

# **Rural Change in North Wales during the Period of the Industrial Revolution: Livelihoods, Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy, 1750-1860.**

Frances Richardson, Kellogg College

Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil, Michaelmas term, 2015

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how a typical area of rural Wales participated in and was shaped by social and economic change during the period of the Industrial Revolution. It investigates how increasing numbers of people made a livelihood in the Caernarvonshire hundred of Nantconwy over the period 1750-1860, including the role of women in the local economy. A wide range of record types are used to explore inter-relationships between population growth, agriculture, proto-industry, the organisation of farming households, and the livelihoods of the poor. The thesis covers a key gap in the historical literature, as most studies of agrarian change at this period concentrate on England, and there has been little investigation of the experience in rural Wales.

Unlike many parts of England where economic modernization was accompanied by growing inequality involving a transition from a household economy to a capitalist tripartite society of landowners, tenant farmers and landless wage labourers, Nantconwy experienced a growth of subsistence smallholding, as more people faced with a shortage of waged employment sought to make a livelihood from the land. Family by-employment and proto-industry also played a crucial role in the local economy. Bringing the commons and wastes into private ownership had relatively little impact on the poor, but smallholders' livelihoods were adversely affected after 1815 by the mechanization of spinning and declining earnings from stocking knitting. Living standards began to improve after 1830 with the expansion of male employment in slate quarrying, while the role of women on family farms was enhanced. Parishes evolved a low-cost system of poor relief which supported mainly older residents who were no longer able to quite make ends meet from the traditional cottager economy, while encouraging the young to leave the land or migrate to local towns or quarrying areas with better employment prospects.

# **Rural Change in North Wales during the Period of the Industrial Revolution: Livelihoods, Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy, 1750-1860.**

Frances Richardson, Kellogg College

Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil, Michaelmas term, 2015

## **Long abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to explore how far a typical area of rural Wales participated in or was shaped by the momentous changes taking place in British economy and society during the period of the Industrial Revolution. It uses a variety of themes from social and economic history to investigate how increasing numbers of people made a livelihood in the Caernarvonshire hundred of Nantconwy over the period 1750-1860, including the role of women in the local economy. A wide range of record types are used to explore inter-relationships between population growth, the agrarian economy, proto-industry, the organisation of farming households and employment, and the livelihoods of the poor. The thesis covers a key gap in the historical literature, as most studies of agrarian change at this period concentrate on England, and there has been little investigation of the experience in rural Wales.

Economic modernization brought considerable social dislocation, and was accompanied in many parts of Britain by a marked increase in inequality involving a transition from a household economy to a capitalist tripartite society of landowners, tenant farmers and landless wage labourers. The benefits of rising national income were spread very unequally. Real male wages stagnated between the 1790s and 1830s, and rose by less than half the increase in GDP per capita over the period 1780-1850. But real wages based on a male worker in full employment with two children do not fully capture the impact of modernisation on family living standards. The cost of poor relief in England and Wales rose by 450% between 1776 and 1830 as more families were unable to make ends meet and required increased support. Severe stress was experienced in many rural areas between 1750 and 1850, due to difficulty in employing rising populations, affected by changes to the structure of agriculture and agricultural employment, a decline in family earnings from proto-industry, and a reduction in women's work.

Nantconwy encompassed over 50,000 acres of land in south-east Caernarvonshire, stretching from the fertile Conwy valley to the summits of the Snowdonia mountains. Three broad phases can be seen in its transition from a traditional to a more modern market economy: a period of gradual change from 1750-90; a period of dislocation from 1790-1830 when poverty increased dramatically; and from 1830-60, when modest prosperity started to emerge as the hundred began to participate in the global slate trade, and farming made more intensive use of the uplands to supply regional and national demand for wool and mutton.

The economy in 1750 was overwhelmingly agricultural, with a majority of families tenancing a farm. Agriculture was transitional between peasant farming and production for the market.

Population grew steadily during the second half of the eighteenth century, and despite growing proto-industrial production in spinning and hand stocking knitting, this put increased pressure on local resources. More families were unable to become farmers, leading to a significant increase in agricultural labourers whose numbers peaked by 1841, and thereafter fell much more rapidly than in most rural areas of England and Wales. Lead mines and slate quarries opened up new employment opportunities in the 1830s, though their fortunes proved mixed until the relative prosperity of the 1850s. Population stagnated in the 1820s and again in the 1840s, and even with the return of relative prosperity in the 1850s, the area experienced some net out-migration. The lack of prospects in agriculture and higher earnings available in mining and quarrying contributed to a fall in the number of men on the land, especially farmers' sons and agricultural labourers. This led to some feminization of the agricultural workforce towards the end of the period.

Ninety per cent of farms were already owned by large or medium-sized estates in the mid-eighteenth century, but consolidation into a smaller number of large estates continued throughout the period up to 1860. Landowners were mostly absentees who took little interest in the running of their upland estates, though those that did strengthen their sphere of influence in Nantconwy were able to improve the value of their land by reorganising intermixed holdings, laying claim to the unenclosed commons and wastes and by letting out holdings of meadow, rough grazing and sheepwalk to the highest bidder.

Most farms were rented at rack rents and landowners took advantage of rising agricultural prices and demand for tenancies from the 1760s to significantly increase rents. However, estates had difficulty in attracting tenants with capital and in the absence of any significant improvements in agricultural productivity in this upland pastoral environment, rent increases contributed to more sub-division, sharing and sub-letting of farms. Landowners subsequently assisted agricultural improvement by investing in roads, improving farmhouses and farm buildings, the erection of mountain walls, and by improving drainage and flood prevention on the most valuable valley lands. They began to actively encourage improved agricultural practice to shore up rent and land values after the Napoleonic Wars. The most important development was further expansion into the uplands, to support increased sheep numbers, and through enclosing more land including perhaps 40 or 50 smallholdings encroached from the waste which were cultivated intensively for potatoes and oats. Farmers generally benefited from bringing the wastes into private ownership, either by enjoying exclusive sheepwalk or by being able to rent additional mountain land. Nonetheless, the failure of landowners to reduce rents when agricultural prices slumped after the Napoleonic Wars left Nantconwy farmers with less capital for improvements; land brought into cultivation during the wars reverted to pasture and demand for agricultural labourers reduced.

While the general story of agricultural improvement in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is of an accelerating trend towards a higher productivity, more capitalist agriculture, Nantconwy experienced an increase in the number of subsistence smallholdings as more people faced with a shortage of waged employment sought to make all or part of their livelihoods from the land. The number of families making a living primarily from agriculture increased by around 40% between 1750 and 1850. The number of farmers remained broadly constant, but the growing number of agricultural labourers were frequently occupiers of smallholdings or land sub-let by farmers, and were more akin to traditional cottagers than to proletarianized landless labourers. Most of these new cottagers had never enjoyed formal common rights. As private rights were extended over the commons and wastes by the mid-nineteenth century, cottagers were at times disadvantaged by curtailment of their access to peat and rushes, but these generally remained obtainable either free or for

a small acknowledgement, while the growth of a market in pasturage and cow-keep enabled them to continue small scale farming.

The median farm size in Nantconwy throughout the period was around 90 acres: there was a spectrum of holdings from smallholdings under eight acres to large farms of over a thousand acres, though with a rise in the number of subsistence smallholdings after 1790. The majority of Nantconwy farms were family farms insofar as the majority of agricultural work was undertaken by family members, though the amount of male and female family labour was not insignificant – an average of 2.6 family members per farm. Assessing the contribution of employed labour is more problematic: the 1851 census data on men employed significantly undercounted the number of male farm servants and labourers, while many women described as domestic servants also undertook a substantial amount of farm work. Taking a lowest estimate, the average number of adult male and female family and employed workers on Nantconwy farms was 3.9.

Whether work was undertaken by family members or employees was largely determined by whether there were sufficient family members of the right age rather than by size of farm. The balance between family and employed labour varied according to life-cycle, with more servants likely to be employed by farmers with young children, or by the elderly and widowers. Unmarried children worked on the family farm, enabling parents to save in order to pay portions to help the younger generation start on a farm of their own. The development of a market in former communal meadow or mountain land let separately by estates allowed farmers to expand or contract their operations according to their family life-cycle, or they could run more stock by paying a hill farmer to agist stock in summer or a valley farmer to take in stock over winter. A system of virtually hereditary tenancies, the inheritance of farm stock, and the traditional nature of Welsh farming also enabled many widows to continue farming, thereby ensuring a livelihood for other family members. In old age, few male or female farmers could afford to retire, but they might downsize by sharing the farm with one or more related or unrelated partners or by sub-letting. Thus Nantconwy farmers adjusted both the amount of land rented and the number of servants employed to the family life-cycle.

By-employment played a crucial role in the agrarian economy of Nantconwy throughout most of the period, though its nature changed in over time. Many dual occupations in the eighteenth century, such as innkeeping, droving, fulling and milling, arose because demand in this sparsely-populated area was insufficient to provide a full-time livelihood. Farmers therefore provided these services to a local market as a way of enjoying a higher standard of living. This type of by-employment declined during the nineteenth century as population growth and economic development enabled greater specialization. On the other hand, the widespread involvement of families across the social spectrum in proto-industrial spinning and stocking knitting may well have enabled more families to make a living from the land by bolstering the viability of small farms and smallholdings. The loss of work after wool spinning migrated to small water-powered mills by 1820 coincided with a period of agricultural depression which lasted till mid-century. This, and the gradual decline of earnings from stocking-knitting led farmers to look for other sources of income, including forestry and infrastructure work for local estates, and carrying for the growing lead and slate industries until this work was largely superseded by railways; small farmers meanwhile might work part time in the quarries.

The layoff of farm labourers after the war and again in the 1840s' recession, coupled with declining family earnings from spinning and knitting, undermined the livelihoods of the smallholder and cottager families who had combined subsistence agriculture with some farm labouring and proto-industrial production, and contributed to increased poverty and the out-

migration of the 1820s and 40s. While smallholdings continued to provide a subsistence livelihood to some mainly elderly people, they became increasingly an adjunct to another male occupation in quarrying, mining or craft work in order to improve family living standards.

The Poor Laws were not put into effect in Nantconwy, or indeed much of north-west Wales, until the 1770s. Until then, a vibrant economy of makeshifts including access to land, resources from the commons and proto-industrial earnings, supplemented by formal and informal charity, enabled most people to get by without the need for parish poor relief. In a largely agricultural economy where most farms grew their own food but cash was in short supply, ratepayers also preferred to maintain the traditions of informal charity in kind, rather than pay poor rates to fund poor relief in cash. Additional church rates were levied as and when needed to provide for the few who were unable to earn a living or seek alms, mainly orphans and the infirm elderly, the latter usually for a brief period before death. Poor relief spread gradually in the 1770s and 80s under the influence of settlement cases and obvious need. But in a generally poor economy, there was an expectation that the elderly would continue to work, and where the parish did assume some responsibility, regular pensions were generally low and residual and were not significantly supplemented by casual relief.

By the 1820s, Nantconwy poor relief costs had increased six-fold, largely as a result of higher regular pensions being paid to an increased number of recipients. The average weekly pension rose by 250 per cent while the number of poor in receipt of regular allowances trebled. The low-cost system of poor relief that evolved by the end of the Old Poor Law era followed the example of other north Wales parishes and was well attuned to the local economy. It recognised the needs of the poor who were no longer able to quite make ends meet from the traditional economy of makeshifts, as more families lacked access to land and earnings from spinning and knitting declined. There was widespread acceptance that labourers' wages alone were insufficient to provide for a large family, and small family allowances were paid to those without additional sources of livelihood. Compared to English parishes, allowances remained low and residual, designed to supplement growing one's own food, resources from the commons and wastes, paid employment and family earnings from stocking knitting, while informal charity and begging continued to play a significant role. At the same time, the system encouraged labour mobility, which prevented levels of reliance on poor relief increasing further.

The introduction of the New Poor Law in 1837, when Nantconwy became part of the Llanrwst Poor Law Union, posed a new challenge to the livelihoods of the poor. The Llanrwst Poor Law Guardians and ratepayers opposed the erection of a workhouse, which they regarded as expensive and unnecessary, and a reduction in poor relief costs after 1850 was due more to rising prosperity than to the eventual opening of the Llanrwst workhouse in 1848. Indeed, the Guardians and ratepayers attempted, with a fair measure of success, to preserve the previous low-cost system of poor relief without recourse to a workhouse. The elderly continued to work for as long as possible; families were expected to look after their elderly parents or unmarried daughters with illegitimate children, and more could now apparently afford to do so, though the phasing out of allowances for large families contributed to the rapid decline in the number of farm labourers. And as the role of friendly societies expanded to provide an enhanced level of welfare benefits for farmers, labourers, quarrymen, craftsmen, wives and female servants, poor relief became even more concentrated on the traditional poor without kin able to look after them.

The experience of rural north Wales during the transition from a traditional to a modern economy and society therefore demonstrates that the development of a tripartite class society was not an inevitable outcome of modernization. Rather, the shape of change was influenced by a number of factors including the role of landowners, the viability of small pastoral farms, the extent of by-employment and earnings from proto-industry and the timing of their decline, the availability of non-agricultural employment, and the part played by the Poor Laws in supporting those whose traditional livelihoods were adversely affected by the modernization process, while encouraging migration of the younger generation in search of new opportunities.

**Frances Ann Richardson**

**Kellogg College, University of Oxford**

**Rural Change in North Wales during the  
Period of the Industrial Revolution:  
Livelihoods, Poverty and Welfare in  
Nantconwy, 1750-1860.**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil**

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the guidance and support provided by my supervisor, Dr. Kate Tiller.

# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abbreviations and Welsh Glossary .....	5
Introduction.....	6
1. Aims and structure.....	6
2. Nantconwy .....	11
Chapter 1. Population and occupations in Nantconwy .....	22
1. Aims and introduction.....	22
2. Population and occupational trends in Nantconwy.....	29
3. Migration .....	46
Conclusions.....	59
Chapter 2. The Evolution of Farming in Nantconwy .....	61
1. Aims and introduction.....	61
2. Landownership .....	67
3. Agricultural change.....	79
4. Smallholdings.....	102
5. The contested commons and wastes .....	116
Conclusions.....	135
Chapter 3. The farming community.....	139
1. Aims and introduction.....	139
2. Family and capitalist farms in Nantconwy .....	147
3. Women farmers.....	161
4. By-employment and proto-industry .....	180
Conclusions.....	206
Chapter 4. Livelihoods of the poor, 1750-1837.....	209
1. Aims and introduction.....	209
2. The economy of makeshifts in Nantconwy.....	216
3. Introduction of the Old Poor Law, 1750 - 1784.....	226
4. Nantconwy poor relief in the 1820s and 1830s .....	234
Conclusions.....	268
Chapter 5. Impact of the New Poor Law.....	271
1. Aims and introduction.....	271
2. Implementation of the New Poor Law in Nantconwy .....	280
3. Impact on the poor of Nantconwy .....	290
4. Poor relief after 1838 .....	310
5. Charity and self-help.....	320

Conclusions.....	332
Conclusion.....	335
Figures.....	342
Maps.....	343
Tables.....	344
Bibliography.....	346

## Abbreviations and Welsh Glossary

### Archives

BUA – Bangor University Archives  
CA – Conwy Archives  
CULSC&A – Cardiff University Library Special Collections and Archives  
DA – Denbighshire Archives  
FA – Flintshire Archives  
GA – Gwynedd Archives  
LA – Lincolnshire Archives  
NLW – National Library of Wales  
TNA – The National Archives

### Publications

AHEW – The Agrarian History of England and Wales  
AgHR – Agricultural History Review  
BBCS – Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies  
ECHR – Economic History Review  
JECH – Journal of Economic History  
JMHR – Journal of the Merioneth History and Record Society  
LPS – Local Population Studies  
NLWJ – National Library of Wales Journal  
PP – Parliamentary Papers  
RCL – Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire (1896)  
TCHS – Transactions of the Caernarfonshire Historical Society  
WHR – Welsh History Review

### Institutions

UCNW – University College North Wales

### Other

CEB – Census enumerator's book  
JP – Justice of the Peace  
RO – Relieving Officer

### Welsh Glossary (Plural in brackets)

<i>Afon</i> – river	<i>Gafael(ion)</i> – clan lands usually in bond townships
<i>Bwlch</i> – pass	<i>Gweirglodd(iau)</i> – improved hay meadow
<i>Cefn</i> - ridge	<i>Gwely(au)</i> – clan lands usually in free townships
<i>Commote</i> – hundred	<i>Hafod(ydd)</i> – summer pasture
<i>Cwm</i> – coombe, high valley	<i>Hafoty (hafotai)</i> – summer pasture house
<i>Cytir</i> – joint or share-land, common meadow, woods and waste for use by hereditary proprietors of the gwely or gafael	<i>Isa/isaf</i> – lower
<i>Dôl/ddôl</i> – damp meadow	<i>Llyn</i> – lake
<i>Ffrith(oedd)</i> – rough pasture	<i>Mynydd</i> – mountain
	<i>Nant</i> – valley
	<i>Ucha/uchaf</i> – upper

## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore how far a remote area of rural Wales participated in or was shaped by the momentous changes taking place in British economy and society over the period 1750-1860. It uses a variety of themes from social and economic history to investigate how increasing numbers of people were able to make a livelihood in the Caernarvonshire hundred of Nantconwy during the period of the Industrial Revolution, including the role of women in the local economy. A wide variety of record types are used to explore inter-relationships between population growth, the agrarian economy, proto-industry, the organisation of farming households and community, and the livelihoods of the poor. The thesis covers a key gap in the historical literature, as most studies of agrarian change at this period concentrate on England, and there has been little investigation of the experience in rural Wales.

### **1. Aims and structure**

Between 1270 and 1870, Britain progressed slowly from the periphery of the European economy to centre stage of an integrated world economy. The foundation of this transformation occurred during the period of the Industrial Revolution from 1750 to 1870, when modern economic growth enabled population to grow without encountering a Malthusian check of rising mortality due to incomes falling below the minimum level of subsistence. Output rose at an unprecedented rate, which in the long run allowed living standards of the majority of the working population to rise.<sup>1</sup> Increases in agricultural productivity enabled the majority of the working population to move from a traditional rural way of life in agricultural production to employment in manufacturing and services. Migration

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Broadberry, B.M.S. Campbell, A. Klein, M. Overton & B. van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth 1270-1870* (2015), p. 402.

played a fundamental role in this transformation, so that by 1851 nearly half (44.8%) of English and Welsh population lived in urban areas of over 5,000 population.<sup>2</sup>

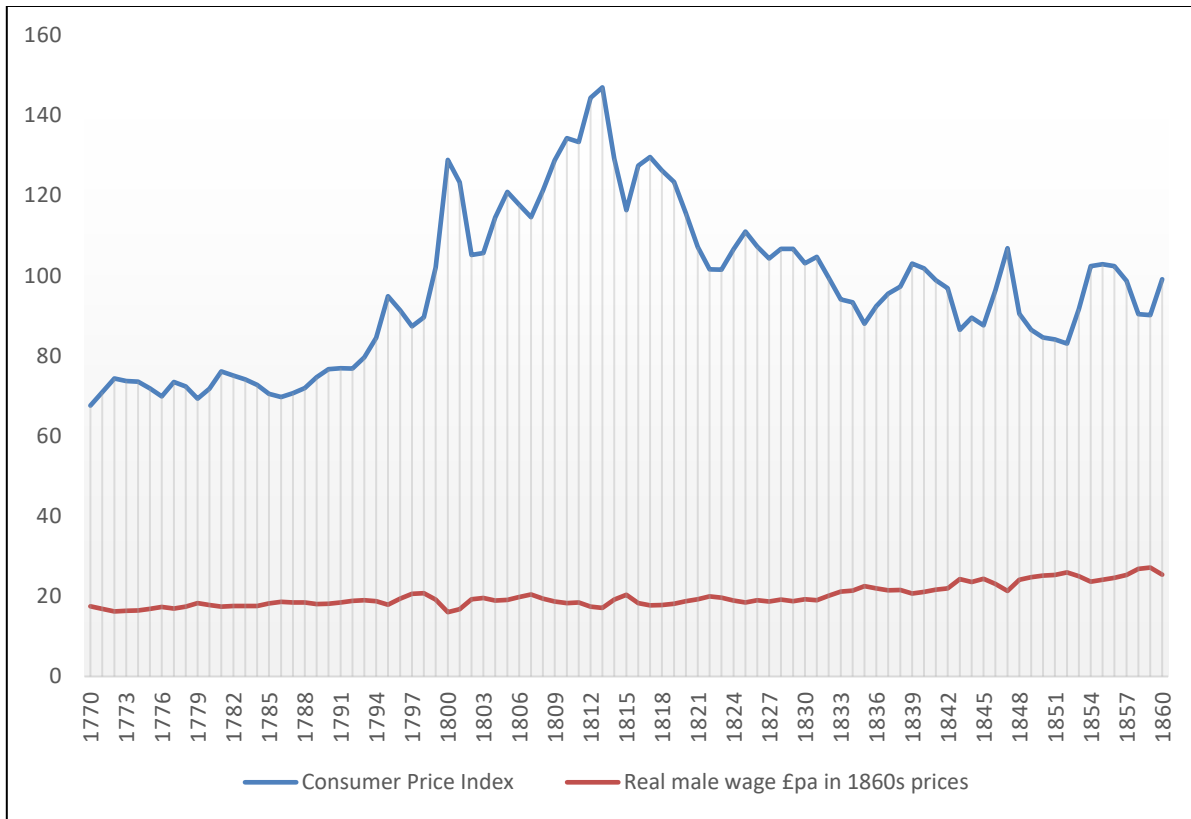
However modernization brought considerable social dislocation, and was accompanied in many parts of Britain by a marked increase in inequality involving a transition from a household economy to a capitalist tripartite society of landowners, tenant farmers and landless wage labourers. The benefits of rising national income were spread very unequally. Over the period 1780-1850, male earnings rose by around 30%, less than half the increase in GDP per capita of 62%, meaning that only a meagre share of the benefits of the Industrial Revolution accrued to working families. At the same time, food prices remained generally dear and highly volatile until the 1850s. The combined impact of wages and prices was that real male wages stagnated between the 1790s and 1830s, before slowly starting to improve (Figure 1). Moreover male real wages based on a male worker in full employment with two children tell only part of the story about workers' living standards. The cost of poor relief in England and Wales rose by 450% between 1776 and 1830 as more families were unable to make ends meet and required increased support. In particular, severe stress in was experienced in many rural areas between 1750 and 1850, much of this due to difficulty in absorbing rising rural populations.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> D. Grigg, *Population Growth and Agrarian Change: An Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 164; *PP 1821*, IV (748), Report of Select Committee on Poor Relief; *PP 1835*, XLVII (444), Poor rate returns, 1830-34.

Figure 1, Prices and real male wages during the Industrial Revolution



Source: R.C. Allen, 'Pessimism preserved: real wages in the British Industrial revolution', *Oxford University Department of Economics Working Paper 314* (2007). pp. 34-5.

Much of the research on this period has focused on the leading edge regions of agricultural improvement and industrial development, or on areas that witnessed particular social unrest, and have focused on specific issues such as population, agrarian or industrial development, or poverty and welfare. There was nevertheless considerable regional diversity in the scope and timing of the changes involved, influenced by factors such as the growth of landed estates, whether agriculture was mainly arable or pastoral, access to land including the resources of the commons, the extent of proto-industrialization and the timing of its decline, the growth of new employment sectors, population growth and the extent of migration, the extent of poverty and social attitudes towards its relief.

Most studies of rural change and poverty focus on England. The impact of modernization on livelihoods and society in north Wales has been little researched and the most comprehensive guide to this period remains Dodd's classic study first published in 1933, in which he characterised the region as a case of arrested development – its manufacturing industries increasingly unable to compete as water-power gave way to steam, or with regions which benefited from better natural resources, markets or transport links.<sup>4</sup> Howell's *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* explored how poor relations between tenants and landlords, peasant attitudes and land hunger impinged on Welsh agricultural development, making it more backward than might be expected from the constraints imposed by climate, soil and geographical remoteness. Much of the historiography on nineteenth-century rural Wales has been heavily influenced by manifestations of discontent: the Rebecca Riots of the 1840s, the tithe wars of the 1880s, and the anti-landowner sentiment fanned by Liberal nonconformist leaders after the 1868 election, which found a greater response when the agricultural depression hit Wales in the 1880s and culminated with the establishment of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire in the 1890s.<sup>5</sup> But many of the social and economic issues explored by rural historians over the last twenty years have received scant investigation in a Welsh context. Nowhere is this more evident than in the study of poverty and welfare, where there have as yet been no regional studies of the development of relief practices under the Old Poor Law or of the dogged opposition to the introduction of the New, and few serious local studies.<sup>6</sup> The story of the impact of modernization on the people of rural Wales deserves to be heard as well.

---

<sup>4</sup> A.H. Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales* (Cardiff, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London, 1977); D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots : a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1955 ); M. Cragoe and P. Readman (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010); D.W. Howell, 'The Land Question in nineteenth-century Wales, Ireland and Scotland: a comparative study', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 83-110.

<sup>6</sup> S. King and J. Stewart, 'The history of the Poor Law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential', *Archives* XXVI (2001), pp. 134-148.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how a representative area of rural north Wales, the Caernarvonshire hundred of Nantconwy, participated in and was shaped by modernization during the period of the Industrial Revolution. It uses an integrated approach to examine the major factors and timing of changes which enabled a rising population to make a living in this pastoral upland area, as well as the dislocation experienced during the transition to a more modern economy, witnessed by the extent out-migration and increased poverty.

Chapter 1 sets the scene by identifying population and occupational trends in Nantconwy from 1750 to 1860 and exploring the extent of migration. Chapter 2 investigates the evolution of agriculture, which formed the mainstay of the local economy throughout the period, to identify how changes in land ownership and occupation or farming methods affected livelihoods. It assesses the extent to which land was owned by the estates, and their role in driving a transition to a more capitalist agriculture or fostering agricultural improvement, including the system of farm tenure and the ability of landowners to increase their share of the agricultural surplus through rent increases and the extension of private ownership rights. The extent to which farming output was increased and opportunities created for more people to make a living from the land through agricultural improvement, increased exploitation of mountain commons and wastes, and the creation of more smallholdings is then investigated.

Chapter 3 looks in more detail at the organisation of agricultural workforce, including the role of family and employed labour, to investigate how far a cottager lifestyle persisted, or whether population growth, a reduction in the number of farms, the loss of commons, or a reduction in farm service resulted in the growth of landless, proletarianized agricultural labour force as in much of rural England. This includes an exploration of the reasons for an unusually high proportion of women farmers in Nantconwy, mirroring a trend in Wales more generally. The

chapter also probes the important contribution of by-employment and proto-industrial manufacturing to the livelihoods of farming, smallholding and cottagers families.

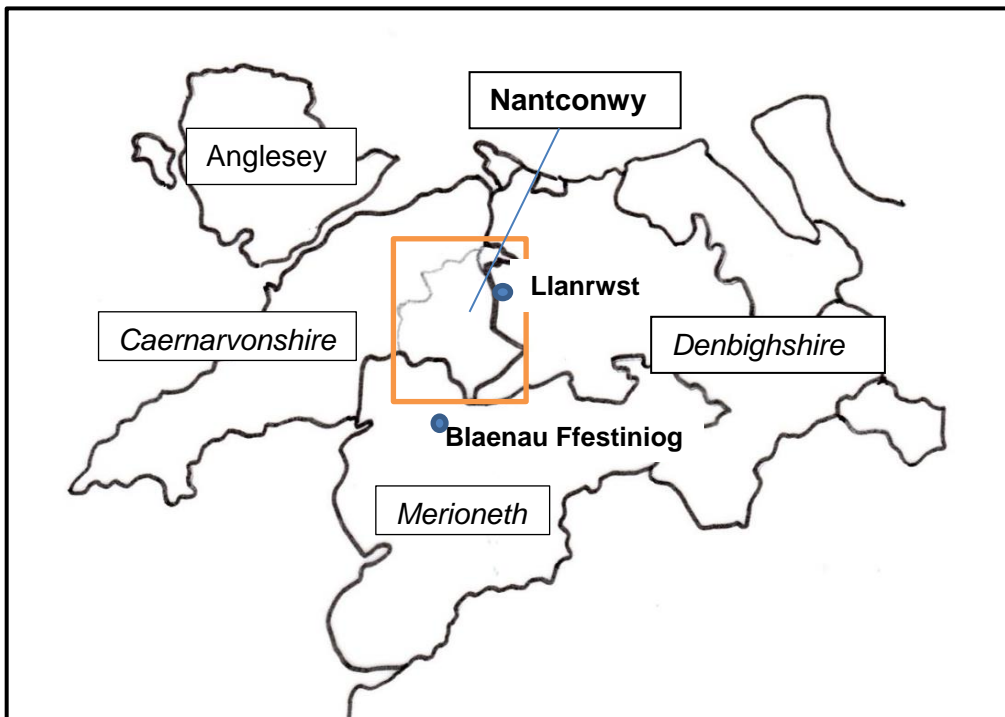
Poor rates were not introduced in Nantconwy until the 1780s, and Chapter 4 examines how the poor made a living through an economy of makeshifts, how and why the Poor Laws were eventually brought into operation, and how poor relief fitted into the local economy and society. By the 1820s, rapid inflation and pressure on livelihoods, especially the loss of earnings following the mechanization of spinning, had greatly increased the number of inhabitants requiring some assistance from the community. The chapter assesses how poor relief had changed by the period 1824-31, to address greater need amongst the traditional poor – the aged and impotent, widows and orphans - and to provide support for working families no longer able to make an adequate living. Finally, Chapter 5 examines how poor relief in Nantconwy evolved in response to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, in particular the Act's impact on the livelihoods of groups targeted for reform such as able-bodied male labourers and unmarried mothers, and the extent to which poor relief supported Nantconwy inhabitants through the economic transition to a modern economy and influenced a move away from the land or migration to areas with better employment prospects. The study concludes by investigating whether the poor benefited by 1860 from alternative welfare avenues such as an expansion of organised charity, and whether new mechanisms of self-help developed in response to any curtailment of former patterns of poor relief, or were used mainly to improve living standards.

## **2. *Nantconwy***

The hundred of Nantconwy was fairly typical of rural north Wales in terms of its economic development, and its records for this period are relatively good by Welsh standards. It

experienced a modest level of development and population growth as a result of its hand knitting industry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and with the development of slate quarrying from the 1830s. It thus stood between the rapidly-growing industrial areas around the south and north-east Wales coalfields and the purely agricultural areas of Wales which were amongst the first parts of the country to experience population decline in the mid-nineteenth century.

Map 1, North Wales

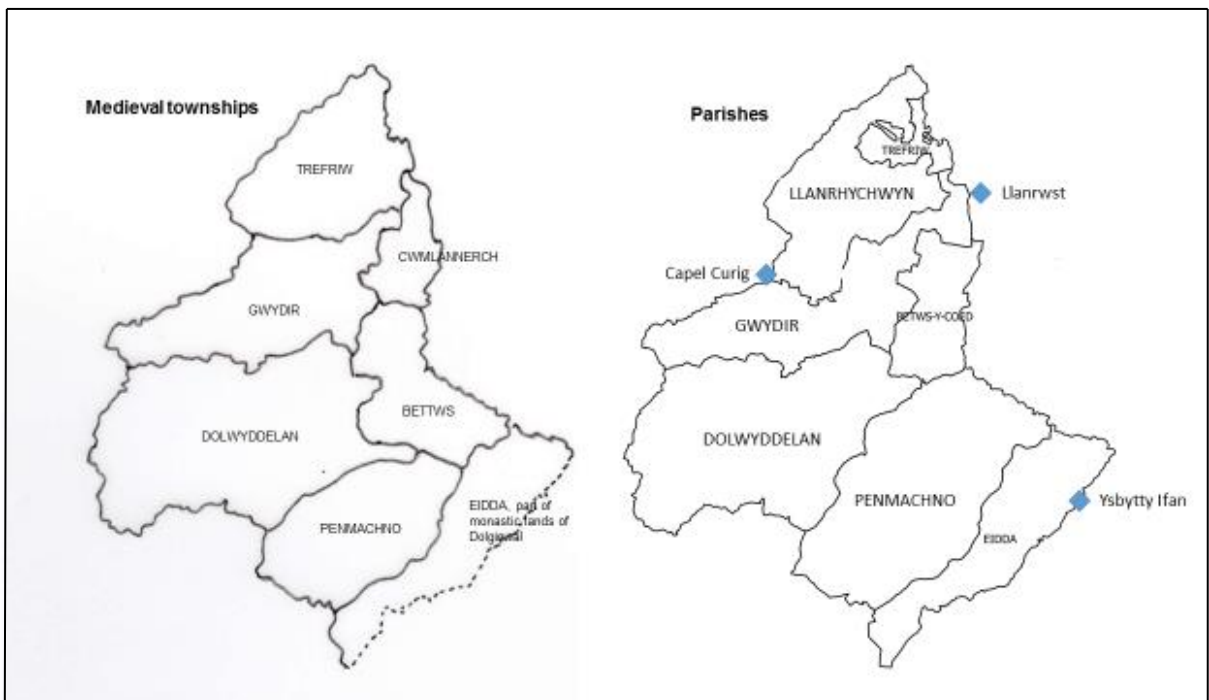


Nantconwy encompassed over 50,000 acres (20,000 hectares) of land in south-east Caernarvonshire stretching from the fertile Conwy valley to the summits of the Snowdonia mountains at an altitude of over 800 meters (Map 1).<sup>7</sup> It comprised five parishes and two townships, in the diocese of Bangor: Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan, Llanrhychwyn,

<sup>7</sup> 46,323 acres were included in the tithe surveys of 1841-2: TNA IR 18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67. Approximately 2,000 acres of common in Penmachno was excluded from the tithe survey, as well as the whole township of Eidda: TNA IR 18/14152 and 14116.

Penmachno and Trefriw, the Gwydir township of Llanrwst parish and the Eidda township of Ysbytty Ifan. Ecclesiastical parishes were grouped around a church, and might contain several small townships. In Nantconwy, the parish structure used as the basis of local administration from the seventeenth century often cut across the earlier medieval township structure on which landholding was formerly based, and the boundaries of both were frequently ill-defined (Map 2).<sup>8</sup> Capel Curig, whose chapel stood just beyond the western boundary of Nantconwy, was nominally a chapelry of Llandegai parish in the hundred of Arllechwedd Uchaf, but as parts of Llanrhychwyn and Gwydir township were up to eight miles distant from their parish churches, their residents formed the bulk of the Capel Curig congregation. Separate parish records were kept for Capel Curig from 1754.

*Map 2, Nantconwy medieval townships and later parishes*



Source: R.J.P. Kain, and R.R., Oliver, *Historic Parishes of England and Wales*.

<sup>8</sup> A.D. Carr, 'Medieval administrative divisions', in T.M. Bassett and B.L. Davies (eds.), *Atlas of Caernarvonshire* (Caernarfon, 1977), p. 69.

In 1750 the area was both remote geographically and cut off from the current of ideas by the Welsh language and the absence of resident landowners or a middle class. With the exception of the small village of Trefriw, most residents lived in scattered farms. Settlements expanded around the parish churches after 1800 as at Bettws, Dolwyddelan, Penmachno, and on both the Eidda and Denbighshire banks of the River Conwy at Ysbytty Ifan, with a hamlet also developing around Capel Curig. The land was generally poor, red or yellow loam in places with many areas of bog, turbary and rock. A few areas were suited to the cultivation of crops in the lowlands of the Conwy Valley in Trefriw and Bettws y coed, and along the tributary Llugwy, Lledr, Machno and Eidda valleys. Most of the farming land was meadow or rough pasture, with mountain land used as common or sheepwalk. Dairying for the production of butter and cheese and rearing store cattle for national markets were the major components of mid-eighteenth century farming in Nantconwy. Sheep were reared on hill farms, and their numbers increased significantly throughout the period through more intensive use of the mountain land. Forestry was also important in some parishes: ancient oak woodland remained in a few areas, but after the Napoleonic Wars several landowners, most notably the Gwydir estate, expanded commercial forestry operations to the point where forestry occupied 7% of the land by the 1840s.

The market town for the area was Llanrwst on the Denbighshire bank of the River Conwy. Its weekly market was of particular local importance because the parishes of the surrounding area had few if any shops: market day was the time for buying in supplies for the week, and the market was supplied with the luxuries as well as the necessities of life.<sup>9</sup> Producers within a radius of twenty miles came to Llanrwst to sell their produce or manufactures, including corn, butter and cheese. There were also eight fairs throughout the year for the sale of corn,

---

<sup>9</sup> Rev. J. Evans, *Letters Written during a Tour through North Wales* (London, 1804), p. 281.

cattle and wool, the June fair setting the price for wool throughout north Wales. The September and October fairs were the main occasions for local farmers to sell their store cattle to drovers who took them to English markets for fattening. In addition to the Llanrwst fairs, Dolwyddelan and Capel Curig held fairs for the sale of sheep and cattle.<sup>10</sup>

Stocking knitting was a widespread proto-industry in much of Nantconwy during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Bettws y coed, Penmachno and Eidda were part of a hand knitting district covering a mountainous tract of land some eighteen miles long and twelve miles wide, from Corwen to Dinas Mawddwy.<sup>11</sup> Bala in Merioneth and Llanrwst were the two principal markets in north Wales where Welsh hosiers bought stockings from the local knitters for sale in England. At its height, over 2,500 people around Llanrwst must have been involved in the industry. Though earnings were always small, this was an important by-employment for the farming community as well as providing an income for the poor, as explored further in Chapter 3, though by the 1830s the industry was in decline. In the eighteenth century, local weavers also came to Llanrwst to sell course linen cloth as well as a striped woollen cloth called linsey-woolsey.

Nantconwy was the main area of lead production in Caernarvonshire, and though never as important as the lead districts of Cardiganshire and Flintshire, the industry provided some alternative employment to agriculture. After 1752, when the Duke of Ancaster employed a German mining engineer to develop the lead mining potential of his Gwydir estate, mining was pursued sporadically for the next sixty years or so at various sites on the Gwydir and Pencraig estates around the remote wasteland of Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn [mountain of the

---

<sup>10</sup> W. Williams, *Observations on the Snowdon Mountains* (London, 1802), p. 25; *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* (1849), accessed 14 Dec. 2015 at [www.british-history.ac.uk](http://www.british-history.ac.uk).

<sup>11</sup> W. Davies, *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of North Wales* (London, 1810), p. 403; J.G. Jenkins, *The Welsh Woollen Industry* (Cardiff, 1969), p. 210.

pass of iron] between Trefriw, Bettws y coed and Capel Curig. At most times only a few men were employed in individual mines. Production picked up somewhat in the 1820s, though still only amounting to a few hundred tons per annum, with the addition of fairly substantial shipments of iron pyrites from a sulphur mine near Trefriw. Like most of the Welsh lead industry, production declined under the depressing influence of low prices and high production costs, until most mines were idle by the late 1830s. After 1854 came a period of boom with nineteen mines at work on the Gwydir estate, shipping an average of 253 tons of lead a year down the River Conwy as well as 1,750 tons per annum of iron pyrites.<sup>12</sup> Many mines were operated by local men who lacked the capital to develop the industry more fully. The mines were plagued by drainage problems, exacerbated by summer shortages of water to drive their water wheels. Production did not really take off until the later nineteenth century, when outside capital brought about the amalgamation of small mines, and steam engines were installed to improve drainage, enabling workings to be pushed further underground.<sup>13</sup>

The Gwydir estate was keen to ensure that the mines brought employment to the area, stipulating in its leases the minimum number of men to be employed and terminating agreements if lessees ceased production. The mines were operated on a bargain system with pairs of miners bidding each month for a 'taking'. Earnings were generally above those of agricultural labourers, averaging 16s a week in the mid-nineteenth century, but were highly variable.<sup>14</sup> Lead miners in most parts of Wales employed women and boys from the age of ten, usually family members, to pick, wash and sometimes break the ore, till this work was superseded by machinery in the 1830s.<sup>15</sup> At times the mines brought an influx of experienced

---

<sup>12</sup> W.J. Lewis, *Lead Mining in Wales* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 237-9.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bennett and R.W. Vernon, *Mines of the Gwydir Forest: Part 1* (Cuddington, 1989), p. 7; *PP* 1864, XXIV (3389), pp. 492-4.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales, 1849-1851: Letters to "The Morning Chronicle"*, Vol. III, (London, 1983), p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> Dodd, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 359, Lewis, *Lead Mining*, p. 274.

miners from other mining districts including Flintshire, Cumbria and Cornwall, especially to act as mine captains or agents. The variability of earnings and precarious nature of employment made lead mining families keen to occupy smallholdings to diversify their risk. How they achieved this is explored more fully in Chapter 3.

Slate quarrying became an increasingly important part of the Nantconwy economy from the 1830s. It has been described as the 'Welshest' of industries, for its techniques were nearly all devised locally, and unlike lead mining it was undertaken almost exclusively by local men. Demand for slate gathered pace in the later eighteenth century to roof the rapidly expanding urban industrial areas of northern England. However capital investment was needed to organise quarries and improve poor transport links which were initially a significant barrier to accessing wider markets. Large scale production started in Caernarvonshire in 1782, when the owner of the Penrhyn estate, Richard Pennant, later Lord Penrhyn, bought out local quarrymen's leases in the Penrhyn quarry, took over production and installed a tramway to transport slates to the coast for shipment. The virtual cessation of building during the early years of the Napoleonic Wars caused a major setback to the nascent industry, but other Caernarvonshire landowners, most notably Mr. Assheton Smith at Llanberis, subsequently became directly involved in developing large-scale quarries. Production in Ffestiniog in northern Merioneth also took off after the wars, though here production was largely organised by English capitalists.<sup>16</sup> By the 1850s, the slate industry of north-west Wales had developed into a highly-capitalised world industry.<sup>17</sup>

Slate production in Nantconwy was never on the scale of the major Caernarvonshire and Merioneth quarrying districts, although there were around sixty slate and hone stone quarries

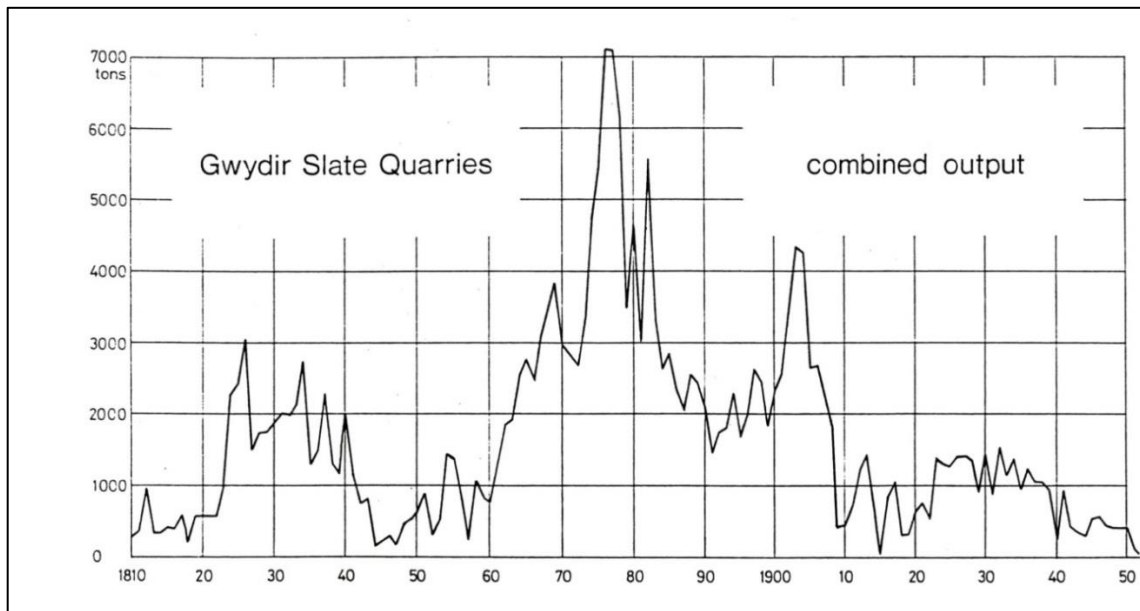
---

<sup>16</sup> Dodd, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 201-11.

<sup>17</sup> D. Gwyn, *Welsh Slate: Archaeology and History of an Industry* (Aberystwyth, 2015), p. 9.

varying in size from trial workings to some employing upwards of forty men, three dozen of which were on the Gwydir estate. Production began in Llanrhychwyn and Dolwyddelan in the 1790s. The estate commenced organised leasing after 1810 and expansion was helped when the River Conwy was made navigable up to Trefriw Quay for river boats of up to 50 tons and for sea-going vessels up to 100 tons at spring tides. The slate from the Gwydir quarries was not of the best quality however, and the industry was mainly run by small-scale local partnerships. Production increased dramatically in the 1820s but fell away during the economic slump of the 1840s, after which production grew rapidly to reach a peak in the 1870s (Figure 2).

*Figure 2, Gwydir slate quarries production*



Source: M. C. Williams and M. J. T. Lewis, *Gwydir Slate Quarries* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1989).

Penmachno was a continuation of the major Ffestiniog slate district and accounted for a larger production of better quality slate than the Gwydir estate quarries. Blaen y Cwm and Cwm Machno quarries commenced production in the 1810s, but disputes over land ownership held up development and production did not take off seriously until 1838; a change of owner in 1849 then resulted in little or no slate being produced till 1861. The major quarry

in the area, Rhiwbach, developed in the 1840s. Slates from the Gwydir and Penmachno quarries were taken by sledge and later by cart to Trefriw quay until the building of a tramway serving the upper Cwm Penmachno quarries in 1863, and the extension of the railway to Bettws y coed in 1867.<sup>18</sup>

The larger quarries were usually worked until the late nineteenth century on a bargain system which involved quarry owners making monthly contracts with groups of four to eight men who were paid for the quantity of slate they produced, varying according to the difficulty of the rock. The bargain group comprised a minimum of two rockmen who worked the quarry face – the working aristocracy of the industry – and two men or boys who processed the blocks of stone into slabs or slates. They were often family or friendship groups and in years when trade was brisk, they could earn good money. In the early years of the industry, the skilled rockmen often moved from area to area helping develop new quarries or in search of one with better management. Entry into a bargain group became increasingly difficult for men without contacts, but they might work as labourers clearing away rubble and undertaking odd jobs for the quarrymen.<sup>19</sup> The slate and lead industries also created work for craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters and stonemasons. In addition to the spasmodic employment in local quarries, many quarrymen living in Nantconwy worked outside the area. The high altitude Ffestiniog quarries generally provided barracks for workers to live in during the week, and in the 1870s a hundred and fifty men were said to walk home on Saturday evenings over the Crimea Pass to Dolwyddelan and Penmachno, with some going as far as Llanrwst.<sup>20</sup>

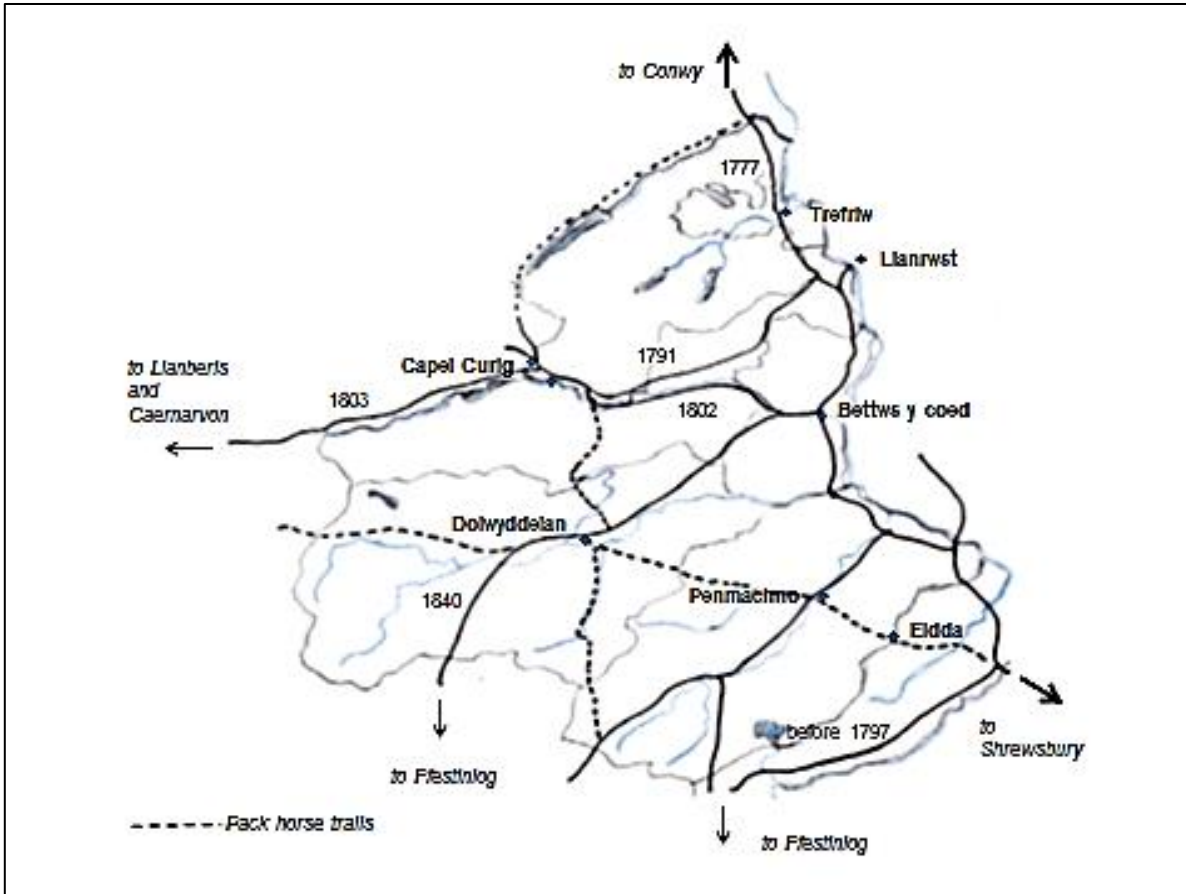
---

<sup>18</sup> A. J. Richards, *Gazetteer of Slate Quarrying in Wales* (Pwllheli, 2007), pp. 96, 178, 200; M. J. T. Lewis, *Blaen y Cwm and Cwt y Bugail Slate Quarries* (Mold, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>20</sup> M.J.T. Lewis (ed.), *The Slate Quarries of North Wales in 1873: a Series of Letters by a Special Correspondent of the Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* (1987), p. 26.

Map 3, Development of the Nantconwy road network



Source: Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Caernarvonshire, Vol. I: East* (1956), p. lxxv.

In 1750, poor communications acted as a significant barrier to trade. Until the improvement of navigation on the River Conwy in the early nineteenth century, only vessels of five tons could ascend to Trefriw quay at its tidal limit. Most of Nantconwy was accessible only by pack-horse trails. The trackway from Bangor to Capel Curig was described by the tour writer Thomas Pennant in 1773 as ‘the most dreadful horse path in Wales’.<sup>21</sup> Investment in roads, largely by the Caernarvonshire gentry, did much to open up rural areas for development by 1810. The first turnpike road in the hundred was built in 1777 from the north coast port of Conwy to Trefriw and Llanrwst. In 1791, Lord Penrhyn pioneered the first post road from

<sup>21</sup> T. Pennant, *Tours in Wales* (London, 1810), Vol. 2, p. 313.

Bangor to Capel Curig and thence through the lead mining district of Bwlch yr Haiarn to Llanrwst.<sup>22</sup> This was superseded by an improved route in 1802, allowing London to Dublin traffic to pass through Bettws y coed and Capel Curig and enabling a small tourist industry to develop. The new route captured the Irish mail traffic in 1808 and was substantially improved by Thomas Telford with the aid of parliamentary grants from 1815-30. The road from Capel Curig to Porthmadog through the Mymbyr valley, previously 'a mere right of passage, exceeding rugged and uneven', was replaced by a turnpike road in 1803.<sup>23</sup> The Gwydir estate built the first road to Dolwyddelan capable of taking wheeled vehicles in 1810, to link Chwarel Ddu quarry to the Holyhead road and giving it access to Trefriw Quay, though it was not till the 1840s that a carriage road ran through the parish, replacing the old pack horse trail to Ffestiniog (Map 3).

These improvements in communications significantly reduced Nantconwy's isolation, which both increased the impact of national economic change on the hundred, and facilitated increased agricultural and mineral production, trade, and the movement of people which shaped the evolution of livelihoods for its growing population – as explored in the following chapters.

---

<sup>22</sup> R.T. Pritchard, 'The post road in Caernarvonshire', *TCHS* 12 (1952), p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 17.

# Chapter 1. Population and occupations in Nantconwy

## 1. *Aims and introduction*

This chapter examines the growth in Nantconwy population from 1750 to 1861, the changing structure of occupations and the extent to which population was affected by migration into and out of the area, providing a broad framework for examining in later chapters how various changing aspects of the local economy affected livelihoods.

For the purpose of estimating key population and occupational trends in Nantconwy, areas of the extensive literature on population history and historical demography of particular relevance are the debates on population growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, occupational trends, migration and understanding sources, including the construction of the 1801-61 census records, and in particular the shortcomings of most sources for identifying women's work.

Our knowledge of population growth in England over the period 1541 to 1871 is underpinned by the work of the Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structure, based on a combination of aggregative national estimates and the results of parish-level family reconstitution studies.<sup>24</sup> After 1750, high and rising urbanization, accelerating industrialisation and commercialisation, and the reorganisation of agricultural labour contributed to a reduction in women's marriage age, the main factor which sparked more rapid population increase. There were however wide regional variations in women's marriage ages, reflecting differing employment or marriage opportunities for women. In particular, a

---

<sup>24</sup> E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541 - 1871: a Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981); E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837* (Cambridge, 1997).

decline in farm service in many arable parts of England left young men to fend for themselves on an hourly wage but without restrictions about remaining single, while the added loss of income from spinning made young women more reliant on finding a husband. Where there were opportunities for proto-industrial work, men could afford to marry earlier and in some industries there was a positive incentive to wedlock in order to harness the unpaid labour of a wife and children.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, better female employment prospects in areas with a high demand for domestic servants or textile workers tended to encourage the postponement of marriage.<sup>26</sup> The methods used by the Cambridge Group have not been extended to Wales, possibly because a high proportion of common names makes it difficult to apply family reconstitution techniques, as explored further below. The extent to which these trends affected Wales therefore remains unclear.<sup>27</sup>

Recent developments in interpreting occupational structure have drawn attention to the growth of manufacturing and services before the classic period of the Industrial Revolution. Recent estimates of the changing occupational structure in the British economy from 1700 to 1870 suggest that England witnessed a 'Smithian' phase of economic development based on a greater division of labour before the new technology of the Industrial Revolution enabled greater improvements in productivity. Whereas around three quarters of the population in most continental countries during the early modern period were employed in the primary sector producing raw materials, mainly food, less than half the male labour force in England was employed on the land by 1700. Most of the jobs needed to accommodate workers leaving the land were in the secondary manufacturing sector, which often involved migrating

---

<sup>25</sup> D. Levine, *Family Formation in the Age of Nascent Capitalism* (London, 1977), p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> R. Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 107-9.

<sup>27</sup> L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, 'Occupational structure and population change', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Britain, Vol. 1, 1700-1870* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 54.

to towns. The tertiary sector, comprising selling, services and professional work, transport and communications, also grew rapidly though from a smaller base, from an estimated 14 per cent of the labour force in 1710 to 35 per cent in 1871. It has been argued that opportunities offered by the growth of secondary and tertiary employment meant that high rates of population increase in the countryside did not lead to misery as in earlier centuries.<sup>28</sup>

To overcome the shortcomings of male occupational data in the pre-1841 censuses, the Cambridge Group attempted to estimate the structure of male occupations in England and Wales c.1817 using data on fathers' occupations from virtually all Anglican parish baptism registers for the years 1813-20. They found that Anglican baptisms in Wales were very much on the low side compared to English rural counties. The group attributed this largely to a higher proportion of nonconformist baptisms, which they corrected for by weighting baptisms according to parish population, with the implicit assumption that there were no significant differences in the occupations of the fathers involved in Anglican and nonconformist baptisms. The authors also acknowledged that unmarried servants were likely to be under-represented, largely affecting men in the 15-30 age group, and used a correction based on the proportion of male domestic servants in the 1831 census.<sup>29</sup> The significance of both of these issues in relation to Wales will be assessed below in estimating Nantconwy occupations c.1817.

A major issue in investigating eighteenth- and nineteenth-century livelihoods is the identification of work performed by women. Wives' occupations are not usually mentioned in parish registers and there is a widespread view that women's work was consistently under-

---

<sup>28</sup> Shaw-Taylor & Wrigley, 'Occupational structure'.

<sup>29</sup> P.M. Kitson, L. Shaw-Taylor, E. A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, G. Newton and A.E.M. Satchell, 'The creation of a 'census' of adult male employment for England and Wales for 1817', *Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History* 4 (2012), pp. 3, 20, 26.

recorded in all nineteenth-century censuses.<sup>30</sup> In 1841, the work of wives and other family members carried out for the market was not recorded if they did not receive wages. This excluded much female work in family businesses, especially on farms. From 1851, the occupations of women *regularly* employed from home or at home in any but domestic duties were supposed to be recorded. In practice, the treatment of women's work depended to a considerable degree on the outlooks and conventions of individual enumerators, many of whom assumed that married women in particular were not occupied.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, married women were more likely to work on a part-time or seasonal basis, to have a dual function producing for both home consumption and the market, and contributed to the family economy in more informal ways. Horrell and Humphries concluded that census enumeration of women's employment was demonstrably inaccurate, and drew instead on data from household budgets for the years 1787-1865 to provide evidence of the importance of women's and children's contributions to household income.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Anderson identified some over-recording of female work in mid-nineteenth century censuses due to 28 per cent of women recorded as servants in 1851 being relatives of the household head. As a result it is difficult to distinguish between cases where kin were correctly recorded as workers contributing to family businesses such as farming, inn-keeping or running a lodging house and instances where kin were simply involved in household reproduction not classified as work.<sup>33</sup> In spite of these shortcomings, the census remains the most comprehensive

---

<sup>30</sup> E.A. Wrigley, 'Men on the land and men in the countryside', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Poverty, Progress and Population* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 125-6.

<sup>31</sup> E. Higgs, 'Women, occupations and the nineteenth century censuses', *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987), pp. 59-79.

<sup>32</sup> S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family, 1790-1865', *ECHR* XLVIII (1995), pp. 89-117.

<sup>33</sup> M. Anderson, 'Mis-specification of servant occupations in the 1851 census: a problem revisited', in N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007).

source available on women's employment in the mid-nineteenth century, and does highlight considerable differences in their participation rates in different regions.

With the exception of the male 'occupational census' published by Kitson et al. in 2012, few general studies on population and employment include Wales, and there have been relatively few local studies addressing population and occupations in a Welsh context.<sup>34</sup> Williams and Boyns highlighted the dominance of the primary sector in the mid-nineteenth century occupational structure of Wales: in 1851 agriculture afforded 35 per cent of male employment and mining and quarrying 17 per cent. Women's employment opportunities were limited, with 60 per cent of all occupied women working either in agriculture or in domestic service.<sup>35</sup> Williams and Jones concluded that women's labour market participation rates followed a similar pattern to England, rising from 26 per cent in 1851 to 29 per cent in 1871, then falling to 22 per cent by 1911. Participation rates for women were consistently and significantly lower in Wales than England, though women's employment in agriculture remained much higher (29.5 per cent in Wales in 1851 compared to 7.5 per cent in England). There were also significant regional differences within Wales, with lower women's employment in industrial Glamorgan, a county dominated by coal-mining and heavy industry, and a higher rate in rural Cardiganshire. Williams and Jones followed Williams and Boyns in excluding unpaid female relatives 'assisting' household heads such as wives of farmers, innkeepers, shopkeepers, shoemakers and lodging-house keepers, partly due to difficulty in knowing whether they were in fact regularly employed in the family business, and also because this

---

<sup>34</sup> Kitson et al., 'Adult male employment'.

<sup>35</sup> L.J. Williams and T. Boyns, 'Occupations in Wales, 1851-1971', *Bulletin of Economic Research* 29 (1977), pp. 71-83.

category was dropped from censuses after 1871. This undoubtedly led to under-estimation of the number of Welsh women working on family farms, as the authors acknowledged.<sup>36</sup>

The rate of population growth after 1750 varied enormously between different areas: over the period 1761 to 1851 population increased by only 25 per cent in some English rural areas, but by over 400 per cent in London and the major industrializing districts.<sup>37</sup> Migration played a key role in these differential growth rates, and Ravenstein proposed a number of 'laws of migration' derived from birthplace data published in the 1871 and 1881 censuses to describe the patterns involved. His key conclusions were that the major causes of migration were economic; the majority of migrants moved only a short distance; migration proceeded step by step, and each current of migration had a counter-current; the major direction of migration was from agricultural areas to centres of industry and commerce and people from rural areas were more migratory than those from towns; most migrants were adults, and families rarely migrated outside their county of birth; and women were more migratory than men within their county of birth, though men were more likely to be long distance migrants. These hypotheses have formed the basis for a substantial volume of research, and have been largely upheld. Women's mobility was driven particularly in the mid-nineteenth century by a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, the greater demand for domestic servants in towns, and because it was usually women who moved on marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Most early studies of migration were based on lifetime mobility assessed by comparing census data on place of birth and current residence. This method has been criticized for failing to reveal details of when, how often or why people moved, although some data on

---

<sup>36</sup> L.J. Williams and D. Jones, 'Women at work in nineteenth century Wales', *Llafur* 3 (1982), pp. 33-44.

<sup>37</sup> E.A. Wrigley, *The Early English Censuses* (Oxford, 2011), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Open University, *Patterns and Processes of Internal Migration* (1982), pp. 20-21.

these questions can be gleaned from census enumerators' books (CEBs). Using a sample of over 16,000 individual life histories, Pooley and Turnbull demonstrated that although mobility increased over time, most moves remained short distance: 53 per cent of moves during the period 1750-1839 were less than 10km, rising to 63 per cent in the years 1840-79. The most mobile occupational groups were members of the armed forces, professionals, skilled workers and those in domestic service. Farmers had the longest average residence in one place (19.7 years) in all periods. Agricultural workers were the second least mobile group in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, but their mobility increased dramatically in the period 1820-49. They found no support for Ravenstein's hypothesis that women were more migratory than men.<sup>39</sup>

In one of the few studies specifically addressing Welsh migration focusing on the north-east Wales coalfield, lifetime migration data from the 1851 CEBs revealed a complex pattern of flows and counter-flows. Most migrants moved only a short distance, but the net impact of this step migration, where out-migrants to the coalfield from nearby parishes were partially replaced by in-migrants from more rural districts, gradually shifted population to towns and growing industrial villages.<sup>40</sup> Welsh counties were among the first to be affected by rural depopulation, and out-migration gathered pace after 1871, involving a higher proportion of long-distance moves to the south Wales coalfield, London and Merseyside. For those leaving Cardiganshire after 1841, both push and pull factors were at work, with farmer's sons despairing of getting a farm tenancy in the prevailing climate of land hunger, and declining employment in the agriculture and lead mining sectors. A desire for a better standard of living

---

<sup>39</sup> C.G. Pooley and J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> OU, *Internal Migration*, pp. 87-89.

and society also acted as a draw to move to more advanced areas, particularly for craftsmen, professionals and girls entering domestic service.<sup>41</sup>

## **2. Population and occupational trends in Nantconwy**

### **1750-1837**

The complex structure of Nantconwy parishes and lack of reliable sources make it difficult to estimate population before the advent of censuses in 1801, while good quality data on male occupations only becomes available from 1851. Data on women's full-time occupations becomes more useful from 1851, but is subject to all the caveats identified in the literature. It has not generally proved possible to employ family reconstitution techniques in Wales, and their use in Nantconwy is clearly not feasible. The use of patronyms (where father's first name becomes the child's second name and women retain their patronym at marriage) remained widespread in Nantconwy until 1841 and resulted in a high proportion of common names. It is estimated that in England only 5 per cent of the population had one of the ten most common surnames but in mid-nineteenth century Wales, the ten most common surnames covered 56 per cent of the population.<sup>42</sup> In a single parish, the concentration of common names could be even greater. In 1851 for example, there were only 18 different surnames amongst 159 household heads in Dolwyddelan, with 66 per cent of families having one of just five surnames (Jones, Williams, Roberts, Owen or Griffiths). The number of Christian names was equally restricted: two thirds of women household heads or wives of male heads had one of the five most common female names, and 60 per cent of male household heads had one of the five most common male names. This resulted in many people having the same name:

---

<sup>41</sup> K.J. Cooper, *Exodus from Cardiganshire* (Cardiff, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> D. Hirst and P. Michael, 'Family, community and the lunatic in mid-nineteenth-century North Wales', in P. Bartlett and D. Wright (eds.), *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000* (London, 1999), p. 69.

among the Dolwyddelan household heads and their wives, there were seven apiece named John Jones, Ann Jones, Jane Jones and Margaret Jones. Undertaking family reconstitution is also hindered by a fairly high proportion of exogamous marriages and a growing proportion of nonconformist baptisms by the 1820s.<sup>43</sup>

One estimate of the population of Nantconwy around 1750, excluding the township of Eidda, can be derived from the number of families reported by local clergy in the 1749 Bishop's Visitation Returns; these are estimated to cover about 88 per cent of the hundred. Using a multiplier of 4.9 people per family suggests a population of around 2,096 in 1750.<sup>44</sup> The number of families in the 1801 census was perhaps some 52 per cent higher – see Table 1. Some uncertainty arises because the Visitation returns do not align entirely with census parishes, but comparing population estimated from the Visitation returns with the 1801 census figure suggests that Nantconwy population increased by about 38 per cent between 1749 and 1801.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> 1851 Census Enumerators' Books [CEBs]; see Table 5 for the level of nonconformist baptisms and Table 8 for exogamous marriages.

<sup>44</sup> NLW B/QA/2, (Diocese of Bangor Bishop's visitations, 1749). A multiplier of 4.9 people per family was used based on the average Nantconwy family size in the 1811-31 censuses: *PPs 1812*, XI (316), *1822*, XV (502), *1833*, XXXVI-III (149). The 1801 census shows 4.3 people per family, but is known to undercount population: *PP 1801-02*, VI (9); E.A. Wrigley, 'Rickman revisited: the population growth rates of English counties in the early modern period', *ECHR* 62 (2009), pp. 711-735. Average family size appears to have remained fairly constant over the eighteenth century: in Ysbytty Ifan and six hill parishes in neighbouring hundreds, average household size was 5 in 1683-6, and average family size was 5.1 in 1821: NLW SA/MISC/1314, 1345, 1369, 1400, 1412b, 1434, 1484, (Notitiae St. Asaph population listings for Cerrigydruidion, Gwytherin, Llanddefel, Llanfor, Llangywer, Llanuwlyn and Ysbytty Ifan, 1683-6). It is likely that living-in servants and apprentices were counted as part of the family in the 1801-31 censuses.

<sup>45</sup> Only 187 males are recorded in Penmachno for 178 families in the 1801 census, so an estimate based on later sex ratios has been used. The Bangor Visitation returns did not cover Eidda or the sparsely populated part of Gwydir township outside the chapelry of Capel Curig.

Table 1, Estimated Nantconwy population in 1749 and 1801

Parish	(a) Min. no. of 1748 land tax payers	(b) No. of families in 1749 Visitation Returns	(c) No. families in 1801 census	(d) Estimated 1749 population from Visitation returns	(e) Estimated 1750 population from baptisms and burials	(f) Population in 1801 census	% increase in population from Visitation returns	% increase in families from Visitation returns
Bettws y coed	34	40	85	196		359		
Part of Capel Curig in Llanrhychwyn & Gwydir*	30	35		172				
Dolwyddelan	39	90	112	441		492		
Eidda township	21	Not in Visitation returns	58			273		
Gwydir township	11 (excluding Capel Curig)		85			316		
Llanrhychwyn			89			376		
Penmachno	66	124	173	608		774**		
Trefriw & Llanrhychwyn (excluding Capel Curig)	63	90		441				
Trefriw			72			301		
<b>Estimated total (excluding Eidda and Gwydir outside Capel Curig)</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>1,857</b>	<b>1,608</b>	<b>2,561</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Total Nantconwy</b>	<b>264</b>		<b>674</b>	<b>2,096</b>	<b>1,815</b>	<b>2,891</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>59%</b>

\* The Chapelry of Capel Curig also included about 14 families outside Nantconwy, not included in these totals. \*\* Estimated total, see Footnote 45. Sources: GA XQL/LT 2/1-7; NLW B/QA/2; PP 1801-02, VI (9); PP 1812, XI (316).

Further estimates can be derived from eighteenth-century parish register data published in the 1801 census, and from Rickman's estimates of county population increases in the 1811 census. Rickman estimated that the population of Caernarvonshire grew by 45 per cent from 1700 to 1750, but by only 14.7 per cent between 1750 and 1801. This is surely an under-estimate, as Nantconwy parish registers show a crude average annual increase (births minus deaths) of 21.1 between 1750 and 1801, implying a crude population increase of 59 per cent over the period. If family size was not increasing, there may have been a small element of net out-migration. Overall, it appears that Nantconwy population was possibly around 2,000 in 1750, and increased somewhere between 38 per cent and 52 per cent in the second half of the eighteenth century, broadly in line with the increase of 46.4 per cent estimated by Wrigley for England.<sup>46</sup>

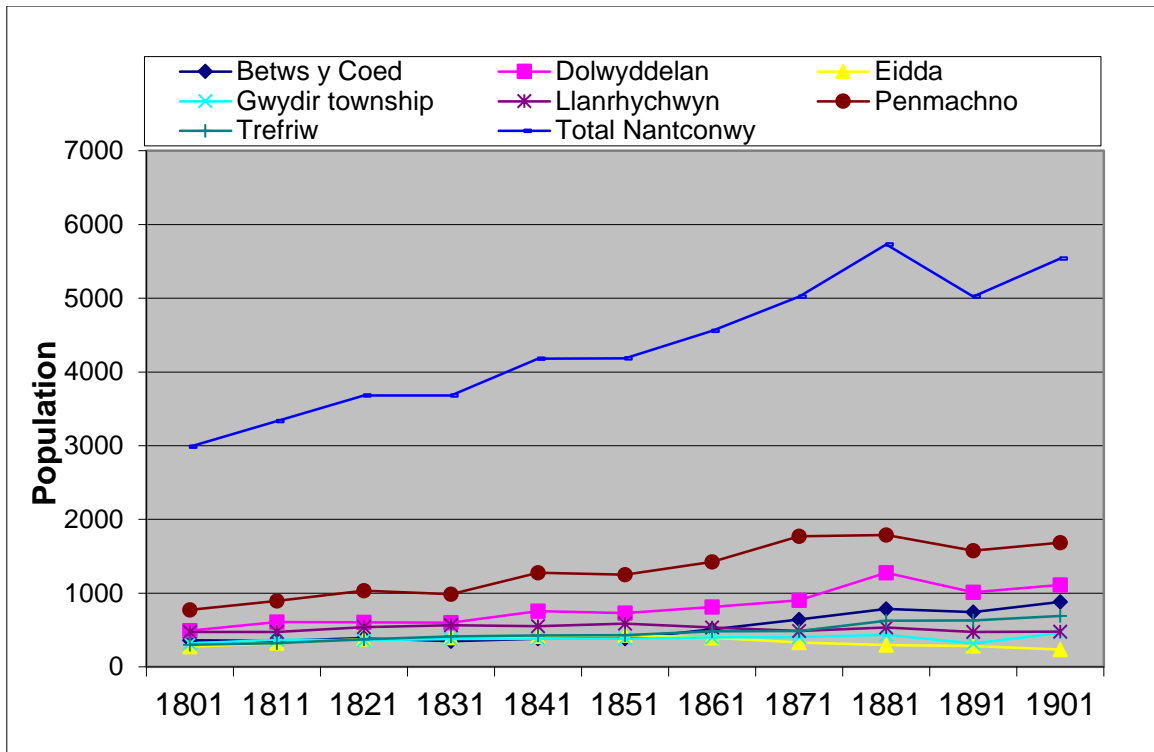
One firm point of comparison is afforded by late seventeenth-century St. Asaph diocese population listings for Ysbytty Ifan (including Eidda township) and six other hill parishes in two hundreds adjoining Nantconwy: Penllyn in Merioneth and Isaled in Denbighshire. Between 1683-6 and 1821, Ysbytty Ifan's population grew by 84 per cent, though growth for the seven parishes varied widely, averaging only 59 per cent.<sup>47</sup> Wrigley estimated that English population grew by 130 per cent over the same period. The indications are therefore that by 1800, population in Nantconwy was already growing fairly rapidly.

---

<sup>46</sup> *PP 1822, XV (502)*, p. xxxiv. Rickman's estimates suffered from a number of problems, including under-counting 1801 population, inaccuracy in parish register totals and exclusion of nonconformist baptisms: Wrigley, 'Rickman revisited', p. 713.

<sup>47</sup> NLW SA/MISC/1314, 1345, 1369, 1400, 1412b, 1434, 1484.

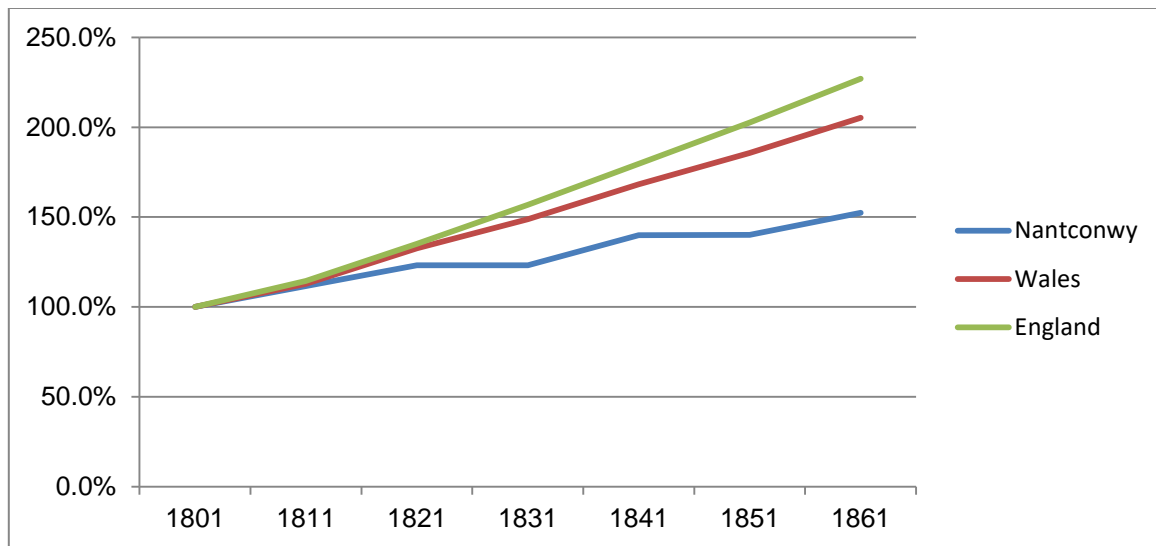
Figure 3, Nantconwy population, 1801-1901



Source: 1801-1901 censuses.

During the nineteenth century, population rose in fits and starts to a peak of 5,732 in 1881, after which it began to decline. The main periods of growth from 1831-41 and 1851-81 were driven largely by the expansion of slate quarrying in the two most populous parishes, Penmachno and Dolwyddelan. Rural decline began first in the two mainly agricultural parishes of Eidda and Llanrhychwyn. Although Bettws y coed and Trefriw began to develop as mountain tourist resorts from the 1840s, the main period of growth was after 1860 with the coming of the railway (Figure 3). Over the period 1801-61, Nantconwy's population increase of 52 per cent was less than half the rate experienced in England or Wales as a whole: only during the 1830s when slate quarrying first took off did the rate of increase come near the national average (Figure 4).

Figure 4, Nantconwy population compared to national trends, 1801-61



The vast majority of Nantconwy families in 1750 were involved in agriculture, and over half occupied a tenant farm. At least 232 families in the parishes covered by the 1749 Bangor Visitation returns paid land tax in 1748, comprising about 61 per cent of families according to the estimates submitted by the local clergy.<sup>48</sup> This impression of a high ratio of tenant farmers to labourers receives some support from the 393 baptisms recorded over the quarter-century 1750-74 for Capel Curig and Dolwyddelan (the only Nantconwy registers to regularly record father's occupation at this period). 78 per cent of fathers worked in agriculture, the majority of whom (55 per cent) were described as yeomen and 45 per cent as labourers. 19 per cent of fathers were craft workers, the most significant groups being weavers, tailors and joiners. Mining and quarrying hardly featured as yet, and only 2 per cent of fathers were employed in the tertiary sector (see Table 2). Mid-eighteenth century

<sup>48</sup> GA XQL/LT 2/1-7, (Land tax, Nantconwy), 1747-8. In Nantconwy and much of Caernarvonshire, land tax was paid by occupiers, not landowners. Where historic farms had been subdivided, tax was paid by more than one occupier. 'Named occupier & partner' has been counted as two tax-payers, and 'named occupier plus partners' as three; in some cases there were more than three occupiers, so this gives the minimum number of farms. A small number of farmers occupied more than one holding.

Nantconwy clearly possessed an economy without significant division of labour, where more specialist crafts and services came from the local market town, in common with many sparsely-populated areas of rural Wales.

The Nantconwy occupational data supplied by parish overseers of the poor for the 1801-1831 censuses appears sadly unreliable. In 1801, overseers were asked to report 'what number of persons in your parish, township, or place are chiefly employed in agriculture, how many in trade, manufactures or handicraft: and how many are not employed in any of the preceding classes?' This was interpreted variously in different places.<sup>49</sup> In Nantconwy, several parishes failed to account at all for the occupations of a significant proportion of families. From 1811-31, the question was revised to ask for family occupations. Even then, replies from Nantconwy parishes varied widely from census to census, especially concerning the proportion of families in the 'others' category – see Table 3. Although 'others' may have included some families of paupers not working, there was little work available in Nantconwy at this time other than in agriculture, trade, manufacture or handicrafts. The inconsistencies and implausibility of the 1801-31 census occupational figures for Nantconwy therefore mean that they cannot be relied on as a guide to the area's occupational structure over this key period of change.

---

<sup>49</sup> E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census Revisited: Census Records for England and Wales 1801-1901* (London, 2005), pp. 8-10.

Table 2, Male occupations from baptismal registers and in 1851 census

Sector	Occupation	2 Nantconwy parishes 1750-74	Nantconwy Anglican baptisms 1813-20	Nantconwy all baptisms 1813-20	England & Wales Anglican baptisms 1813-20	Nantconwy 1851 census*	England & Wales 1851 census*
Primary	Agriculture	78.4%	69.4%	67.7%	35.7%	52.2%	26.9%
	Mining & quarrying	1.0%	5.1%	5.2%	3.2%	23.1%	4.9%
	Other primary				0.5%	0.6%	0.6%
	<b>Total primary</b>	<b>79.4%</b>	<b>74.5%</b>	<b>72.8%</b>	<b>39.4%</b>	<b>75.9%</b>	<b>32.4%</b>
Secondary	Textiles	6.1%	3.5%	4.2%	7.8%	1.9%	6.8%
	Other secondary	12.5%	10.0%	11.8%	34.3%	14.3%	37.9%
	<b>Total secondary</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>42.1%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>44.7%</b>
Tertiary	Dealers & sellers	2.1%	4.7%	4.4%	3.4%	2.4%	4.7%
	Services & professions		5.1%	4.7%	8.7%	3.6%	10.4%
	Transport & communications		2.1%	2.1%	6.4%	1.9%	7.7%
	<b>Total tertiary</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>22.8%</b>
	Number of baptisms	393	569	678			
	Men aged 20 and over					1026	

\*Males aged 20 and over

Sources:

1750-75 figures from the Capel Curig and Dolwyddelan parish records: CA microfilm 3: CA CEP14.

1813-20 baptisms: CA, Baptismal registers for parishes Bettws y coed, Capel Curig, Dolwyddelan, Llanrhychwyn, Penmachno, Trefriw and Ysbytty Ifan; NLW NPR Ril 16/3871, (Baptism register microfilms, Bettws y Coed Brynmawr Calvinistic Methodist, 1806-37, Capel Curig/Llanrhychwyn Salem CM, 1814-36, Dolwyddelan Capel Ellen CM, 1813-37, Ysbytty Ifan CM, 1813-37); 17/3836, (Dolwyddelan Ganasareth Independent, 1819-36); 18/3871, (Penmachno Salem CM, 1812-37); 19/3448, (Llanrwst Seion CM, 1810-37, Trefriw Peniel CM, 1815-37); 20/3444, (Llanrwst Tabernacle Independent, 1803-37).<sup>50</sup>

Nantconwy 1851 census data: [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk), accessed 4 April 2015.

England & Wales Anglican baptisms 1813-20: Shaw-Taylor & Wrigley, 'Occupational structure', p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Only baptisms for births in Nantconwy from the Llanrwst registers were included. For Ysbytty Ifan, where Eidda township in Nantconwy accounted for nearly half the population of the parish, half the baptisms were included.

*Table 3, Nantconwy occupations in the 1811-31 censuses*

<b>Employed in :</b>	<b>1811 families</b>	<b>1821 families</b>	<b>1831 families</b>
Agriculture	67%	38%	55%
Trade, manufacture or handicraft	15%	10%	10%
Others	19%	52%	35%

Sources: PPs 1801-02, VI (9), 1822, XV (502), 1833, XXXVI-III (149).

The breakdown of individual male occupations in the 1831 census fails to clarify the Nantconwy occupational structure, with a suspiciously low figure of three per cent for those employed in manufacture, retail, trade and handicrafts, and leaving 23 per cent of males over 20 still unaccounted for. A proportion of 24 per cent of men recorded as agricultural labourers is also low in relation to the 35 per cent described as occupiers, raising questions as to where farmers' sons and unmarried farm servants, who in 1851 outnumbered agricultural labourers, were accounted for. As no male servants were recorded in Nantconwy, farm servants were probably included in the 23 per cent 'other males' (Table 4).

*Table 4, Occupations of Nantconwy males over 20 in 1831 census*

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Occupiers employing labourers	79	10.3%
Occupiers not employing labourers	194	25.2%
Labourers employed in agriculture	187	24.3%
Manufacture	2	0.3%
Retail, trade or handicrafts	21	2.7%
Capitalists, bankers, professional & other educated men	1	0.1%
Labourers not in agriculture	105	13.7%
Male servants	0	0.0%
Other males	180	23.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>769</b>	

If the Nantconwy data is representative, the method used by Kitson et al. to adjust fathers' occupations from baptismal records appears to under-estimate significantly the proportion of adult male farm servants and farmers' sons working on Welsh farms. Furthermore, farm servants generally started work by the age of 15, and youths aged 15-19 formed an important component of the farm labour force in areas like Nantconwy where farm service remained prevalent: in 1841, they comprised 10 per cent of male farm labour. Chapter 3 explores more fully the question of the structure of farm employment in Nantconwy, based on data from the 1851 and 1861 censuses.

The Cambridge Group's method of estimating male occupations from baptism records works best with very large samples and cannot hope to give reliable results on a scale as small as Nantconwy. Nevertheless, in view of the unreliability of early census occupational data, it is useful to look at fathers' occupations from Nantconwy baptisms both to compare the distribution of occupations with the national picture for 1813-20 and to identify trends over the period 1813-37, when major changes were taking place in the local economy.

Nonconformist baptism grew rapidly in Nantconwy following the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' break with the Church of England in 1811. Baptisms from the nine nonconformist baptismal registers extant for the area were therefore analysed in addition to those in the Anglican parish records. Few chapels had yet been built, but the registers of later chapels include the earlier christenings conducted in private houses. Calvinistic Methodist registers survive for all Nantconwy parishes, and Independent registers cover most of the hundred apart from Penmachno. As these two denominations represented 82 per cent of nonconformist attendances in the Llanrwst Union in 1851, the registers included in this analysis cover a significant majority of nonconformist baptisms from 1813-37. The results in Table 2 show clearly that although the share of agricultural employment had

declined since 1750-75, farming remained the dominant male occupation in the Nantconwy economy around 1817 accounting for 67.7 per cent of all baptisms, compared to 35.7 per cent of Anglican baptisms in England and Wales as a whole. Mining and quarrying had begun to take off and already provided five per cent of fathers' occupations - well above the national average. Although there was a small woollen manufacturing industry, this represented only just over half the national average share of employment in textiles. There had been no obvious growth in the share of craft and manufacturing occupations over the previous half century, which now stood at less than a third of the national average level, leading overall to an apparently weak secondary sector.

The tertiary sector had achieved the biggest growth in Nantconwy, with the emergence of a small middle class in the shape of innkeepers, parish clerks, schoolteachers, woollen manufacturers and mine agents. The opening of the Great Irish coach road through Bettws y coed and Capel Curig around 1800 also brought increased employment in transport and communications. Nevertheless, the tertiary sector apparently remained under-developed in comparison to the national share of occupations, with the exception of the 'dealers' category, highlighting the important role played at this time by the drovers and hosiers who traded the area's chief exports – store cattle and stockings – to English markets.

The low proportion of fathers' main occupations in the secondary and tertiary sectors c.1817 does however raise the question of the extent to which goods and services may have been provided by women and children or as a male by-employment. The area's significant stocking-knitting industry was carried on mainly by women and children and as a by-employment for men. The only clue to its existence in the baptismal records is a number of hosiers in the 'dealers' category. It is also significant that no fathers' occupations were recorded in relation to the growing volume of work transporting lead ore or slates. The

important role of by-employment in the local economy will be explored more fully in Chapter 3.

The inclusion of data on nonconformist baptisms made relatively little difference to the overall findings on Nantconwy male occupational structure c.1817, chiefly because they constituted only 16 per cent of total baptisms for the period 1813-20. The main impact was to show a somewhat larger secondary sector than would have been evident from Church of England baptisms alone. By the 1830s however, nonconformist baptisms had grown to at least 36 per cent of all Nantconwy baptisms (Table 5). In Nantconwy, craftsmen were the major early converts to nonconformity, while the mainly bi-lingual tertiary sector workers remained a stronghold of Anglicanism. Farm labourers were later converts, but by the 1830s were as likely to be nonconformist as other groups of primary and secondary sector workers. This fairly small sample of 2,142 baptisms therefore suggests that it may be unwise to assume that nonconformist fathers' occupations occurred in the same proportion as in Anglican baptisms and is likely to result in an under-estimation of the size of the Welsh secondary sector. The impact of nonconformity on estimating the occupational structure of Wales may well depend on the date at which it made significant inroads in particular areas.

*Table 5, Nonconformist baptisms as percentage of all baptisms by father's occupation, 1813-37*

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1813-20</b>	<b>1821-28</b>	<b>1829-37</b>	<b>Total 1813-37</b>
Farmer	19%	36%	34%	30%
Labourer	10%	19%	39%	24%
Miners & quarrymen	17%	30%	40%	34%
Secondary	29%	39%	37%	34%
Tertiary	10%	11%	18%	13%
<b><i>Nonconformist % of all baptisms</i></b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b><i>Number of all baptisms</i></b>	<b>678</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>2,142</b>

Analysis of fathers' occupations from baptisms over the period 1813-37 sheds useful new light on the timing of several local trends before a fuller picture becomes available from the censuses of 1841-61. After flat-lining between 1821 and 1831, there was a spurt in population growth over the next decade, mainly due to the rapid expansion of slate quarrying in Penmachno and Llanrhychwyn. This was accompanied by a major decline in the share of the adult male population employed in agriculture, though baptisms to farm labourers continued to rise numerically until the mid-1830s. How far changes introduced by the New Poor Law may have contributed to married men leaving agriculture is discussed in Chapter 5. Employment in the Gwydir lead mines continued to provide some employment throughout the 1820s and early 1830s, but by the later part of the decade, most mines in Wales had become idle.<sup>51</sup> Some of the former Nantconwy lead miners found employment in the Llanrhychwyn pyrites mines; others were recorded as agricultural labourers in the 1841 census, though employment as such must have been scarce in the area of waste and small farms around the lead mining district. The number of baptisms to hosiers declined steadily after 1820, perhaps a sign of declining profits in the hand stocking-knitting industry. The share of employment in the woollen manufacturing industry also declined, as production first moved into a number of small factories, and then became more concentrated in a smaller number of larger water-powered mills.<sup>52</sup>

## **1841-61**

The growth of slate quarrying in Nantconwy from the 1830s brought significant change to the male occupational structure, though agriculture remained the biggest employer in 1861 (Table 6). The biggest reduction in the farm labour force came from adult male agricultural

---

<sup>51</sup> Lewis, *Lead Mining*, pp. 237-9.

<sup>52</sup> Evolution of the woollen industry is explored in Chapter 4.

labourers, whose numbers shrank by 47 per cent between 1841 and 1851, and there was also a significant reduction in the number of male farm servants. By 1851, these exceeded men recorded as agricultural labourers, even though not all labourers would have worked full-time: some were retired or semi-retired, while others combined occasional labouring with other ways of making a living including running smallholdings. Better age data in the 1851 census reveals that the majority of male farm servants were under age 20, and the proportion of youths in agriculture increased further by 1861 – see Figure 5.

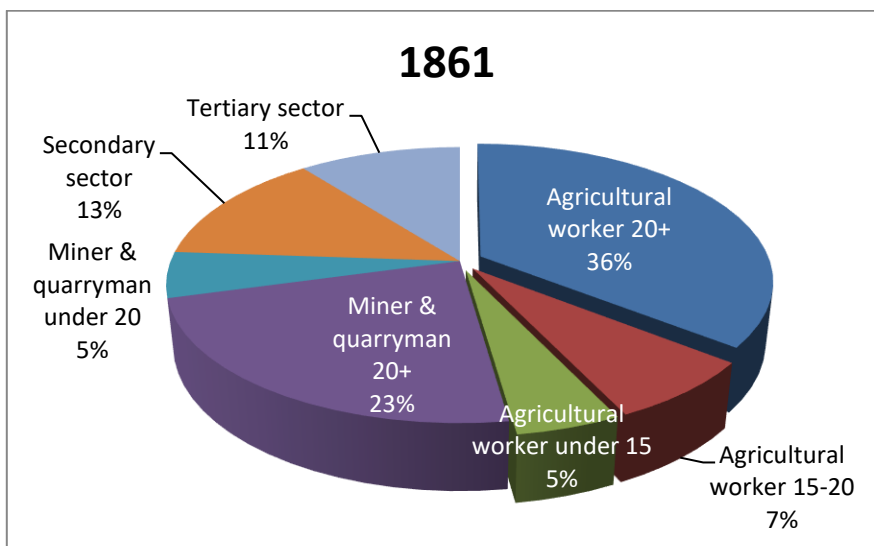
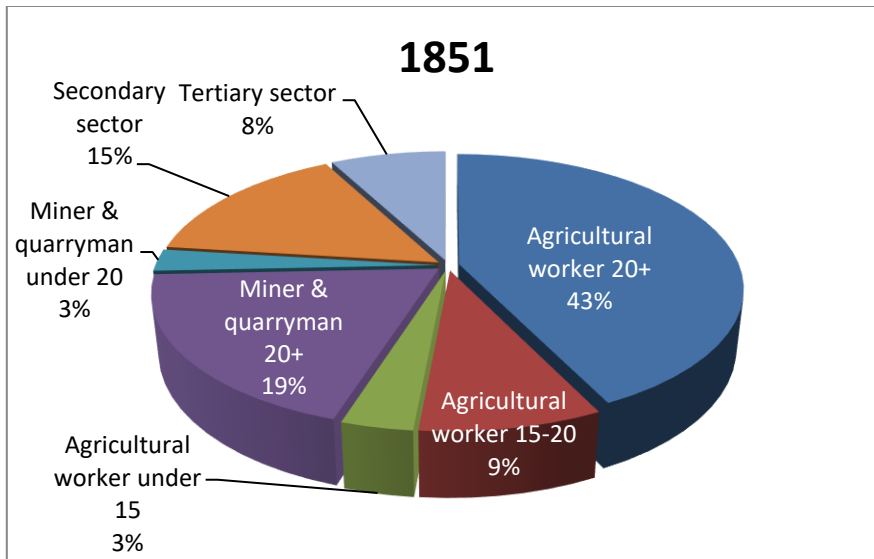
*Table 6, Nantconwy male occupations, 1841-61*

Occupation	Age 15+	Age 20 and over		Age 15-19		Under 15	
	1841	1851	1861*	1851	1861*	1851	1861*
Farmer	19.1%	22.1%	24.1%	-	-	-	-
Farmer's son**	-	9.7%	7.5%	26.8%	25.7%	11.3%	23.1%
Agricultural labourer	21.7%	13.5%	6.6%	4.9%	2.1%	3.2%	12.3%
Male farm servant	18.2%	6.8%	6.3%	34.8%	25.0%	54.8%	43.1%
<b>Total Agriculture</b>	<b>59.0%</b>	<b>52.2%</b>	<b>44.5%</b>	<b>66.5%</b>	<b>52.8%</b>	<b>69.4%</b>	<b>78.5%</b>
Mining	3.3%	5.5%	10.9%	3.7%	11.1%	3.2%	10.8%
Quarryman	17.3%	17.6%	16.4%	12.2%	18.8%	4.8%	7.7%
Other primary	0.1%	0.6%	1.4%	0.6%	0.7%	1.6%	0.0%
<b>Total primary</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>75.9%</b>	<b>73.2%</b>	<b>82.9%</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	<b>79.0%</b>	<b>96.9%</b>
Textiles	2.1%	1.9%	1.3%	4.3%	1.4%	4.8%	1.5%
Craft	10.1%	12.8%	12.7%	6.7%	9.0%	6.5%	-
Other secondary	11.2%	14.3%	13.4%	6.7%	9.0%	6.5%	0.0%
<b>Total secondary</b>	<b>13.4%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>11.0%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Dealer	2.8%	2.4%	3.1%	1.2%	0.7%	3.2%	-
Seller	2.0%	1.5%	2.9%	0.6%	0.7%	3.2%	-
Professional & service	4.0%	3.6%	6.6%	4.3%	2.8%	4.8%	1.5%
Transport & communications	0.2%	1.9%	2.3%	0.6%	2.8%	1.6%	-
<b>Total tertiary</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
<b>Total occupied males</b>	<b>1212</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>65</b>

\* 1861 figures exclude parts of Penmachno and Dolwyddelan for which one and a half CEBs are missing. The increase in slate quarrying may therefore be under-stated.

\*\* 1841 CEBs did not record farmer's son as an occupation.

Figure 5, Age and occupation of Nantconwy males, 1851-61



Compared to the national male occupational structure (Table 2) the growth of quarrying meant that the Nantconwy economy had by 1851 become even more heavily weighted towards the primary sector. There had been no growth since c.1817 in the share of the secondary sector. Although the mines and quarries brought increased employment for craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters and stonemasons, this did little more than offset declining employment in the small local woollen industry with the advent of mechanisation. Full-time employment in the tertiary sector in Nantconwy actually shrank with the virtual

demise of hosiers and a decline in the number of long-distance drovers as livestock began to be conveyed to English markets by train. There were still no resident gentry and the very small professional group had a similar make-up to the c.1817 group, with the addition of several Methodist ministers.

Despite reservation about the under-recording of women's work in the censuses, the 1851 and 1861 CEBs are a useful starting point for exploring women's occupations in Nantconwy at the end of the period. Census enumerators' descriptions of women's occupations are at their most reliable for unmarried women and widows. However most Nantconwy enumerators appear to have misunderstood their instructions in 1851 and 1861 to record wives, sons and daughters as for example 'shoemaker's wife' only if they regularly assisted in the family business; instead they often recorded status, for example as 'mariner's wife', or even young children as 'agricultural labourer's son'. As a result, it is not possible to distinguish where wives of shopkeepers, innkeepers or craftsmen were substantially occupied in the family business, though it is likely that many were.<sup>53</sup> Only wives and daughters recorded as 'farmer's wife' or 'farmer's daughter' have therefore been included in the female occupation totals, though indirect evidence of other women's contribution to family income is explored later in the sections on smallholdings, the economy of makeshifts, and in relation to the poor relief paid to husbands when wives were ill or benefits paid by female friendly societies. Many Nantconwy householders also recorded their unmarried daughters aged 15 and over as a 'house servant'. Unless it is clear that this brought an income into the family, for example in the case of innkeepers or lodging-house keepers, these are treated as not occupied (although in some cases the family would have hired a

---

<sup>53</sup> Wives often played a crucial subsidiary role in some areas of craft production such as shoemaking, hat-making and framework knitting, and a man without a wife might have to hire an assistant to do this work instead: A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 124-5.

servant if a daughter had not been available). Other female relatives recorded in a service capacity, such as sisters acting as housekeepers, were included in female occupations.

*Table 7, Comparison of male and female employment 1851-61*

Occupation	Age 20 and over				Age 15-19			
	M 1851	M 1861	F 1851	F 1861	M 1851	M 1861	F 1851	F 1861
Farmer	227	201	60	35				
Farmer's relative	100	63	218	199	44	37	28	39
Agricultural labourer	139	55			8	3		
Farm servant	70	53	25	36	57	36	13	23
<b>Total Agriculture</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>62</b>
Miner	56	91			6	16		
Quarryman	181	137			20	27		
Other primary	6	12			1	1		
<b>Total primary</b>	<b>779</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>62</b>
Wool manufacture	19	11			7	2		
Stocking knitter			22	20				
Craft	131	106	24	16	11	13	9	3
Other secondary	16	6						
<b>Total secondary</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>
Dealer	10	2			1			
Seller	15	24	6	17	1	1	1	
Professional & service	37	55	114	112	7	4	72	50
Transport & communications	20	19	6	4	1	4		
<b>Total tertiary</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Total occupied</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>115</b>
Percentage of age group occupied	68.4%	65.5%	31.6%	34.5%	57.1%	55.6%	42.9%	44.4%
Percentage of all age 15+ occupied	57.4%	54.5%	26.6%	28.6%	6.9%	9.4%	6.9%	7.5%

Table 7 shows that in 1851, women accounted for 32 per cent of Nantconwy inhabitants aged 20 and over with a recorded occupation and 43 per cent of those aged 15 to 19. If anything, the female share of the workforce may have increased in the following decade, though the absence of one and a half CEBs for 1861 prevents precise comparison. The relatively high and increasing share of work undertaken by women came largely from a higher proportion of farmer's daughters and female farm servants, especially those below age 20, taking the place of adult male relatives and labourers on family farms, and from

women in domestic service, many of whom also worked on farms. This runs very much against the national trend of decreasing female participation in agriculture. The increased feminisation of agriculture in Nantconwy reflects both the increased opportunities for men in better-paid mining and quarrying employment both locally and in the nearby major quarrying districts of Ffestiniog and Bethesda, and a lack of alternative employment for women.

### **3. Migration**

The extent of migration into and from Nantconwy affected both population growth and the nature of local society. How far was this a stable society, largely dependent on its own resources, or did net out-migration relieve some of the pressures on the local economy? Indeed, in view of the lack of a local landowning elite, was there sufficient stability among the rate-payers, principally tenant farmers, to provide leadership to local society? These issues are investigated by means of high level overviews of the extent of mobility among Nantconwy residents at the beginning and end of the study period. Mobility in the mid-eighteenth century is assessed by looking at marriage patterns in four Nantconwy parishes. Data from the 1861 CEBs and Registrar General's annual reports are then used to assess whether the area experienced net out-migration by the end of the period, the extent of lifetime mobility into and from Nantconwy parishes, and whether there were variations in the migratory behavior of women and men or between different occupational groups. These two measures are not directly comparable - marriage records referring to parish of residence prior to marriage rather than birthplace – but they do provide a useful indication of major changes over the period.

Although migration patterns in mid-eighteenth century Nantconwy cannot be assessed directly, marriage patterns give some idea of local migratory horizons. Of the 186 marriages that took place in four Nantconwy parishes between 1750 and 1774, either the husband or wife was from another parish in nearly half. A third of husbands and ten per cent of wives came from another parish in Nantconwy or the local area within a radius of ten miles, most frequently from the market town and large agricultural parish of Llanrwst. Only four per cent of husbands came from further afield in Caernarvonshire or Denbighshire. As one or both partners had to move if they came from different parishes, marriage was clearly a major source of local migration. In addition, farm servants usually moved annually and married agricultural labourers circulated to a more limited extent between local parishes. As a result, the majority of Nantconwy residents aged fifteen and over were likely in the mid-eighteenth century to have come from another parish, though virtually all from within a radius of ten miles (Table 8).<sup>54</sup>

*Table 8, Marriage patterns in four Nantconwy parishes, 1750-74*

	Same parish	Other Nantconwy parish	Other local parish	Other NW Wales	Total
Husband	117	20	41	8	186
Wife	165	7	12	0	184
% Husband	62.9%	10.8%	22.0%	4.3%	
% Wife	89.7%	3.8%	6.5%	0.0%	

Sources: Marriage registers for Bettws y coed, Capel Curig, Dolwyddelan; Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn are treated as a single parish. CA CEP11, Microfilm 4, CEP14, CEP 20.<sup>55</sup>

Overall changes in the population of Nantconwy were a product of the crude rate of population growth (births minus deaths) and the extent of migration in and out of the area. Lack of adequate data makes this difficult to assess before the advent of civil registration

<sup>54</sup> In a study of mobility in Wiltshire for example, Day found that in the period 1754-75, around 35% of brides and 45% of grooms had migrated between birth and marriage: C. Day, 'Geographical mobility in Wiltshire, 1754-1914', *Population Studies* (2012), p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn treated as a single parish.

in 1837, after which births and deaths were published for each registration district, in this case the Llanrwst Union. Because the population of Nantconwy formed only 36 per cent of the union and different economic factors affected the largely agricultural Denbighshire parishes in the union, net migration can only be estimated for the final decade of the study period, when data on births and deaths were published on a sub-registration district basis. Birthplace data in the 1861 census was then used to analyze the extent and patterns of lifetime migration into Nantconwy of working-age residents aged fifteen and over, and of out-migration of people born in Nantconwy; several case studies are also used to exemplify the typical circumstances of individuals or families leaving Nantconwy.

In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, population increased in all counties of England and Wales, but by 1851, early signs were emerging in some rural counties of a 'flight from the land'. During the 'Hungry 'Forties', population fell in three upland Welsh counties, by three per cent in Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire, and by one per cent in Merioneth. One English upland county, Westmorland, also experienced a fall in population. Overall decline paused during the 1850s, apart from in Anglesey where population fell by 5 per cent, but by 1871, population was static or reducing in half the counties of Wales. Caernarvonshire and Denbighshire were not affected by this decline, with population increasing by nearly nine per cent in both counties between 1851 and 1861. After remaining static in the 1840s, the population of Nantconwy also increased by 8.9 per cent during the 1850s. Nevertheless, this increase masks some net out-migration: the estimated gross population increase in Nantconwy from 1851-61 was 614 (14.7 per cent), compared to a

net population increase of 371, implying a net out-migration of 5.8 per cent of the local population.<sup>56</sup>

Beneath the net outflow, there was also a considerable amount of local population movement. Just over half the people of working age population of Nantconwy in 1861 were still living in their parish of birth. The overall pattern of in-migration was remarkably similar for both sexes, but there were significant differences in the degree of movement into different parishes (Figure 6). In-migration was strongest in Bettws y coed and Gwydir township where the recent revival of employment in the lead mines brought a higher proportion of incomers from further afield, including other mining areas of Flintshire and Anglesey.

---

<sup>56</sup> Gross population increase was estimated from the Annual Reports of the Registrar General for 1855-61. Nantconwy comprised the sub-district of Bettws y coed and 69% of the Ysbytty sub-district.

Figure 6, Nantconwy in-migration – birthplace of Nantconwy residents aged 15 and over in 1861 census

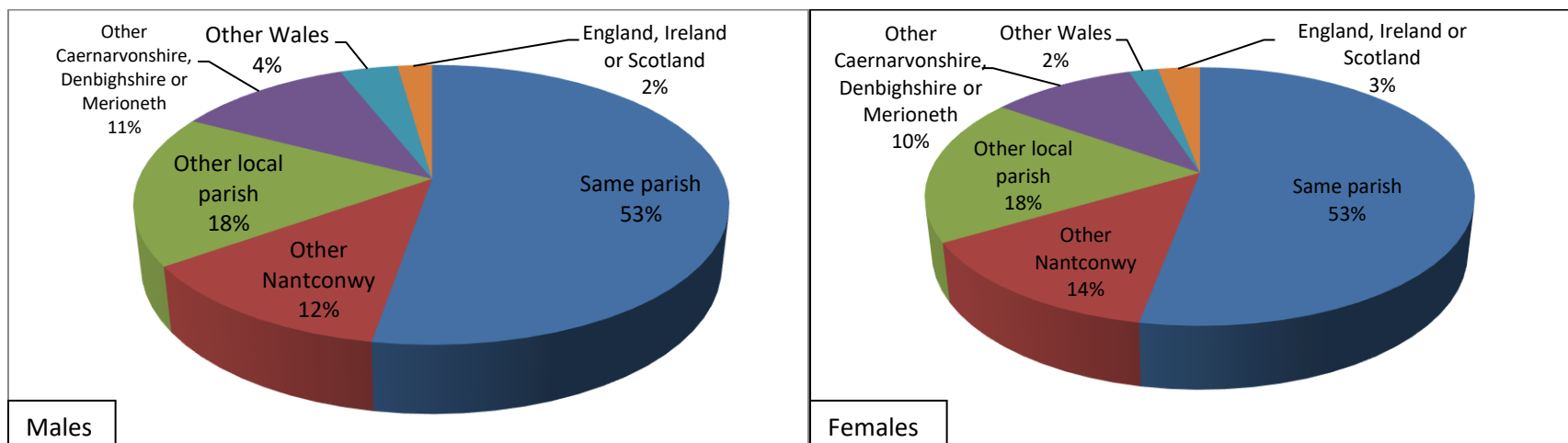


Table 9, Birthplace parish

Residence in 1861	Where born											
	Same parish		Other Nantconwy		Other local parish		Other Caernarvonshire, Denbighshire or Merioneth		Other Wales		England, Ireland or Scotland	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Bettws y coed	42.2%	48.0%	15.0%	17.0%	13.6%	17.0%	19.7%	12.9%	6.8%	1.8%	2.7%	3.5%
Dolwyddelan*	60.3%	56.1%	13.8%	15.5%	14.4%	19.6%	10.9%	8.1%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Eidda	40.5%	47.9%	3.4%	6.6%	31.9%	25.6%	18.1%	13.2%	3.4%	3.3%	2.6%	3.3%
Gwydir	36.7%	33.9%	21.1%	26.3%	22.9%	16.9%	10.1%	11.0%	4.6%	6.8%	4.6%	5.1%
Llanrhychwyn	55.9%	52.1%	20.0%	14.7%	16.5%	21.5%	4.7%	7.4%	1.8%	0.6%	1.2%	3.7%
Penmachno*	71.5%	68.3%	6.9%	7.7%	8.5%	14.1%	8.5%	7.7%	3.1%	0.0%	1.5%	2.1%
Trefriw	55.3%	60.6%	5.0%	7.7%	19.1%	14.8%	9.2%	11.0%	7.1%	3.2%	4.3%	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>52.7%</b>	<b>52.9%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>

\*Incomplete census returns for Dolwyddelan & Penmachno. Trefriw & Llanrhychwyn treated as same parish, as Trefriw encircled by Llanrhychwyn.

The lifetime mobility of different occupational groups was broadly similar to patterns found elsewhere (Table 10 and Table 11). Farmers had generally been born in the same parish, and their sons were the group least likely to have migrated. Farm servants on the other hand were more prone to seek work outside their parish of birth, mainly within the local area within a ten mile radius, but with 21 per cent coming from further afield in north Wales. The mountainous nature of much of Nantconwy and its sparse population account for farm servants being mobile over longer distances than were found in some parts of England: in late eighteenth-century Lincolnshire for example, Kussmaul found the mean distance between place of birth and service was about six kilometres.<sup>57</sup> Agricultural labourers were less mobile than farm servants, though nearly half worked outside their birth parish. Many would previously have been employed as farm servants, and it was also normal for married labourers working on remote farms to move regularly. Labourers living in the expanding villages with a wider choice of workplaces and those owning or occupying a smallholding were less likely to move.

Miners were somewhat more likely than quarrymen to come from outside the parish. This probably reflected both the more recent resurgence of lead mining employment following the collapse of the 1840s, and the need for local connections to become part of a bargain group in the larger slate quarries. It is clear that quarrying and mining provided employment for much of the expanding population and for men leaving agriculture. Skilled manual workers were considerably more likely than average to be non-local, while 78 per cent of the small group of managers and professionals came from outside the local area. A third of these were managers or agents of the larger mines and slate quarries, whose term of office was usually of limited duration. A further third were clergymen and schoolteachers, of whom only the rectors of Trefriw would have enjoyed much social standing, the others being low-paid curates. Nearly

---

<sup>57</sup> A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 64.

a third of professionals and managers came from England or Scotland and as non-Welsh speakers would have been unable to play an active role in community affairs. This left the leadership of the local community in 1861 very much as it had been in 1750, largely in the hands of the more substantial farmers, with the addition of the innkeepers of the major inns in Bettws y coed and Capel Curig.

*Table 10, Birthplaces of males aged 15 and over by occupation, 1861*

Occupation	Where born			Total no.
	Same parish	Local parish	Non-local	
Farmer	58.7%	31.1%	10.2%	196
Farmer's son	88.3%	6.4%	5.3%	94
Agricultural labourer	52.9%	35.3%	11.8%	51
Farm servant	35.0%	43.8%	21.3%	80
Miner	49.0%	34.3%	17.6%	102
Quarryman, stone cutter	57.7%	30.9%	11.4%	149
Craftsmen	45.4%	26.1%	28.6%	119
Professional & managerial	11.1%	11.1%	77.8%	27
<b>All male occupations</b>	<b>52.7%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>987</b>

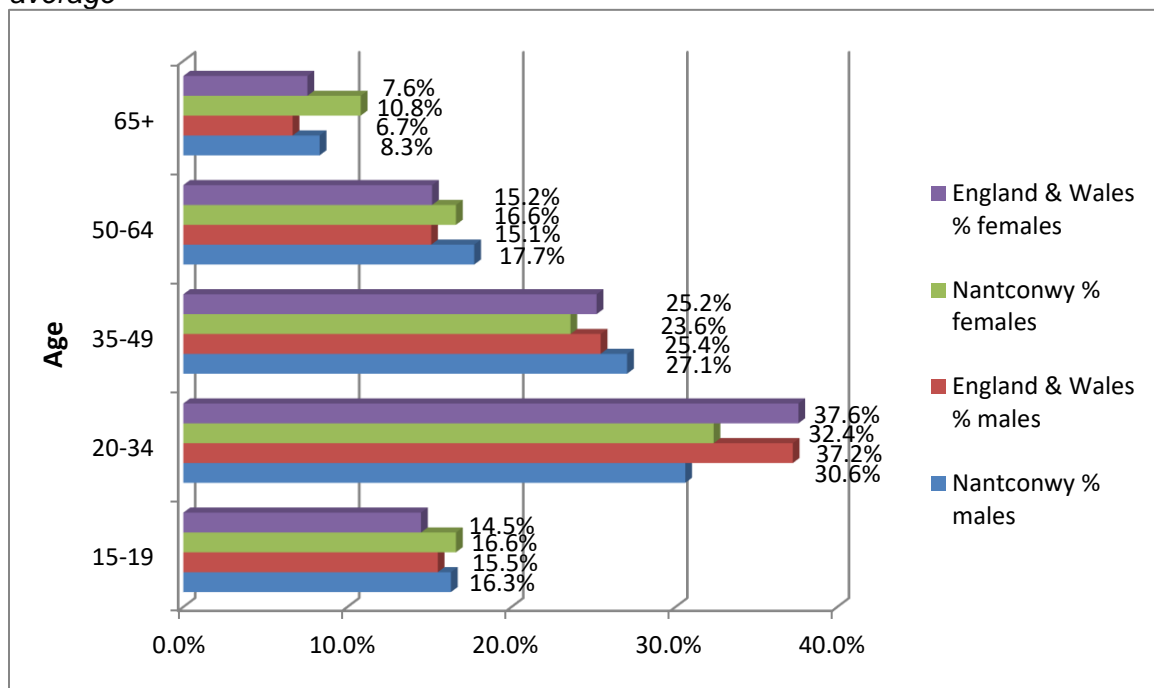
Women farmers and farmers' wives were also likely to have been born in the parish. Female farm servants, chiefly dairymaids, typically came from another parish within Nantconwy or the local area, while around half of domestic servants came from the parish where they were working. The majority of wives with no recorded occupation, mainly the spouses of quarrymen, miners, craftsmen and agricultural labourers, were in-migrants, and were more likely than most male groups to come from outside the local area (Table 11).

*Table 11, Birthplaces of females aged 15 and over by occupation, 1861*

Occupation	Where born			Total no.
	Same parish	Local parish	Non-local	
Farmer	64.7%	23.5%	11.8%	34
Farmer's wife	53.7%	34.7%	11.6%	147
Farm servant	35.0%	51.7%	13.3%	60
Domestic servant	50.4%	32.5%	17.1%	117
Wives with no recorded occupation	43.9%	34.4%	21.6%	305
<b>All females aged 15+</b>	<b>52.9%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>1117</b>

The proportion of men and women in different age groups in Nantconwy compared to the national average age distribution affords an indication of the groups contributing most in the net outflow of population during the 1850s (Figure 7). Life expectancy was fairly high in Nantconwy so it is not surprising to find a higher than average proportion of women and men aged over 50 in Nantconwy in 1861.<sup>58</sup> The proportion of youths aged 15-19 was also above average, perhaps reflecting the opportunities for incoming farm servants, the employment of local youths in mines and quarries and the number of farming, craft and quarrying families able to keep one or more daughters at home to undertake farm and domestic duties. The biggest deficit in Nantconwy population clearly occurred in the 20-34 age group for both women and men, suggesting that young adults were the most likely to have migrated out of the area.

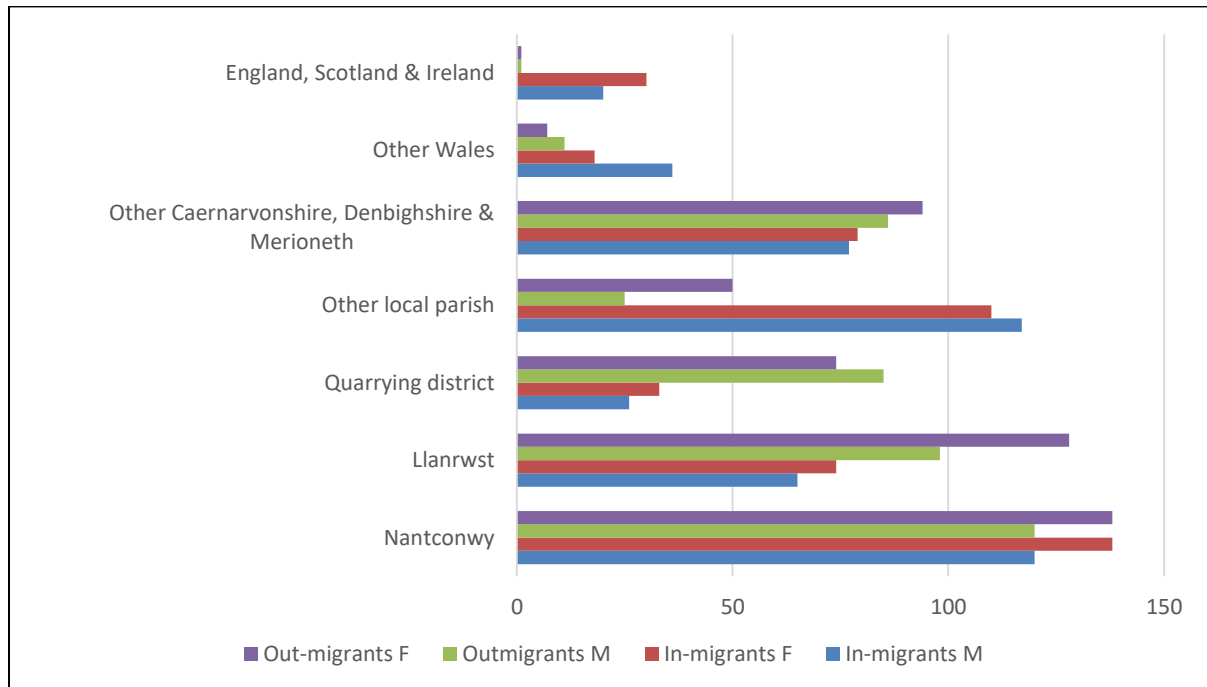
Figure 7, Distribution of Nantconwy residents aged 15+ in 1861 compared to national average



<sup>58</sup> R. Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 96, Figure 5.17.

It should in principle be possible to use birthplace information in the 1861 census to identify people born in Nantconwy who had migrated out of the hundred. In practice, searching on-line databases by parish of birth yields partial results because some census enumerators recorded only the county of birth; others had difficulty in spelling Welsh parish names and these were often illegible to the database transcribers.<sup>59</sup> This means that long-distance migration is less likely to be detected, but a clear picture of the main out-migration trends can nevertheless be gleaned from the 918 Nantconwy-born migrants aged 15 and over who were traced in the 1861 census (Table 9 and Figure 8).

*Figure 8, Origins and destinations of lifetime migrants, 1861*



Underlying a considerable amount of circular migration between Nantconwy parishes, there was clear evidence of step migration with replacement similar to that found in the north-east Wales coalfield. Women were marginally more likely to migrate than men (52 per cent of

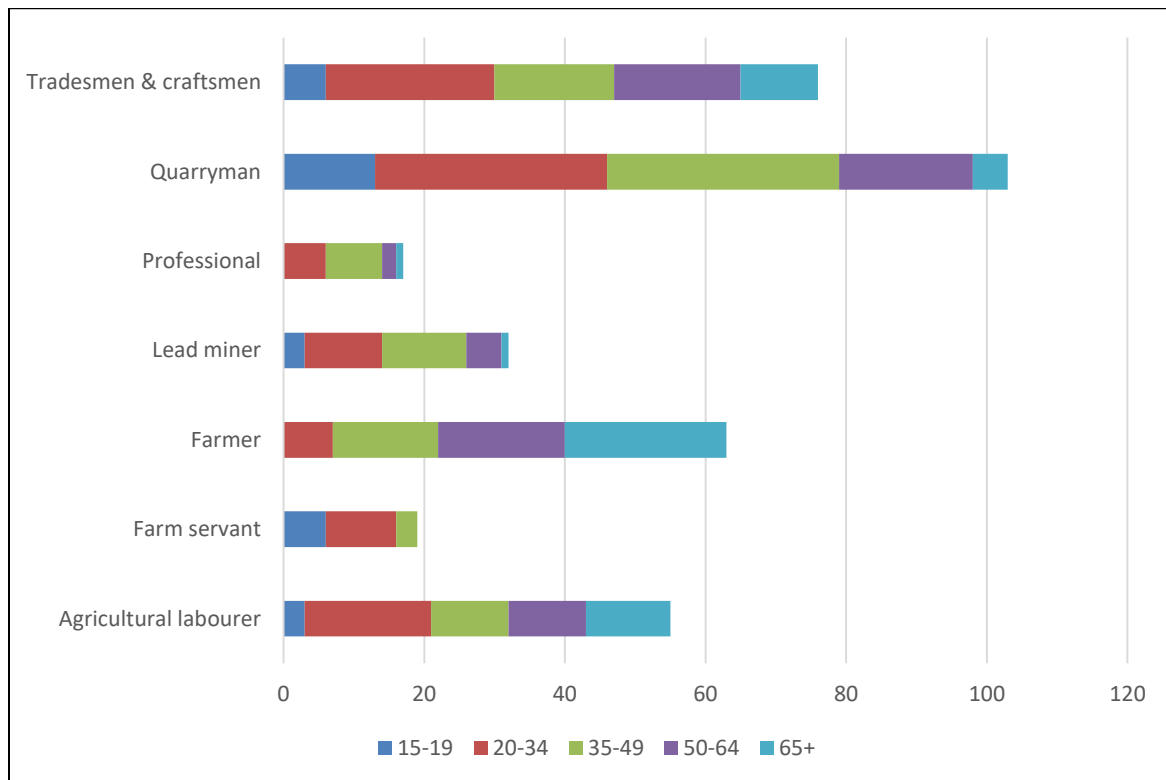
<sup>59</sup> Cooper, *Exodus*, p.5.

migrants into and out of Nantconwy parishes were women), but were more likely to move over shorter distances within Nantconwy, reflecting the local marriage market. Farmers were the most likely male occupational group to move within Nantconwy, perhaps because of estate loyalties. The most significant out-migration destinations were Llanrwst and local quarrying districts, typically Ffestiniog for people from Dolwyddelan and Penmachno and Bethesda (Llanllechid parish) for migrants from Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn. Llanrwst was both the local market town and a large rural parish; women were more likely to move here (26 per cent of out-migrants) than men (23 per cent). Nantconwy agricultural labourers and farm servants were more likely to migrate to a more arable local parish outside Nantconwy with better employment prospects, though there was more in-migration than out-migration from other local parishes, as Nantconwy migrants' places were often filled by incomers from more rural areas. There was also circular movement over longer distances within the counties of Caernarvonshire, Denbighshire and Merioneth: 16 per cent of in-migration and 19 per cent of out-migration, with craftsmen and tradesmen the group most likely to move over longer distances. The overall impact was one of gradual net out-migration, where around half those born in Nantconwy might expect to leave their birth parish during their lifetime.

The age of out-migrants reflected to some extent the fortunes of the local economy (Figure 9). Most migration took place as young adults or at marriage, though Nantconwy families also moved when opportunities arose to take on a better farm or inn, or from necessity when inactivity in the local quarry or lead mines took away their livelihoods. Craftsmen and tradesmen were spread across adult age-groups, evidence of their high mobility throughout the period and at all life stages. Migration of quarrymen clearly took off during the 1830s with the pace quickening during the 1840s and continuing in the 1850s. Farmers were the oldest group of migrants, due to the fact that men tended to pick up a farm tenancy later in life. 42 per cent of migrant agricultural labourers were over 50, men who left their home parish before

employment prospects in the slate industry provided a more attractive alternative. The rapid reduction in the number of farm labourers in Nantconwy from the 1830s onwards was achieved mainly through men moving into the slate industry with some out-migration of farm labourers to more arable parishes.

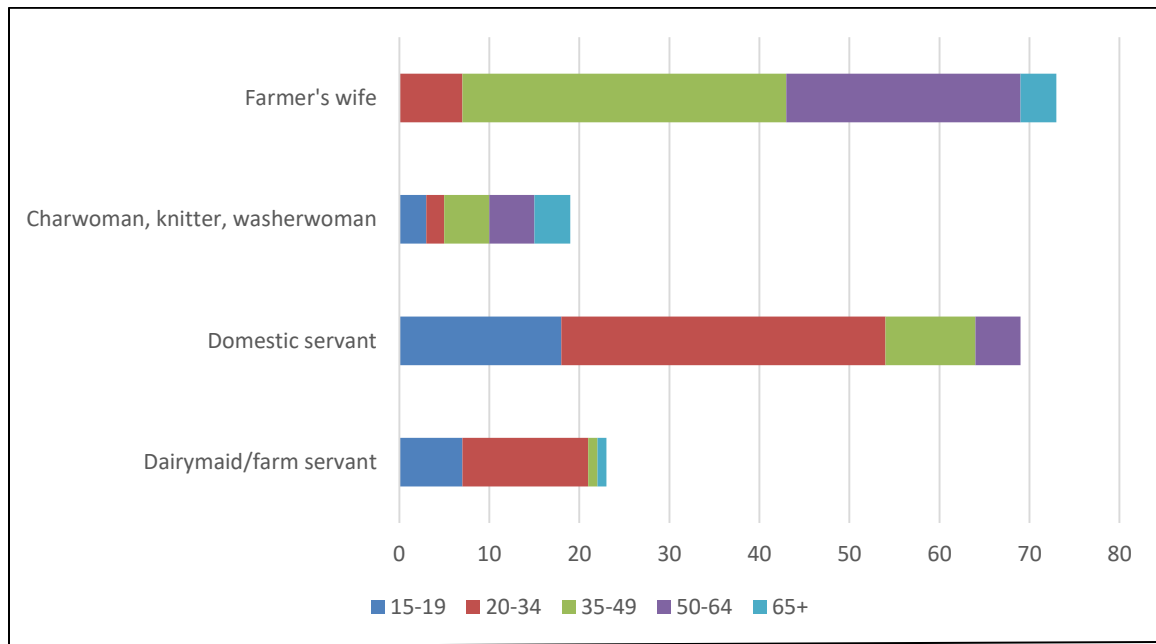
*Figure 9, Age distribution of male out-migrants, 1861*



For female out-migrants there was a much more restricted range of occupations. Younger women left principally to become farm servants, (who had a median age of 20) or domestic servants (median age 22). The majority of female lifetime migrants were married, but the most common occupations for older women household heads were as farmers, or as charwomen, washerwomen and stocking knitters, for which there was greater scope in Llanrwst (Figure 10). The issue of common names makes it difficult to systematically track Nantconwy migrants longitudinally from their origin to destination place of residence:

only families migrating together can usually be traced with confidence.<sup>60</sup> The following short case studies are however representative of the circumstances of people migrating from Nantconwy in the 1830s to 1860s.

Figure 10, Age distribution of female out-migrants, 1861



Hugh and Jane Jones were typical of small farmers prepared to move to a new parish in order to take on a larger holding. In 1841, Hugh, aged 42 and his wife Jane, 32, farmed a 24 acre share of a former Penmachno gentry farm, Hafodwryd. By 1851 they had moved about 15 miles to a 199 acre farm in the Denbighshire parish of Llansannan, where they employed two male farm servants, with their eldest daughter Anne, aged 15, acting as a house servant. By 1861, their son John was old enough at 18 to work on the farm, but the couple still employed a male and female farm servant. They were following in the footsteps

<sup>60</sup> C.G. Pooley and J. C. Doherty, 'The longitudinal study of migration: Welsh migration to English towns in the nineteenth century', in C.G. Pooley and I.D. Whyte (eds.), *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: a Social History of Migration* (London, 1991), p. 148.

of a neighbouring couple from Penmachno, John and Margaret Jones, who had moved from an 18 acre farm with their son and daughter-in-law to farm 126 acres in Llansannan.

Rhys Thomas, born in Penmachno in 1817, made the transition in mid-life from agricultural labouring to slate quarrying, probably because of the depressed outlook for labourers, especially after their smallholdings were hit by the potato blight. In 1851 he worked in Penmachno as a labourer supporting a wife and two sons, but by 1861 the family had moved to Ffestiniog where Rhys and his two sons all worked as quarrymen. Another Penmachno-born quarryman, William Williams, moved at marriage to his wife's parish of Trawsfynydd in Merioneth, where two sons were born. By 1841 the family had moved back to Penmachno, probably to take advantage of the employment opportunities in the developing slate quarries. As they lived in the village, over four miles from the quarries, William probably slept in barracks during the week. Three daughters were born in Penmachno, but around 1850, when one of the major Penmachno quarries was virtually idle, the family moved to Ffestiniog where they were sufficiently well-off to employ a maid servant.

Robert Jones and his wife Ellin exemplify the wide range of circumstances in which people left Nantconwy for improved economic opportunities elsewhere in the local area. Both were from Penmachno and in 1851, Robert worked as a wool carder, probably at the small woollen mill of Felin Ucha (Upper Mill). The family also tenanted a four acre smallholding encroached from the common earlier in the century. They migrated during the 1850s to Gwytherin, a parish in the Denbighshire part of the Llanrwst Union, to take over a small woollen factory, where they employed their two teenage sons as a spinner and weaver and as a carder, together with a servant from Penmachno as a carder. There were clearly links between the Gwytherin and Penmachno woollen manufacturers, for the factory had previously been run by a Penmachno

couple, and the Joneses were succeeded in the 1860s by another couple formerly living in Penmachno. Their eldest son moved to become the manufacturer at another small woolen mill in a Merioneth parish about ten miles away, also employing three men.

Alice Jones from Llanrhychwyn moved to Llanrwst to go into service with two elderly spinster sisters from the local Titley dynasty of clergymen and small landowners. In 1851 she was one of two house servants, and by 1861 had been promoted to cook, although as a 35 year old spinster her prospects must have looked uncertain after the death of her aged employers.

## ***Conclusions***

Identification of the major trends in population, occupations and migration into and out of Nantconwy between 1750 and 1861 has highlighted some key factors to be investigated in greater depth in exploring the livelihoods of the hundred's inhabitants. The economy in 1750 was overwhelmingly agricultural with a majority of families probably tenating a farm. Population grew steadily during the second half of the eighteenth century with the help of earnings from stocking knitting, but this put increased pressure on local resources and there may have been an element of net out-migration. More families were unable to become farmers, leading to a significant increase in agricultural labourers whose numbers peaked by 1841, and thereafter fell much more rapidly than in most rural areas of England and Wales. Knitting began to decline in the 1840s but continued to provide meagre earnings for spinsters and widows and a supplementary income for poor families until the end of our period.

Lead mines and slate quarries opened up new employment opportunities in the 1830s, though their fortunes proved mixed until the relative prosperity of the 1850s. Population stagnated in the 1820s and again in the 1840s, and even with the return of relative prosperity in the 1850s,

the area experienced some net out-migration. The lack of prospects in agriculture and higher earnings available in mining and quarrying contributed to a fall in the number of men on the land, especially farmers' sons and agricultural labourers. This led to some feminization of the agricultural workforce towards the end of the period. Farm service was the main mode of employment other than the farmer's family members but became increasingly dominated by youths and girls in the 15-19 age group. Despite the improved employment opportunities in Nantconwy, young adults were the most likely to move away during the 1850s, the men in search of better prospects in the major slate quarrying districts of Caernarvonshire or Merioneth or to pursue a commercial career in an urban area, most often the local market town of Llanrwst. For women, in addition to the long-established movement over the local area around Nantconwy associated with farm service and marriage, movement to the major quarrying districts where there were a shortage of women and to urban centres afforded better marriage or employment prospects.

Beneath the net out-migration, there remained a considerable degree of local migration, mainly within a radius of ten miles. Compared to the degree of openness in the mid-eighteenth century, more Nantconwy residents aged fifteen and over were likely by 1861 to have been born in the same parish. This was most noticeable in the two larger parishes, Penmachno and Dolwyddelan, where slate quarrying had brought enhanced employment opportunities for men and marriage opportunities for women. Nonetheless there remained a considerable amount of local migration, and there was a clear increase in in-migration from further afield, mainly from other parts of north Wales, and also from England for managers and professionals. With no resident gentry, farmers remained the most stable group in the local population and thus remained the leaders of Nantconwy society throughout the period from 1750 to 1860.

## Chapter 2. The Evolution of Farming in Nantconwy

### *1. Aims and introduction*

In 1750, Nantconwy contained a spectrum of farms, from large upland cattle and sheep farms producing mainly for the market and employing non-family labour, to small farms and cottages with a couple of acres of land run with the main aim of providing the family with a means of subsistence. However large farms generally produced for their own requirements as far as possible - corn, milk, butter, cheese, wool and possibly flax and hemp - while small farms produced for the market at least to the extent required to pay the rent, tithes and taxes. The majority of families occupied a tenant farm and paid land tax, the minimum size of farm paying land tax being about eight acres.<sup>61</sup> Many cottagers beneath the land tax threshold also had access to land by a variety of means and were able to combine subsistence farming with some labouring or craft production. Nantconwy was therefore at a transitional stage displaying elements of both peasant and capitalist agriculture.

This chapter explores how far this traditional organisation of agriculture changed over the period to 1860, by looking at the structure of landownership and nature of farm tenure, the role of landlords in driving or facilitating increased productivity, and the organisation of farming. This sheds new light on agricultural change in the uplands, as much work so far has been dominated by lowland studies. In particular, a continuing expansion into the Nantconwy uplands enabled a significant increase in sheep numbers during the nineteenth century to meet a growing national demand for mutton and a local and national market for wool. At the same time, population growth and a lack of employment before the expansion of lead mining and slate quarrying in the 1830s increased the demand for smallholdings. How this demand

---

<sup>61</sup> See footnote 154.

was met is investigated, including through the sub-division of farms, sub-letting by tenants, the creation of smallholdings by estates, and unauthorised encroachment from the waste. These changes increased the use of marginal land, resulting in erosion of the commons and Crown wastes, and the process by which land was brought into private ownership is explored, together with the extent to which this was contested and the impact on various interest groups including the poor.

Two key themes have dominated English agrarian history of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The first concerns when and how an increase in agricultural output and productivity enabled a rising population to be fed by a decreasing proportion of the population working in agriculture – the search for an Agricultural Revolution. The second relates to the transition from a peasant to a capitalist agriculture involving a tripartite social structure of landowners, tenant farmers and proletarian agricultural labourers, which was thought to be an essential component of agricultural improvement. While the two were once seen as going largely hand in hand, a number of separate processes were involved. There was a shift from farming mainly for subsistence to production largely for the market involving greater regional specialization. Improved agricultural techniques such as crop rotations and selective animal breeding were adopted, with more inputs of seeds, fertilizer, labour and animal power. Changes in ownership concentrated more land into large estates able to supply the capital for infrastructure improvements and to charge market rents. The classic ‘landowners’ agricultural revolution’ of the eighteenth century involved enclosure of the open fields, commons and wasteland and the creation of larger farms. And the nineteenth century witnessed a ‘second agricultural revolution’ based on improved drainage and a more commercialized farming with more inputs purchased off-farm. Recent estimates of total agricultural output suggest a steady growth over the period 1400 to 1860, with the most rapid growth occurring in the period 1750 to 1860,

when output increased by 270 per cent, though the extent and timing of the contributory changes varied significantly in different parts of England and Wales.<sup>62</sup>

In the later eighteenth century, agricultural improvers advocated the changes in the institutional structure of farming associated with the landowners' agricultural revolution in order to facilitate the adoption of improved farming methods and the increase in output and productivity needed to feed a rapidly expanding and increasingly urban or industrial population.<sup>63</sup> The estates system, in which large landowners accumulated an ever increasing proportion of the land and supplied the farming infrastructure while tenant farmers supplied the working capital, was thought to provide an essential spur to agricultural improvement. It also created a market in tenancies, where professional agents employed to run large estates were assumed to lease or rent land to more efficient farmers who could afford to pay higher rents.<sup>64</sup> Small owner-occupiers were increasingly viewed as a barrier to agricultural improvement, lacking either the ambition or the incentive to modernize.<sup>65</sup>

Enclosure of open fields allowed the adoption of crop rotations which improved the nitrogen in the soil, reduced the need for fallow and enabled more animals to be kept, while enclosure of the commons and wastes brought more land into cultivation or improved the quality of pasture and enabled selective breeding. Large farms were viewed as more efficient in their use of labour and capital, employing more division of labour and more economical use of

---

<sup>62</sup> J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880* (London, 1966); R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman: Agricultural Developments of the South Midlands 1450-1850* (Oxford, 1992); M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: the Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge, 1996); Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*.

<sup>63</sup> G.E. Mingay, *Parliamentary enclosure in England. An introduction to its causes, incidence and impact, 1750-1850* (London, 1997).

<sup>64</sup> G.E. Mingay, *English Landed Society: the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1968).

<sup>65</sup> T. Robertson, *Outline of the General Report upon the Size of Farms, and upon the Persons who Cultivate Farms* (Edinburgh, 1796), pp. 35-6.

teams, wagons, carts, ploughs and other implements. The large farmer was thought to show greater enterprise and be more willing to take up new ideas; being freed from manual labour himself, he could devote more time to learning about new techniques and farm management. Small farmers on the other hand had few defenders and were frequently castigated as inefficient, lacking capital, manure and knowledge of improved techniques.<sup>66</sup>

This picture of eighteenth-century landowners playing a benign role in fostering agricultural improvement has been somewhat dented by modern scholarship suggesting that enclosures and large farms enriched landowners without significantly benefiting consumers, workers, or farmers.<sup>67</sup> Landowners may if anything have contributed more to agricultural improvement in the half century after 1815, when the number of professional agents increased to ensure that estates were effectively managed to make the best of the risks and opportunities. Landowners invested more heavily in field drainage and improved farm buildings, while English farmers adopted a more commercialized agriculture by purchasing more inputs such as fertilizers and animal feedstuffs rather than being self-reliant within the farm.<sup>68</sup>

Given the important role played by the estates system in the transition to capitalist agriculture, a key question was how estates had developed, and the concomitant reasons for the decline of small landowners. Marx was one of the first to argue that the great feudal lords forcibly drove the peasantry off the land, thereby creating an incomparably larger proletariat of wage workers.<sup>69</sup> The extent to which small landowners were dispossessed and tenants forced onto

---

<sup>66</sup> J.V. Beckett, 'The debate over farm sizes in eighteenth and nineteenth century England', *Agricultural History* 57 (1983), pp. 308-325.

<sup>67</sup> Allen, *Enclosure*.

<sup>68</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp. 177-8; F.M.L. Thompson, 'The second Agricultural Revolution, 1815-1880', *EcHR* 21(1) (1968), pp. 62-77.

<sup>69</sup> K. Marx, *Capital: a critique of political economy* (London, 1926).

market rents from the sixteenth century onwards was explored more fully in the Brenner debate of the 1970-80s. Brenner sought to emphasize the political aspect of an increasing polarization between landowners, large tenant farmers and a rural proletariat, to counteract a school of thought that proletarianization was mainly the product of population growth.<sup>70</sup> Further research has demonstrated that the rise of market rents was in fact a long and slow process; beneficial leases were common across much of the country in the seventeenth century and were only gradually phased out in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in favour of genuinely commercial leases at market rents.<sup>71</sup> Overall, rents rose by 40-50 per cent between 1750 and 1790, taking advantage of rising food prices, with landowners in financial difficulties particularly likely to increase rents.<sup>72</sup>

More detailed research on the decline of the small landowner or beneficial leaseholder has revealed that this too was a lengthy process. Small owners sold up for a variety of reasons, including marriage, inheritance by an outsider not interested in landownership, the gradual erosion of family holdings by lifetime gifts or partible inheritance, economic difficulties or failure to repay mortgages.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, according to Bateman's analysis of the Return of Owners of Land, a quarter of non-waste land in England and Wales was still held by lesser yeomen and small proprietors owning less than 300 acres in 1873, though most did not farm their land themselves. There were considerable local differences in the overall drift of land into large

---

<sup>70</sup> T H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>71</sup> J. Whittle (ed.), *Landlords and Tenants in Britain: Tawney's Agrarian Problem Revisited* (2013), p. 218.

<sup>72</sup> Mingay, *Landed Society*, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> H.R. French and R.W. Hoyle, 'The land market in a Pennine manor: Slaidburn, 1650-1780', *Continuity and Change* 14 (1999), pp. 349-383; Overton, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 172.

estates, influenced particularly by the presence of large landowners keen to add to their estates.<sup>74</sup>

Although the general trend was towards larger farms, by the end of the eighteenth century, some agricultural writers and landowners became concerned about the social and political impact of a growing rural proletariat without a direct stake in the soil, which was also seen as contributing to the rapidly rising cost of poor relief. This was an especial problem in areas of southern England where there was little alternative employment. A movement promoting the provision of allotments to the poor first emerged after the harvest failures of 1794-6, and took off more strongly in the 1830s following the Swing Riots.<sup>75</sup> (The term 'allotment' usually relates to a small plot of land for food production in a group of similar plots, but the provision of large cottage gardens, potato ground in the farmer's fields, or cow pastures all served a similar end in providing poorer members of society with land on which they could grow food which substantially enhanced their families' standard of living.)

Wales has been covered variably in histories of agrarian change. A number of studies have illustrated the development of estates in north-west Wales following the demise of the medieval Welsh 'tribal system' and the introduction of English land law in the sixteenth century, though only a few local areas have so far been researched.<sup>76</sup> How Crown land passed into private hands in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remains particularly obscure. Several county studies have revealed how ownership of Welsh estates became

---

<sup>74</sup> J.V. Beckett, 'The decline of the small landowner in England and Wales 1660-1900', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *Landowners, Capitalists, and Entrepreneurs* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 89-112.

<sup>75</sup> Barnett, 'Allotments', pp. 162-186; J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (Woodbridge, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> T. Jones Pierce, 'Landlords in Wales' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW* Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 357-381; C. Thomas, 'Patterns and processes of estate expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', *JMHS* VI (1972), pp. 333-342; J.G. Jones, *The Wynn Family of Gwydir: Origins, Growth and Development c. 1490-1674* (Aberystwyth, 1995).

concentrated into fewer hands during the eighteenth century, with an increasing proportion of absentee landowners.<sup>77</sup> By 1873, the concentration of landownership in Caernarvonshire was the highest in Wales, with 67 per cent of farmland owned by 'great landowners'.<sup>78</sup> The story of agricultural improvement and parliamentary enclosure in north Wales was outlined by Dodd, and developed by Howell, who explored allegations made during the anti-landowner campaigns of the late-nineteenth century that poor relationships between tenants and owners had retarded agricultural development. He concluded that the 'Land Question' in Wales was a figment of the political imagination, and that lack of development was mainly attributable to tenants' lack of capital and peasant conservatism in adopting new farming methods.<sup>79</sup> The process of Parliamentary enclosure in Wales, which largely affected the wastes, has been explored both overall and through a number of detailed case studies, though the means by which a probably much larger amount of land was brought into private ownership without Parliamentary authority, the impact of the loss of commons and wastes, and how far smallholdings provided additional means of livelihood in Wales have received less attention.<sup>80</sup>

## **2. Landownership**

The medieval landholding pattern had a profound impact on the development of estates in Nantconwy from the sixteenth century onwards and on the survival and use of common land. The manorial system was not introduced into Gwynedd following the English conquest in 1282 except on some ecclesiastical estates. In the twelfth century, the Welsh commotes, equivalent to an English hundred, were subdivided into free and bond townships: each commote had a

---

<sup>77</sup> M. Humphreys, *The Crisis of Community; Montgomeryshire, 1680-1815* (Cardiff, 1996); P. Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>78</sup> B.L. James, 'The 'great landowners' of Wales', *NLWJ* XIV (1965-66), p. 317.

<sup>79</sup> A.H. Dodd, 'The enclosure movement in north Wales', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (1926-7), pp. 210-221; Dodd, *Industrial Revolution*; Howell, *Land and People*.

<sup>80</sup> J. Chapman, *A Guide to Parliamentary Enclosures in Wales* (Cardiff, 1992); G. Plume, 'The enclosure movement in Caernarvonshire' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1935).

chief township (*maerdref*) held directly by the Welsh Prince, used as an administrative centre and occasional royal residence where a more nucleated settlement of unfree bondsmen might be found. At the English conquest, Trefriw was the *maerdref* for Nantconwy and included royal demesne land in the Conwy valley, part of which was leased to Maenan Abbey. The ffriths (rough upland pastures) of Dolwyddelan and of Bryntyrch and Cwm Clorad in Gwydir township were also part of the royal demesne. The remaining townships were held directly from the Prince by groups of kin under what is sometimes described as the 'tribal system'. Townships contained one or more 'clan lands' in which individual households held a small area around the farmhouse, sometimes with strips in common arable fields, and a share in the joint or share-land (*cytir*) pasture, wood and waste. *Gwely* clan lands were generally associated with free townships, usually in lower-lying districts, and the unappropriated waste tended to be undivided. *Gafael* clan lands were more common in large upland bond townships where more kinship groups might have rights in the share-lands. The appropriated farmlands descended amongst male heirs by gavelkind or partible inheritance, but fragmentation of holdings was to some extent eased by enclosing new holdings out of the share-lands.<sup>81</sup> Most of Trefriw township was held in four and a half bond *gafaelion*; the townships of Dolwyddelan and Gwydir each contained two bond *gafaelion*, Bettws y coed, Gwydir and Cwmlannerch contained free *gwelyau*, while Penmachno contained royal demesne, half a bond *gafael* and some areas of freehold land mainly held by Bettws freeholders. Eidda was a bond township forming part of the monastic lands of the Knights of St. John at Ysbytty Ifan.<sup>82</sup>

During the sixteenth century, three major changes enabled small Welsh gentry families to rapidly build up estates: the freeing of the bondsmen by Henry VII in 1507, which allowed

---

<sup>81</sup> Jones Pierce, 'Landlords in Wales', pp. 361-6.

<sup>82</sup> Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, *The Record of Caernarvon, 1352* (London, 1837), pp. 9-12.

tenants to occupy former bond land without fear of acquiring serf status; the 1536 and 1542 Acts of Union which introduced the English legal system, including the ability to buy and sell land; and the dissolution of the monasteries. The medieval township structure remained the basis of landholding until the seventeenth century, with a hundred court held at Conwy for Nantconwy and the neighbouring hundred of Arllechwedd Isaf.<sup>83</sup>

The Wynns of Gwydir were one of the first local gentry families to build up large estates in Caernarvonshire, which they achieved by leasing the Crown ffriths and township of Dolwyddelan, the bond *gafaelion* of Gwydir, the Trefriw demesne land and several of the township's bond *gafaelion*, and by buying up the freehold land in Cwmlannerch, Gwydir and parts of Bettws township. From the outset, the new landowners were able to let freehold land and vacant former bond holdings on annual tenancies at market rents, though they also granted longer leases to minor gentry tenants. Where the descendants of the bondsmen freed in 1507 still occupied their hereditary holdings, Crown leases usually obliged the farmer of the township to allow them to retain their tenancies at customary rents and fines. Many of the new Welsh landlords failed to honour this obligation and sought to convert customary tenancies to tenancies at will with rack rents. When Sir John Wynn of Gwydir attempted around 1590 to raise rents on customary tenancies, 17 'ancient native tenants' of Dolwyddelan brought a case in the Exchequer Court, claiming that they were in fact freeholders as a result of Henry VII's charter freeing the bondsmen. Although the court did not agree that their land had become freehold, it did grant them a very favourable form of hereditary tenant right at customary rents and low entry fines.<sup>84</sup> This made the Dolwyddelan customary tenancies very marketable,

---

<sup>83</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2503, (Parliamentary survey of Nantconwy, 1649).

<sup>84</sup> J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and his tenants', *WHR* 11 (1982), p. 3; TNA E178/3383, (Exchequer Court Proceedings, Award as to the native tenants of Dolwyddelan' 1589).

though in 1614, Sir John Wynn seized the opportunity of Crown land sales to buy the ffriths and township of Dolwyddelan and most of Trefriw.<sup>85</sup>

Thereafter his descendants continued a policy of buying out freeholders and tenant right leaseholders to gain tighter control of Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan, Gwydir, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn. But with the marriage of the sole Gwydir heiress, Mary Wynn, to Robert Bertie, Baron Willoughby de Eresby, (later Duke of Ancaster) in 1678, the Gwydir estate became a minor outpost of the vast Ancaster estates based at Grimthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire.<sup>86</sup> After Mary's early death in 1689, Gwydir Castle and its demesne were tenanted for three generations by a local gentry family, the Hughes of Gwydir, who owned lands in a number of lower Conwy valley parishes and in Chester. From 1730-49, Robert Hughes acted as local agent of the Gwydir Estate, but he died without issue in 1749; his younger brother Owen, who had acquired one of the few remaining freeholdings in Trefriw through his marriage to Jane Evans of Gomannog, also died childless, and by 1750, Mrs. Hughes of Gomannog was one of only two remaining members of the gentry in Nantconwy.<sup>87</sup>

Estate building in Penmachno was more complex. In the early sixteenth century, two descendants of the *gwely* leaders named in the 1352 Record of Carnarvon pieced together small estates in the lower Machno valley, part of the free township of Bettws. The Bettws freeholders also owned a small amount of land in the mixed township of Penmachno, and several of these holdings became the nucleus for small estates, considerably expanded by land enclosed from the Crown wastes.<sup>88</sup> In the early seventeenth century, Evan Lloyd of Dulassau, the Penmachno-born London lawyer to Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, emerged as the

---

<sup>85</sup> *Calendar of Wynn Papers*, (Aberystwyth, 1926) p. 104.

<sup>86</sup> *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (Oxford, 1959) p. 1,098.

<sup>87</sup> NLW FPB 2/4, (Wills of Robert Hughes and family, 1738-82).

<sup>88</sup> NLW Elwes 1229, (Lands in Penmagnho in the hands of Edward Wyn and Richard Lloyd, 1630s).

largest landowner in the parish, but after the death of his grandson in 1683, the estate was partitioned between three daughters who had no connection with Penmachno. By 1750, the former Dulassau lands had passed by sale and inheritance to Lord Grosvenor of Cheshire and the Wynns of Peniarth, a major Merioneth landowning family. This left the Lloyds of Hafodwryd as the only other family in Nantconwy described as 'gentleman'.<sup>89</sup> They owned a few small farms near the centre of Penmachno and lands in two Denbighshire parishes, but apart from administering several charities for the poor, the family does not appear to have played a prominent role in local affairs before 1860.

A junior branch of the Wynns of Gwydir, the Wynns of Berthddu in Llanrwst, also succeeded in building up a small estate in Gwydir township, but by a series of judicious marriages their heirs came into ownership of considerably more important estates including Corsygedol in Merioneth. In 1752, the estate's heiress, Margaret Wynn, married Sir Roger Mostyn, the 5<sup>th</sup> baronet, thus adding considerable property to the rising Mostyn estate based in Flintshire.<sup>90</sup> Resident gentry had also disappeared from the Eidda by the mid-eighteenth century after the Pantglas estate, part of the former monastic lands of Ysbytty Ifan, passed to Anne Williams, a maid of honour to Queen Caroline who was reputed to be the wealthiest heiress in north Wales; after two unhappy marriages, her second husband sold the estate in 1769 to Edward Lloyd Esq. of Pengwern, Flintshire.<sup>91</sup>

By 1750, the Gwydir/Ancaster estate was the premier landowner in Nantconwy, with 51 per cent of the land. Five other large estates had minor holdings comprising 13 per cent of the land: all but one were based outside Caernarvonshire. Eight medium-sized estates owned a

---

<sup>89</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2489, (Deed of partition Richard Lloyd properties in Penmachno, 1686).

<sup>90</sup> J.E. Griffith, *Pedigrees of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire Families* (Horncastle, 1914), p. 184.

<sup>91</sup> R.T. Jenkins, 'Some pages in the history of Pant Glas, Ysbytty Ifan', *TCHS* 10 (1949), pp. 27-29.

further 26 per cent, the majority again based in other north Wales counties. Rationalisation continued an inexorable process of consolidating landownership into large estates, whose share grew to 88 per cent by 1860 (Table 12).<sup>92</sup> This occurred mainly at the expense of medium-sized estates, which shrank to five per cent of land ownership. Dynastic marriages sometimes brought about the merger of estates, contributing especially to the spectacular growth of the Mostyns, however the former Berthddu lands in Gwydir township were clearly of little interest to the Mostyns, and in 1811 there was some rationalization of spheres of influence when Sir Roger Mostyn exchanged six Berthddu farms inter-mixed with Gwydir estate lands for Gwydir properties in Llanrwst. Lord Mostyn subsequently sold the remainder of his lands in Gwydir township to the Gwydir estate in 1844.<sup>93</sup>

The disappearance of several estates was brought about by their owners' financial difficulties: Nantconwy lands frequently appear to have been regarded as peripheral to estates based elsewhere and were accordingly the most likely to be sold. The first major landowner to sell was Lord Grosvenor of Cheshire, whose penchant for the turf led him to spend £7,000 a year on racing, and by 1779 he had run up debts of £151,500. His affairs were committed to trustees who sold the nine Grosvenor farms in Penmachno to Edward Lloyd of Pengwern, adding to his growing estate in Nantconwy.<sup>94</sup> Several of the former Grosvenor farms in the tributary valley of Glasgwm were considerably intermixed with Gwydir estate lands, which Edward Lloyd was able to buy after the third Duke of Ancaster also left his estate heavily

---

<sup>92</sup> 1750 ownership based on share of Land tax in 1792, adjusted for sales since 1750: GA XQL/LT 2/1-7 (1792); for sales see text. 1860 ownership based on 1841-2 tithe commutation surveys adjusted for later sales: TNA IR18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67. There was no tithe survey for Eidda, so its 1860 value was estimated pro-rata to its 1792 share of Nantconwy Land tax. Large estates were those defined in the *Return of Owners of Land* (1873) as having over 3,000 acres and an income over £3,000pa: James, 'Great Landowners'.

<sup>93</sup> NLW Gwydir 70, (Plan of Sir Thomas Mostyn's farms in Gwydir and Bettws y coed, 1811); NLW Gwydir BRA 79, (Sale of Berthddu estate, 1844).

<sup>94</sup> Mingay, *Landed Society*, p. 151: BUA Bangor Mostyn 6058, (Particular of Lord Grosvenor's estates, c.1787).

encumbered, also due partly to his involvement in horseracing; on the death of the fourth Duke in 1779 a year after his father, trustees were appointed under act of Parliament to sell settled lands to clear the estate.<sup>95</sup> This purchase made Lloyd the major landowner in Penmachno and put him in possession of the whole of Glasgwm and most of its extensive mountain sheepwalks. Shortly afterwards, he built Glasgwm Hall as a shooting lodge to take advantage of the excellent grouse shooting on the surrounding moorland. Edward Lloyd's heir, Sir Edward Pryce-Lloyd, was created Baron Mostyn in 1831 when his son inherited the Mostyn estate (including lands in Gwydir township), through Sir Edward's wife. The merger of the Lloyds of Pengwern and Mostyn estates made the Mostyns one of the major landowners in north Wales, including ownership of 23 per cent of Nantconwy, though their visits to Penmachno were largely confined to a week in August each year for the grouse shooting.<sup>96</sup>

The second largest landowners in Penmachno were the Wynnes of Peniarth who owned fourteen farms around 1750. In this case, after the injudicious marriage of the Peniarth heiress with William Wynne of Wern, Caernarvonshire, it emerged that Wynne's father had overstretched himself with purchases to expand his estate, and it was the Penmachno lands that were sacrificed in 1821 to restore financial health to the core of the Peniarth estate. Even the greatest landowners could suffer financial difficulties: Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, owner of the sprawling Wynnstay estate, the largest in Wales, was by the 1780s a virtual fugitive moving continually between London, the houses of friends, spas and the seaside, not daring to show his face in Denbighshire for fear of his creditors. Around 1800 he attempted to

---

<sup>95</sup> NLW 9726B, (Accounts of trustees for the sale of the estates settled by the will of Robert, Duke of Ancaster, 1780-89).

<sup>96</sup> Griffith, *Pedigrees*, p. 183.

dispose of his three farms in Nantconwy, which were eventually sold to the Gwydir and Mostyn estates.<sup>97</sup>

Robert Watkin Wynne Esq. was yet another landowner forced to sell his Penmachno properties to pay off mortgages and debts.<sup>98</sup> In 1829 his two Penmachno farms at Gethin and Ysgwyfrith were bought by the Rev. Price Downes, owner of the small local Fedw Deg estate. Unusually, Price Downes chose to farm five of his farms personally rather than letting to tenants, perhaps in an attempt to reduce his indebtedness, but in 1849 he started to dispose of his property. This afforded the first opportunity for local tenant farmers to buy land. A successful Dolwyddelan drover, Richard Evans, bought two farms including Fedw Deg, assisted by a mortgage from the Titley sisters of Llanrwst.<sup>99</sup> Ysgwyfrith was bought by two substantial Penmachno farmers in 1853, the mortgage this time being provided by Elizabeth Hughes, a former landlady of the Capel Curig Inn and sister-in-law of the Titleys.<sup>100</sup> Wider land ownership had to await the sell-off of the great estates, which commenced with sales of Gwydir land in Dolwyddelan, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn in the 1890s.

But the biggest financial collapse to affect the area was the bankruptcy in 1853 of Lord Mostyn, probably as a result of unwise railway speculation.<sup>101</sup> The Mostyn estate in Penmachno and Eidda was bought wholesale by Col. Douglas-Pennant, adding to his already extensive lands in Caernarvonshire: in the 1873 Return of Owners of Land, the Penrhyn estate ranked sixteenth by acreage in England and Wales.<sup>102</sup> Pennant was probably motivated primarily by

---

<sup>97</sup> Mingay *Landed Society*, p. 155; NLW Sale Catalogue Caern. 199, (Sir Watkin Williams Wynne Bart. properties to be sold, 1800); DA DD/WY 47 (1827).

<sup>98</sup> Act of Parliament 10 Geo. IV. Session 1829.

<sup>99</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2252, (Sale and mortgage of Fedw Deg and Hafod y Chwaen, 1849).

<sup>100</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2257, (Mortgage to Humphrey Williams, 1857).

<sup>101</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 7537, (Bankruptcy declaration in Liverpool Commercial Court, 1853).

<sup>102</sup> James, 'Great Landowners'.

the sporting rights including the trout fishing in Llyn Conwy, salmon fishing in the upper River Conwy and grouse shooting on the moorlands surrounding Cwm Penmachno, Glasgwm and Cwm Eidda, though as MP for Caernarvonshire, he may also have hoped to advance his political interests. He went on to buy out the Peniarth lands and several other small Penmachno landowners in the 1860s to strengthen his hold on Cwm Penmachno.<sup>103</sup>

Most of the small freeholders had already disappeared from Nantconwy by 1750, when ten remaining owner-occupiers held just 3.8 per cent of the land, and nine small absentee owners possessed 2.9 per cent. These included five descendants of the 17 'ancient native tenants' of Dolwyddelan, who succeeded in persuading the Gwydir estate that their land was freehold, now that the 1590s Exchequer Court case which granted them tenant right was lost in the mists of time.<sup>104</sup> The number of freeholders continued to decline till by 1860 only seven of the 19 farms owned by small landowners in 1750 remained independent. In a couple of cases, freeholders had moved up into the small local landowner category as a result of marriage to an heiress. More often, freeholders sold out to the dominant Gwydir or Mostyn estates, either because the inheritors had no other connection with Nantconwy, or due to financial difficulties. The decline of the small landowner in Nantconwy was partially offset by smallholdings enclosed from the Penmachno Crown waste: in 1841, 12 of these new smallholdings over one acre were owner-occupied and a further 17 were tenanted, although their owners often lived locally.

Two cases are illustrative of the decline of the hereditary small landowner. Tai Isa yn Blaen Glasgwm was one of the former Dolwyddelan bond holdings granted tenant right in 1590. In 1737, a descendant of the 1590 'ancient native tenant', Humphrey Evans, took on a £37

---

<sup>103</sup> BUA Penrhyn 274, (Freehold estates purchased by Lord Penrhyn, 1886).

<sup>104</sup> NLW Gwydir 2, (Survey of the Welsh estates, 1766).

mortgage to enable him to stock the large Penmachno farm of Blaen y Cwm, which he tenanted while letting out Tai Isa. The farm was further mortgaged by his nephew Evan Morris in 1788, with the intention of buying out his wife's right of dower so that his son could inherit the whole farm. This was not achieved, and with land values rising during the Napoleonic Wars, Morris's widow and son continued to mortgage Tai Isa for increasing amounts while they tenanted a farm in Denbighshire; they were eventually forced to sell to Sir Edward Pryce Lloyd in 1805.<sup>105</sup>

The owners of Llanerchelsi in Bettws y coed were another freeholder family to get progressively into debt. John Pierce settled the 150 acre farm on his son Rees Jones on the occasion of the latter's marriage to the daughter of a freeholder from Caerhun in the lower Conwy valley, who brought a portion of £50. By 1818, Rees had mortgaged his own and his wife's lands to raise £850. On his death in 1825, he instructed his son Owen Jones to sell Llanerchelsi to pay off the debt and to share any remaining amount with his mother and four siblings. Evidently Owen tried to soldier on, moving to a cottage and renting out Llanerchelsi, but he was eventually forced by his mortgage lender to sell the farm to the Gwydir estate. In this case, the need to provide portions for a numerous family on the scale expected of freeholders may have led the family into an unmanageable level of debt.<sup>106</sup>

The concentration of ownership which led to 84 per cent of Nantconwy being in the hands of the Gwydir and Penrhyn estates by 1860 was very much in line with the aggrandisement of the great estates at the expense of lesser landlords and owner-occupiers which occurred throughout England and Wales during this period.<sup>107</sup> After the initial bout of estate formation

---

<sup>105</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 1299 (1801), Penrhyn Add. 2266 (1805).

<sup>106</sup> GA XD/131/26 (1782), 32 (1849); NLW B/1825/68 W,I (1825).

<sup>107</sup> Mingay, *Landed Society*, pp. 15, 48.

in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the remaining independent freeholders were not able to compete for any land that came on the market, indeed in many cases they had moved away from Nantconwy and had no interest in expanding their holdings. Most land sales came from medium-sized estates with outlying lands in Nantconwy which were generally regarded as the most disposable part of the estate; Penmachno in particular was unusually prone to sales to clear debts. The dominant estates on the other hand had ready access to mortgage finance and were motivated to purchase any land within their spheres of influence in order to establish clear boundaries, rationalise intermixed holdings, and to gain control of the township wastes and their attached mineral and sporting rights – explored further below.

Becoming part of a dominant local estate may have brought certain advantages to tenant farmers. Where Nantconwy farms formed a small proportion of a remote estate, landowners had little incentive or ability to improve their tenants' farms and productivity. Their main focus was on keeping rents at market level with a view to current income, mortgage value, or to maximize land values in the event of a sale. The role played by estates in Nantconwy farming will be investigated in the next section.

Table 12, Changing land ownership 1750-1860\*

Type of landowner	Owner	1750	1860	Reason for change
		% Land tax	% Tithe	
Large estates	Ancaster/Gwydir (Lincs.)	51.0	60.1	Bought and sold various
	Peniarth (Merioneth)	6.9	3.0	Part sold to Mostyn to clear debts
	Grosvenor (Cheshire)	4.1		Sold to Mostyn to clear debts
	Wynnstay (Denbs.)	1.7		Sold to Gwydir & Mostyn to clear debts
	Mostyn (Flints.)	0.2		Bought various estates, then sold to Penrhyn on bankruptcy
	Penrhyn	0.2	24.0	Bought Mostyn estate
	Church		0.6	
<b>Total large estates</b>		<b>64.1%</b>	<b>87.7%</b>	
Medium estates	Pantglas	13.7		Sold to Mostyn
	Corsygedol (Merioneth)	0.9		Passed to Mostyn by marriage, sold to Gwydir
	Wynn of Wrexham (Denbs) & Ffestiniog (Merioneth)	3.5	2.4	Became part of large Nerquis Hall estate (Flints.) by inheritance
	Wynn of Soughton (Flints.)	3.6	2.5	Unchanged
	Wynn of Garthmeilio	1.2		Sold Penmachno farms to Price Downes to clear debts
	Wynn of Wern	0.9		Sold Nantconwy lands to Church to clear debts
	Lloyd of Pengwern (Flints)	1.2		Merged with Mostyn by marriage
	Kyffin (Denbs.)	0.6	0.3	Unchanged
<b>Total medium estates</b>		<b>25.6%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	
Small estates	Hafodwryd	1.8	1.8	Unchanged
	Price of Fedw Deg	1.7	1.2	Bought Wynn Garthmeilio, sold 3 farms to clear debts
	Other		0.5	Small owners became part of small estates
<b>Total small estates</b>		<b>3.5%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	
<b>Small non-resident owners over 1 acre</b>		<b>2.9%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	Original small owners sold or inherited by small estates, but new holdings enclosed from waste & early tenant purchases
<b>Owner-occupiers over 1 acre</b>		<b>3.8%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	

\*See Footnote 92 for sources.

### **3. Agricultural change**

#### **Farming in Nantconwy c.1750**

Welsh agriculture has often been portrayed as peasant farming on mainly small farms which were a legacy of the medieval gavelkind inheritance system that had prevailed up to 1536, and of the tradition of leaseholders partitioning their land amongst sons, which continued in parts of north Wales until the end of the eighteenth century. The viability of small farms was improved by the ability to graze livestock on commons and wastes, which remained widespread in upland areas.<sup>108</sup> However yeomen in the Caernarvonshire uplands farmed largely for the market, though continuing to grow crops for home consumption needs, and some were relatively wealthy.<sup>109</sup> In Nantconwy at least, most farms were let on annual tenancies, which afforded landowners some control over further sub-division. In fact, the organisation of holdings in Nantconwy showed wide variations in farm size and organisation, based on both geographic and historic factors.

In Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn, the mid-eighteenth century organisation of holdings recognisably reflected the medieval pattern of landholdings, even though most of the land was now owned by the Gwydir estate. Thirteen farms situated above the Afon Conwy flood-line in Trefriw village and along the road to Bettws y coed also had designated holdings in the valley bottom (Map 4). Interspersed with these in 1784 were meadows belonging to other landowners (shown in red): Lady Kyffin of Maenan Abbey, the gentry farm of Gomannog and glebe land, as well as parcels of the Gwydir demesne, and some 65 acres of the Dôl Trefriw

---

<sup>108</sup> D.W. Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 33-4.

<sup>109</sup> G.H. Williams, 'A study of Caernarfonshire probate records, 1630-1690' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1972); J.G. Parry, 'Stability and change in mid-eighteenth-century Caernarfonshire' (UCNW MA thesis, 1978); N.M.W. Powell, 'Near the margin of existence'? Upland prosperity in Wales during the early modern period', *Studia Celtica* XLI (2007), pp. 137-62.

(Trefriw meadow) and Gweirglodd y Brenin (King's hay meadow). The Gwydir estate meadows were let in parcels, generally of one to six acres. The largest parcel of 32 acres was itself let jointly to 11 small farmers and cottagers. Two of the small farms also claimed entitlement to three days' math or mowing in Dôl Trefriw. Another area of wet meadow further north along the banks of the Conwy, which had probably formed the meadow share-lands of Gafael Coed Gwydir in the sixteenth century, was similarly designated to four upland farms, with a further four upland farms renting 300 acres of meadow; in some cases this meadow holding was larger than the enclosed land around the farmhouse.

Many farms also enjoyed access to hill pasture by various means. The landholdings of Gomannog, a relic of the Trefriw *gafael* land not acquired by Sir John Wynn of Gwydir in 1614, give a clear indication of the medieval *gafael* land organisation. The main holding was a 154 acre farm in the Crafnant valley; in addition, Gomannog held an area of rough pasture further up the valley, a 27 acre allotment in Trefriw meadows, and 280 acres of sheepwalk four miles away on the western slopes of Creigiau Gleision mountain. The rough pasture share-lands of the former Gafael Coed Gwydir occupied one side of the Cefn Cyfarwydd ridge, other areas of the ridge being shared by farms to the south in the Crafnant valley and along the Afon Ddu to the north. Gwydir estate farms at the head of the Crafnant valley also had sheepwalks on Creigiau Gleision. In cases where valley farmers no longer had access to commons, they might partner with upland farmers to rent sheepwalk. For example in 1784 Roger Thomas of Pant y Carw farm near Trefriw village, which included several allotments in Trefriw Meadow, shared the 176 acre sheepwalk of Cwnllwyd Isaf with Morris David of Cwnllwyd Uchaf.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*; TNA IR 18/48/67, (Trefriw & Llanrhychwyn tithe schedule, 1841).

Map 4, Trefriw farms and meadows, 1784



Source: Ancaster Estate private papers, (Plan of an estate lying in the parishes of Llanrwst, Llanrhychwyn, Trefriw, Bettws and Dolwyddelan, 1784) © William Hall Hawarden Agent.<sup>111</sup>

In Bettws y coed on the other hand, the former communal meadow Dôl Bettws between the Conwy and Llugwy Rivers had been enclosed in the early eighteenth century and added to Ty Issa farm.<sup>112</sup> In the former township of Cwmlannerch, the rich vale farms' hinterland at Pen

<sup>111</sup> [Hereafter, 'Gwydir terrier']. Permission to reproduce this terrier has been granted by the Ancaster Estate.

<sup>112</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 5782, (Gwydir rent roll, 1724).

yr allt (hilltop) was probably the township's medieval share-lands; by 1750 several new tenements had been enclosed, though about 240 acres remained unenclosed on the moors of Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn which extended into Gwydir township and Llanrhychwyn.<sup>113</sup>

The organisation of land into small farms on the valley sides, supplemented by valley-bottom hay meadow and hill pastures reflected the collective agricultural organisation of the medieval tribal system. But in contrast to clan organisation of land use, the Gwydir Estate now provided a market to distribute unconsolidated areas of meadow or rough pasture to farmers able to stock the land. This land use system clearly remained relevant by providing small and medium-sized hill farms of up to 75 acres with a share of valley meadow for winter fodder, and afforded valley farms access to mountain sheepwalk; it also gave Trefriw and some Bettws cottagers the possibility of renting small parcels of land on a flexible basis. Because farm tenancies passed on a virtually hereditary basis, this combination of historic core holdings with a market in meadow and sheepwalk gave farmers flexibility to expand their operations, or to downsize in old age or when a widow or new generation was less able to stock additional land. At the same time the market in supplementary holdings enabled the estate to maximise profits on its more valuable meadow parcels.

In the more sparsely-populated upland areas of Dolwyddelan and Gwydir township, farms were much larger. The eleven former royal *hafodai* (rough summer pastures) extending from the valley floor to mountain ridges in the ffriths of Dolwyddelan became permanent farms in the sixteenth century. At this time a number of Nantconwy farms were leased by minor gentry or cadet branches of landowner families and run as large cattle ranches. But as gentry families died out, so too did cadet branches with sufficient capital to stock large farms. By

---

<sup>113</sup> 'Gwydir terrier'.

1750, most upland farms had been sub-divided into two to four holdings, often sharing a mountain sheepwalk.

To assess the type of farming practised in mid eighteenth-century Nantconwy and the capital involved, data was collected from the 70 inventories of Nantconwy male and female farmers whose personal estates went to probate during the quarter century 1750-74. This represented all inventories where farming was the deceased's main or an important means of livelihood, including a miller and a fuller, but excluding a weaver and a labourer who kept cows but did not rent a farm. The inventories covered all parishes with the exception of Eidda. The probate evidence is then used in conjunction with estate surveys of the 1760s to 1780s to describe the pattern of mid-eighteenth-century farming activity (Table 13).

*Table 13, Wealth of farmers with inventories, 1750-74*

Parish	No. Inventories	Median value of inventories	Median milk cows per farm	Median other cattle	Cattle as % of wealth	Median sheep per farm
Bettws y coed	9	£33.41	3	5	47.3	33
Dolwyddelan	14	£110.68	9	17	50.4	65
Gwydir	10	£114.63	8	19	50.2	70
Llanrhychwyn	15	£92.40	4	6	35.8	55
Penmachno	16	£82.03	6	8	37.1	77
Trefriw	6	£32.97	3	7	36.7	20
<b>All</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>£84.62</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>44.5%</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: NLW Bangor Diocese online probate records.

The limitations of probate inventories as a source have been well summarised by Overton *et al*: they do not often include debts owed by the deceased, may exclude a wife's personal property or goods bequeathed by will, and tend to give less detail by the mid-eighteenth century as the volume of possessions increased. Wealth at death may not be representative of an individual's wealth in the prime of life: the elderly may have retired or downsized from their previous occupation, and may have paid portions to adult children or other forms of *inter-*

*vivos* transfers. Most importantly, inventories were more likely to be produced for gentlemen and farmers and are therefore not representative of wealth distribution throughout the community: the ratio of extant inventories to deaths found in previous studies has ranged from 8 per cent in the Vale of Evesham to 40 per cent in Cumbria.<sup>114</sup>

The Nantconwy probate sample was compared to parish burial registers to identify how representative it was of farm occupiers and the total population. During the period 1750-74, inventories were produced for 29 per cent of adult male deaths, representing three quarters of farm occupiers. There was no material difference in the size of farms occupied by farmers with and without inventories.

The median inventory wealth of Nantconwy farmers at the beginning of our period was £85, but there were significant differences between parishes. The large farms of Dolwyddelan and Gwydir township were characterised by wealthier farmers, while the small farms of Bettws and Trefriw were relatively impoverished. Cattle farming dominated throughout the area, cattle accounting for 44 per cent of the typical farmer's wealth and other stock a further 16 per cent. All farms kept dairy cows and nearly all also reared store cattle. Although 85 per cent of farms kept some sheep, flocks were fairly modest with a median size of 50. The larger flocks were found in those parts of Dolwyddelan, Gwydir, Penmachno and Trefriw with extensive mountain sheepwalks, but only 15 per cent of farms kept a hundred or more sheep. About a third of farmers also kept goats, usually in mountain areas. These were milked as

---

<sup>114</sup> M. Overton, J. Whittle, D. Dean and A. Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London, 2004), pp. 14-18; M. Spufford, 'The limitations of the probate inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 137-174; M. Overton, 'Probate inventories and the reconstruction of agricultural landscapes', in M. Reed (ed.), *Discovering Past Landscapes* (London, 1984), pp. 167-194.

well as ewes to make cheese for home consumption, and dried goat was eaten during winter.<sup>115</sup> Few farmers kept pigs – these were more the preserve of cottagers.

Only four per cent of mid-eighteenth century Nantconwy inventories specifically mentioned crops either harvested or in the field, though hay and some corn were grown on most farms.<sup>116</sup> Oats remained the predominant crop, but barley was sown in Penmachno for the first time in 1761 - enough of a novelty that it was some years before the local mill, designed for processing oats, was re-equipped with harder millstones capable of grinding barley. Most farms also used the corner of a field to grow enough flax and hemp for home consumption.<sup>117</sup> Potatoes had apparently just reached Nantconwy and were mentioned in only two inventories.

Oxen were still used for ploughing on 17 farms; usually this was a pair, but a minority of farms possessed a full team of six oxen. All but the smallest farms also owned at least one horse: horses were starting to replace oxen for field work, though some small arable areas were cultivated by hand. Only a third of inventories detailed implements of husbandry, typically on smaller farms, around half of which included a plough. This was not unusual for small Welsh hill farms; a tourist travelling through Merioneth described how: 'the small patches of land amongst the mountains capable of cultivation are not brought into tillage by the *plough*, or manured by the help of *carts*: the spade being used for the one purpose and small hand-barrows for the other'.<sup>118</sup> In a countryside with few roads, drags were typically used for

---

<sup>115</sup> T. Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, Vol. II, (London, 1810), p. 334.

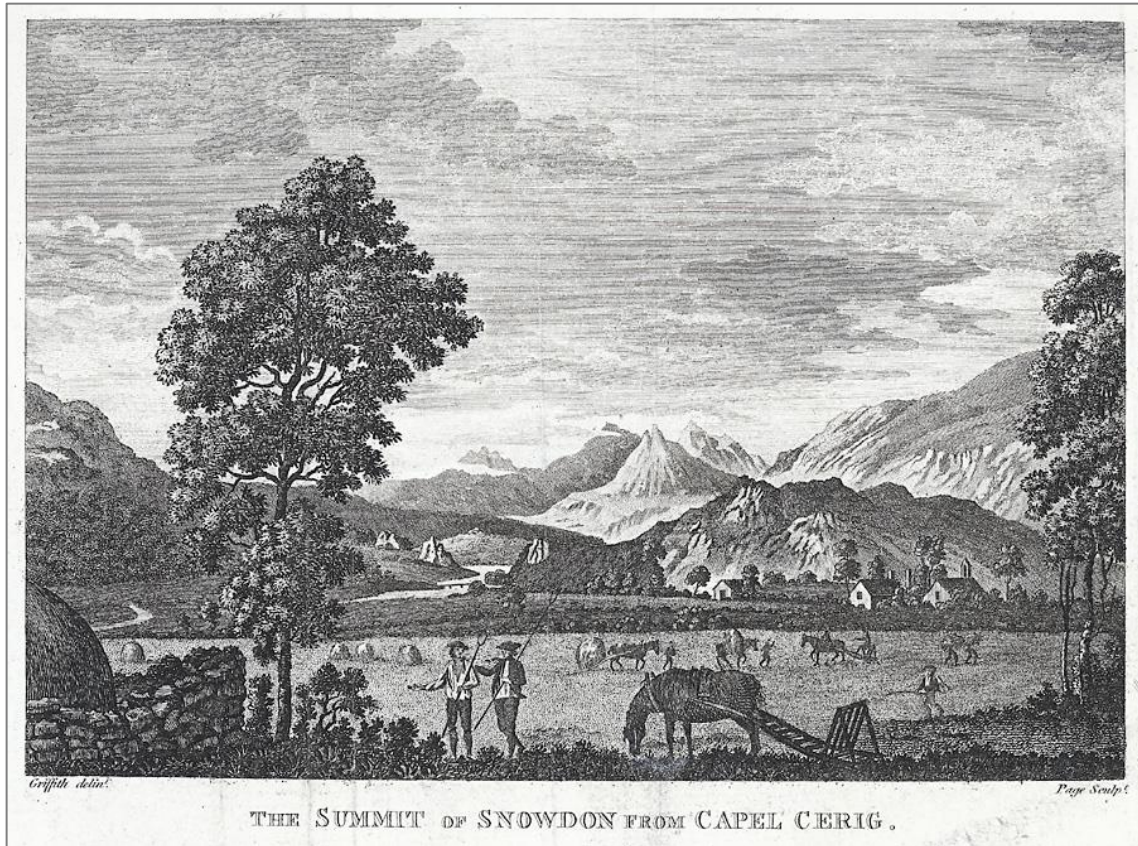
<sup>116</sup> The exclusion of crops may have arisen because most farms were taken over as a going concern by another family member. In this case, debts owed for rent or taxes were also excluded.

<sup>117</sup> O.G. Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin [Works of Gethin]* (Llanrwst, 1884), p. 24 of English translation.

<sup>118</sup> Rev. R. Warner, *A Second Walk through Wales* (Bath, 1800), p. 186.

bringing in the hay or crops, or it was simply carried on the backs of horses, men and women, while panniers were used to take bulky produce to market (Figure 11).<sup>119</sup>

*Figure 11, Co-operative hay harvest at Capel Cerig.*



Source: NLW Caernarvonshire Top. B3/22 B427, (Moses Griffith print, 'The Summit of Snowdon from Capel Cerig' c.1795). Permission to reproduce this print granted by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / National Library of Wales.

The proportion of land devoted to crops in the mid-eighteenth century was probably similar to the five per cent recorded in the tithe files of around 1840. On many farms, cultivation of crops was undertaken in quilllets or patches – strips within a meadow (Map 5). Once ploughed and manured before the first crop, crops were grown for as long as possible till the soil was exhausted, usually four years, after which the area was left to return to pasture for several years by natural regeneration without the use of grass seed. The

<sup>119</sup> Pennant, *Tours*, Vol. II, p. 320; Pennant, *Tours*, Vol. II, p. 320.

resulting mat of vegetation had to be cleared by paring and burning before the land could be returned to cultivation, using a breast plough to pare away the surface grass and weeds which were burned and the ashes scattered to fertilize the soil. In some places sheep were brought down from the mountains after harvest to graze the stubble but were not hurdled to manure the land systematically. Fields were mainly enclosed with earthen banks which were insufficient to keep cattle out of arable fields; the use of closes surrounded by stone walls was just beginning.<sup>120</sup>

*Map 5, Patches and closes on Pencraig farm, Gwydir, 1787*



Source: GA XD/38/214, (Map of Pencraig, 1787), © GA. Permission to reproduce this map has been granted by Gwynedd Archives.

<sup>120</sup> G. Kay, *General View of the Agriculture of North Wales* (Edinburgh, 1794), pp. 12-15; Davies, *General View*, pp. 125, 152, 290-3; LA 3 ANC 7/23/2/39-40, (Fahy to Kennedy, 1819).

The emphasis on cattle farming and the need to produce sufficient hay to feed stock over winter meant that manure was at a premium for improving the *gweirgloddau* (improved hay meadows). Store cattle were often sent to the *hafodai* (rough summer pastures) during summer, and returned to the valley bottom meadows and *gweirgloddau* after Michaelmas. Milk cows and calves were kept in cow-houses and field barns over winter; except in Eidda, these were not generally part of a farmyard, but were situated in the *gweirgloddau*. This made it easier to manure the hillside hay meadows where the roughness of the ground and steep slopes usually precluded the use of wagons.<sup>121</sup> Butter and cheese were made on the farm and in the summer pastures, as witnessed by frequent references amongst household goods to milking pails, pitchers, butter churns, sieves, cheese moulds and presses. The practice of farm families moving with the cattle and living in *hafodtai* (summer pasture houses) seems to have declined after the seventeenth century; some of the former *hafodtai* were spun off as separate upland farms, and in other cases, farm workers visited the summer pastures daily but returned to the farmhouse at night.<sup>122</sup> Butter from the hill farms of north Wales was sold in local markets such as Llanrwst, Denbigh and Holywell, and was also sent to Chester and by sea to Liverpool.<sup>123</sup>

A comparison of Nantconwy farm occupiers' inventory values with the wealth of yeomen throughout Caernarvonshire and in highland Cumbria, the English region with a farming system closest to Nantconwy, suggests that they were modestly well off (Table 14). Nantconwy farmers were certainly wealthier than those in Caernarvonshire as a whole, though much of their assets were tied up in store cattle which took three or four years to

---

<sup>121</sup> F.A. Richardson, 'Evolution of a hill farming community and its impact on the Snowdonia landscape: Capel Curig c.1750-1850' (University of Oxford MSc dissertation, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>122</sup> G.H. Williams, 'Estate Management in Dyffryn Conwy c 1685: the Caerhun, Baron Hill and Gwydir Estates', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1979), pp. 45-6.

<sup>123</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 315.

mature, a low margin, slow turnover business. Cumbrian highland farmers were somewhat better off, mainly as a result of their higher level of assets in money and credits. In Nantconwy, cash or money owing were mentioned in less than a third of inventories and averaged only £14; cash was in notoriously short supply, and much of the economy ran on a barter system. Cumbrian yeomen by contrast had a striking propensity to save, with cash and credits averaging £65, and in 37 per cent of cases constituting over half their wealth. Tenurial and inheritance customs may offer some explanation for the difference. Most Cumbrian upland farmers enjoyed a form of tenant right close to freehold and paid only small manorial rents. As their land was inherited by primogeniture, yeomen attempted to make provision for younger children, which seems to have been paid at the father's death rather than during his lifetime.<sup>124</sup> Nantconwy inheritance customs will be covered in more detail in Chapter 3, but rents here were higher than in Cumbria and portions, which were typically paid when a son or daughter married, were lower. There was therefore less ability and less need in the pre-industrial economy for Nantconwy farmers to save, though this had obvious consequences for their lack of capital to finance improvements.

*Table 14, Inventory wealth of Nantconwy, Caernarvonshire and Cumbrian farmers*

<b>Gross inventory value</b>	<b>Nantconwy farm occupiers 1750-74</b>	<b>Caernarvonshire yeomen 1735-70</b>	<b>Cumbria highland yeomen 1721-50</b>
Under £40	25%	38%	27%
£40-99	39%	34%	31%
£100+	35%	28%	41%
<b>Average</b>	<b>£102</b>	<b>£84</b>	<b>£127</b>

Sources: NLW Bangor Diocese online probate records; Parry, 'Stability and change' p. 68. J.D. Marshall, 'Agrarian wealth and social structure in pre-industrial Cumbria', *EcHR* XXXIII (1980), p. 509.

The picture of farming in Nantconwy in the mid-eighteenth century is therefore one of a very traditional agriculture, derived from medieval patterns of land use in an environment where

---

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p. 517.

land was plentiful if generally of poor quality, but capital and labour were in short supply. Nearly all farmers were involved in markets, locally for the sale of small quantities of corn, regionally for the sale of wool and butter, and participating in national markets for store cattle. However they also aimed at self-sufficiency as far as possible, growing their own corn, flax and hemp, making cheese for home consumption and fashioning most of their own wooden implements and clothes. More prosperous farmhouses were solidly furnished in a time-honoured style, with dressers, settles, three-piece cupboards, tables and chairs, chests, and feather beds. There was little surplus cash, but where available this went largely into equipping the kitchen with pewter-ware, iron and copper pots and a range of cooking implements. Clocks remained relatively uncommon and were only mentioned in a third of detailed inventories between 1750 and 1800. There was therefore little sign of a consumer society in mid-eighteenth century Nantconwy that might provide an incentive for farmers to adopt new methods to increase their output or productivity.

### **Agricultural improvement and rent increases**

This lifestyle came under increasing pressure from the 1760s as a result of rising population and landowner intervention. During the first half of the eighteenth century, depressed agricultural prices and a series of mortality crises made it hard for landowners to keep farms tenanted.<sup>125</sup> In 1724, the Gwydir agent had been obliged to reduce rents across the estate, in many cases to the level prevailing in the 1680s, but despite this, some large upland farms in Capel Curig and Llanrhychwyn remained untenanted.<sup>126</sup> Across Nantconwy, a shortage of tenants created an opportunity for major tenants to take on extra farms. By the 1760s

---

<sup>125</sup> Mingay, *Landed Society*, p. 56; in February 1740, the Anglesey diarist William Bulkeley recorded that 'they die so fast that at Llanrwst churchyard there were at the same time 11 graves open and 9 another time': J.E. Griffith, 'The diary of William Bulkeley', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions* (1931).

<sup>126</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 5782.

however, prices for farm produce were rising and the first symptoms of land hunger began to be felt in the more populous areas. Nantconwy landowners started, as elsewhere in Wales, to have their estates surveyed and revalued as a prelude to land sales, higher mortgages, or significant rent increases.<sup>127</sup>

One of the first Nantconwy estates to be surveyed was Pantglas, which covered the whole of Eidda township plus a few farms in Penmachno. The estate's 29 farmhouses were mainly stone built, with a mixture of slate and thatched roofs; their condition ranged from those in good repair to 'very ruinous'. Most farms contained a mix of arable, pasture and meadow, and many had access to the commons on the ridge between Eidda and Penmachno, or to the extensive sheepwalks surrounding the head of the valley. The surveyor, Griffith Williams, considered the estate capable of considerable improvement, to produce more barley and clover and to carry more stock. He recommended better drainage and smaller fields which could be manured to improve crops and pastures, and liming to improve the quality of the soil, but recognised that most of the tenants were too poor to invest in these improvements. Lack of roads also made it difficult to bring lime to the area, and though an outcrop of limestone on the estate could be used, the landowner would need to build several kilns and import coal to fire them. The surveyor suggested that the landowner should undertake a demonstration project of draining and fencing one area to show how much more productive the land could be.<sup>128</sup>

Williams valued the Pantglas estate at 45 per cent above the existing rental value, but cautioned that his valuation 'may be more than it can be let for to the present or any other tenants in this country at this time . . . there certainly is soil of all kinds and for all purposes,

---

<sup>127</sup> Howell, *Rural Poor*, p. 51.

<sup>128</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 5959, (Survey of Pant-Glas estate, 1767).

but I fear seldom made use of, sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through indolence and often, I fear, through perverseness by treading in the steps of their fathers too closely' – sentiments about Welsh farming that were echoed repeatedly over the next century and a half. In the event, the landowner Terence Prendergast had no interest in improving the estate and was more interested in raising the rents to obtain the best possible sale price.<sup>129</sup> Rents were increased by 25 per cent and the estate sold to Edward Lloyd of Pengwern in Flintshire, to whom it was already mortgaged.

The Pantglas increases were however dwarfed by those on the Gwydir estate, the largest in Nantconwy, which averaged 57 per cent, though in the more populous parishes of Bettws y coed and Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn where farms were smaller, the increases were considerably higher at 71 per cent to 77 per cent. Across 18,000 acres of Nantconwy farms, rents rose in the 1760s by an average of 49 per cent (Table 15). These increases had a far-reaching impact on many tenants who were unable to pay the higher rents, leading to a change of tenancy arrangements on 58 per cent of farms (Table 16). Change took place within the family on 17 per cent of farms, with an older tenant moving to a smaller holding, bringing in a new partner or giving up a tenancy to another family member; this was the virtual end of large farmers holding multiple farms. In 28 per cent of cases, rent increases led to a change of tenant or partners, and there was also a certain amount of farm reorganisation including engrossment or enlargement and the creation of new farms. The rent increases clearly had the effect of shaking out less profitable farmers and enabling the rising generation to obtain a holding, but they also led to some increase in farm sharing, a longstanding response to rising population exacerbated in this instance by ability to pay.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Jenkins, 'History of Pant Glas', p. 29.

<sup>130</sup> A.R.H. Baker and R.A. Butlin, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 639.

Table 15, 1760s rent increases

Parish	Estate	Acres	Percentage increase
Bettws y coed	Gwydir	2208	77
Dolwyddelan	Gwydir	6280	34
Eidda	Pantglas	3862	26
Gwydir	Gwydir	2336	54
Gwydir & Bettws y coed	Berthddu		0
Penmachno	Gwydir	533	60
Penmachno	Pantglas	537	25
Trefriw & Llanrhychwyn	Gwydir	2,921	71
<b>Total Nantconwy estates</b>		<b>18,677</b>	<b>49%</b>

Sources: NLW Gwydir BRA 2, (Survey of the Gwydir estate, 1766); NLW Gwydir BRA 3, (Gwydir estate revaluation, 1767); NLW Gwydir BRA 4, (Gwydir estate rents, 1767); BUA Bangor Mostyn 5959 & 5448.

Although the 1760s rent increases in Nantconwy were similar to those experienced in England, they were not matched by any significant increase in agricultural productivity.<sup>131</sup> Rather, Welsh landowners appear to have been able to exploit the strong demand for tenancies, especially small farms, in an area with few non-agricultural employment opportunities. Following his purchase of the Pantglas estate, Edward Lloyd initially spent significant sums – up to 35 per cent of the rental in some years – in estate improvements. His priority was to bring buildings into good repair, slating farmhouses that still had thatched roofs, replacing beaten earth floors with flagstones, building new cow-houses, repairing the fulling mill and renewing the mill stones in the corn mill. Large amounts of timber were provided, probably for tenants to undertake their own repairs.<sup>132</sup> These made Pantglas tenancies more attractive, but it was many years before fields were enclosed with hedges. There were few improvements on the Gwydir or other major estates of absentee landowners, most of whom were to a greater or lesser extent experiencing financial difficulties in the late eighteenth century. The major contribution made by landowners during this period was probably their investment in transport infrastructure: turnpike roads which allowed the use of

<sup>131</sup> Mingay estimated English rent increases 1750-90 at 40-50%: *Landed Society*, p. 20.

<sup>132</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 6417, (William Owen's account with Edward Lloyd Esq., 1772).

wheeled vehicles, and making the River Conwy navigable up to Trefriw, both of which improved opportunities for marketing farm produce.

*Table 16, Impact of 1760s rent increases on tenancies*

<b>Change reason</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Same tenant	79	39.5
Same partners	5	2.5
Tenant moved to new farm or reduced share	4	2.0
Same tenant plus son or new partner	11	5.5
Son took over	12	6.0
Widow took over	8	4.0
New tenant	53	26.5
New partners, farm already shared	3	1.5
New farm sharing	4	2.0
End of sharing	6	3.0
Farm engrossment or enlargement	8	4.0
New farm	3	1.5
Farm reorganisation	4	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	

## **Agriculture during the Napoleonic Wars**

By the close of the century, this traditional style of agriculture was attracting increasing criticism at a time when poor harvests, increasing population and a shortage of imports during the wars with France created food shortages. In Wales, poor harvests were exacerbated by transport difficulties and inefficient markets. Although the price of oats, the staple grain in Nantconwy and much of west Wales, was less volatile than wheat, increasing shortage had already resulted in regular imports before the dearth periods of 1795 and 1799-1800. There was also a suspicion that farmers in the Conwy valley area were illegally exporting grain and potatoes to achieve a better price.<sup>133</sup> Agricultural improvement therefore became a patriotic duty, and agents of the Board of Agriculture toured the country to identify good practice and to make recommendations for increasing output.

<sup>133</sup> TNA HO 42/52/67, (H Holland Edwards JP, Rector of Llanrwst, to Home Office, 27 Oct 1800).

Nicholas Owen's criticism of Caernarvonshire farmers in 1792 was typical of those voiced frequently over the next century:

'Where the land is thoroughly manured and meliorated, it produces good corn: but the farmer in general will not be persuaded to lay out any money on improvement unless the land be his own. This class of men are generally very backward in experiment and speculations, prejudiced in the old mode of husbandry, they . . . are not dissatisfied with their fortune if they can pay the rent and maintain a homely subsistence . . . They depend too much on the profit of their lean cattle.'<sup>134</sup>

More specifically, the Rev. John Evans criticized Welsh farmers' ignorance of basic principles of husbandry, including want of fallowing, their use of paring and burning, a lack of enclosures and neglect of sheep folding, and a scarcity and improper application of manure.<sup>135</sup> The perceptive and sympathetic author of the second Board of Agriculture report on north Wales, Walter Davies, added the need to improve drainage, but also noted the deleterious effect of the general non-residence of proprietors to take an interest in their estates which led to a want of mutual confidence between landlord and tenant. Yet he regarded lack of capital as the obstacle of obstacles. Although cultivation could undoubtedly be improved, farmers could not afford the necessary investment including the hiring of additional labour; furthermore, migration to London and manufacturing districts resulting from lack of local employment, as well as the number of men drafted into the army and navy, had left insufficient labour available in many areas.<sup>136</sup>

Agricultural writers paid most attention to ways of increasing corn production. The main opportunities for improving crop rotations in Nantconwy could be achieved by increasing the amount and quality of manure, liming the land, laying down grass seed and reducing periods

---

<sup>134</sup> N. Owen, *Caernarvonshire* (London 1792), pp. 97-8.

<sup>135</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p. 368.

<sup>136</sup> Davies, *General View*, pp. 458-61.

of fallow. These improvements could set up a virtuous circle of increasing the hay crop, enabling more animals to be kept through the winter and increasing the amount of manure. On the other hand, the harsh Snowdonia climate made many farmers wary of investing in unsure improvements, particularly if this required borrowing. Getting in the hay crop without damage by rain was always an uncertain business in Wales, and in inclement seasons the corn might not ripen sufficiently to be harvested before being stripped by autumn gales: in Llanrhychwyn, the topographer Hyde Hall found that oats had to be laid in small sheaves on the slate roofs of cottages to accelerate their drying.<sup>137</sup>

High wartime corn prices did nevertheless enable some improvements to be made. Land was converted from rough pasture to arable production, Hyde Hall reporting that in Gwydir township 'in the present eager competition for land much of the rough ground and patches heretofore neglected have been subdued and rendered productive'.<sup>138</sup> Considerable areas were also encroached from the waste, as explored in more detail below. Where the cost of carrying lime into the mountains had previously been prohibitive, its use now became economic. The Gwydir estate undertook the drainage and embankment of part of the Conwy valley above Trefriw to keep out the spring tides, as recommended in Walter Davies' Board of Agriculture report.<sup>139</sup> Improving the navigation of the Conwy also improved drainage in the valley, and enabled larger vessels to bring coal and lime to Trefriw quay, where the estate built lime kilns. In Eidda an outcrop of limestone was exploited by burning in turf kilns.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> T. Firbank, *I Bought a Mountain* (1941), pp. 146-152; E. Hyde-Hall, *A Description of Caernarvonshire (1809-11)* (Caernarfon, 1952), p. 129.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>139</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 280.

<sup>140</sup> Anon., 'Ysbytty Ifan, or the Hospitalers in Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1860), p. 123.

During the mid-eighteenth century, much of the native forest on the Gwydir estate had been logged by the Dukes of Ancaster and not replanted; it was said that in six years from 1754 to 1760, the estate sold £50,000 worth of forest oak. As timber became more scarce and valuable during the Napoleonic wars, several Nantconwy estates expanded forestry plantations. On the Pantglas estate, Sir Edward Lloyd planted over 320,000 trees, while the Gwydir estate began to re-establish the Gwydir forest by setting up a nursery near Trefriw.<sup>141</sup>

However the major potential for improvement lay in the expansion of sheep farming, to meet a growing demand both for tender hill mutton and for wool.<sup>142</sup> Snowdonia mountain sheep were small and hardy, but owing to being kept out on the hills they took up to four years to mature, and large numbers could perish in bad winters. Experiments of cross-breeding with larger English and Spanish breeds proved unsuccessful, as did Lord Penrhyn's attempt to provide shelters on the mountains: shepherds found that their use deterred the sheep from finding their own food and it was not practical to carry hay up to the shelters through the winter snows.<sup>143</sup> This was the time when landowners built many of Snowdonia's characteristic mountain walls around the enclosed lands to keep sheep out on the mountains during summer, so that more hay could be cut on the enclosed lands. In winter, sheep were then brought to lower lands while cattle were brought nearer to the farmhouse. Mountain walls were typically nearly six feet high and three feet wide, a major investment costing 9s a rood in 1809. Part of the rent increases on the Mostyn and Pengwern estates in Penmachno went towards this cost, though the Gwydir estate generally built walls only where separate sheepwalks were created or to protect new plantations.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 234; *North Wales Gazette*, (25 February 1808).

<sup>142</sup> Owen, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 99.

<sup>143</sup> Davies, *General View*, pp. 326-33.

<sup>144</sup> Richardson, 'Capel Curig', p. 47; Bangor Mostyn 5791, (Penmachno rental, 1790); NLW Elwes 1426, (Rental of Maurice Wynne, 1792).

Nantconwy farmers benefited from increased wartime food prices. Oat prices nationally were on average 53 per cent higher during the period 1800-1815 than in 1791-4 before shortages began to emerge (Table 17). It was claimed that the Methodist cause in the neighbouring parish of Beddgelert was set back during the war years, because 'the high prices of agricultural produce and the flourishing condition of mining and quarrying industries made the people so flush, and made riot and drunkenness so common, that the modest Christians were afraid to assert themselves'; it was only in the hard times after the war that Methodism was able to make significant progress.<sup>145</sup> Improved farming profits and high food prices for those who were unable to grow their own fuelled the demand for farms and smallholdings: in 1800 for example, the Mostyn estate received four solicitations for tenancies in Penmachno alone from well-qualified local farmers' sons.<sup>146</sup> Landowners were not slow to take advantage by raising rents. Before the war, rents across the Gwydir estate and the Pengwern estate in Penmachno had risen by some 26 per cent since the 1760s. Further increases from 1800-15 averaged 36 per cent, though in some cases they were much higher: the Pengwern estate raised rents three times during the war by a total of 78 per cent - evidence of the common complaint that outside surveyors tended to over-value Welsh farms because they did not make sufficient allowance for the difficult soil and climate conditions.<sup>147</sup>

*Table 17, Napoleonic war impact on corn prices and rents*

Years	Wheat price increase on 1791-4	Oat price increase on 1791-4	Nantconwy rent increase on 1791-4
1800-15	84%	53%	36%
1822-26	16%	8%	36%

Sources: *PPs 1821*, XVII (201), 'An account of the average price of all sorts of grain, 1791-1821'; 1823, XIII (424), 'Average price of grain 1821-23'; *PP 1826*, XXI (50), 'Average price of grain 1823-26'; NLW 9727D, (Valuation of the Gwydir Estate, 1806); NLW Elwes 1426; NLW Nerquis Hall 7, (Pengwern estate rental, 1806-14).

<sup>145</sup> D.E. Jenkins, *Beddgelert, its Facts, Fairies and Folklore* (Beddgelert, 1899), p. 364.

<sup>146</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 5794, (Mostyn rental, 1799).

<sup>147</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 459.

## Farming 1815-60

After the war, agricultural prices collapsed under pressure from renewed foreign competition, following a short-lived peak due to harvest failures in 1817-18. By the 1820s, oat prices had fallen to 71 per cent of their wartime average, only 8 per cent above their pre-war level. Wheat prices rose more dramatically during the war, but fell to an average of 16 per cent above their pre-war level. Although some Nantconwy landowners including the Gwydir estate gave temporary rent abatements during the post-war agricultural depression, demand for farms remained high and landlords were able to keep rents at their wartime levels (Table 17).<sup>148</sup> Given the fall in agricultural prices, this represented a significant increase in the share of the agricultural surplus taken by landowners. This, and the general failure of Welsh landowners to reduce rents during the crisis of the 1840s, had long-lasting consequences for Welsh agriculture, further diminishing farmers' working capital, reducing employment, and exacerbating farmers' unwillingness to invest in improvements for fear of landowners raising rents.<sup>149</sup>

Tenants responded to the depression in a number of ways. Lime again became too expensive, especially in view of the much-criticized duty on coal carried by sea.<sup>150</sup> Some farmers attempted to grow more corn by taking more crops in succession, leading to soil exhaustion, while many broke up old pastures and meadow for crops. Others sub-let part of their farm and many went into arrears with their rent. The Gwydir estate, which had been administered during the war by a Beaumaris lawyer, installed a local agent at Gwydir Castle to introduce improved husbandry and ensure that rents were paid. A few tenants in arrears

---

<sup>148</sup> LA 3 ANC 7/23/2/42, (Letter of J. Fahy, 22 April 1819).

<sup>149</sup> Howell, *Land and People* p. 10. Fear of landowners raising rents was exemplified in the S. Roberts' cautionary tale, *Farmer Careful of Cil-Haul Uchaf*, (first written in the 1830s, republished Conwy, 1881).

<sup>150</sup> DA DD/WY 6840, (Petition to Parliament from the gentlemen, clergy and inhabitants of Llanrwst area against the duties on coal brought there by sea, early 19c.).

were given notice to quit as an example to others, but the estate won the goodwill of its tenants by forgiving arrears from those who clearly could not pay, and by allowing others to work off their debts by performing work for the estate. Tenants resisted the introduction of new husbandry clauses which restricted their ability to plough up old pasture or to take multiple corn crops without fallowing or manuring, and the estate had to make an example by refusing entry to a new tenant of a large farm who refused to sign a lease incorporating these conditions. Ultimately, the estate resorted to employing a Scottish drainage engineer and providing tenants with grass seed to improve the best meadows.<sup>151</sup>

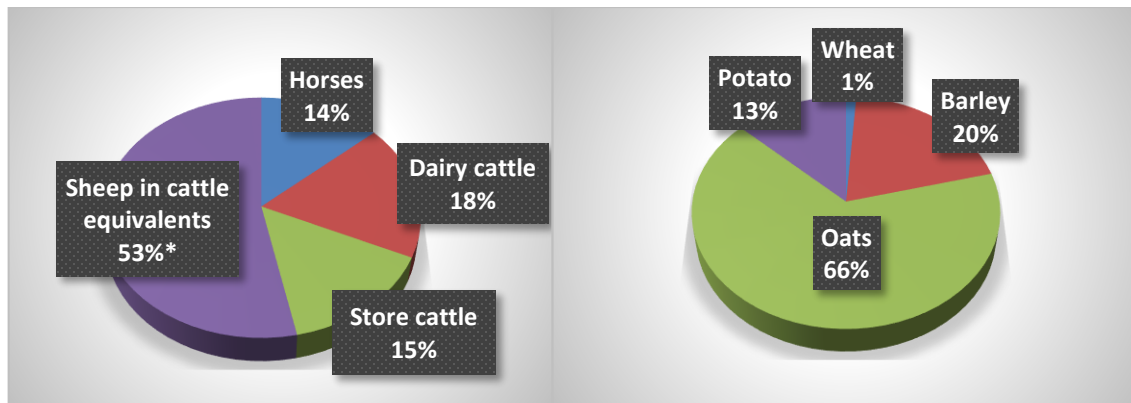
By the 1840s, crops occupied only five per cent of Nantconwy, and 81 per cent of the land was devoted to hay and pasture. Where crops were grown, rotations had improved somewhat, with three years' crops of oats, potatoes and barley followed by ley for two or three years. Farmers' preference for growing grass was partly influenced by this being less heavily tithed than corn, with an annual modus of only 2d per farm. Forestry occupied 7 per cent of Nantconwy but over a third of Bettws y coed was now afforested with oak, ash, beech, birch and elm woodland, and more recent larch and fir plantations. As the area was considered very picturesque and was beginning to attract more tourism, the Gwydir estate explicitly preferred to preserve this character rather than attempt any agricultural improvement. Afforestation reduced the size of some farms, though woodland was mainly planted on the steep valley slopes less useful for agriculture. Sheep farming now predominated especially in Dolwyddelan, though dairy and beef cattle were still kept and mountain ponies were bred for sale here and in Penmachno (Figure 12). After 1840, the area under crops continued to decline, influenced by the growing shortage of farm labour

---

<sup>151</sup> LA 3ANC 7/23/2/13, (Letter of Cadwaladr Ellis to Kennedy, 17 Feb. 1819); GA XD 38/362, (Gwydir letter book), John Duncan to Kennedy, 27 March 1842.

especially in the vicinity of the quarries. Crop acreage fell by a further 145 acres by 1870.<sup>152</sup> As the price of corn fell and became less volatile following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, Caernarvonshire farmers also became more willing to abandon growing their own.<sup>153</sup>

Figure 12, Nantconwy farm production c. 1840.



\*Seven sheep taken as equivalent to one cow or steer.

Sources: TNA IR 18/14117, 14097, 14112, 14152, 14158, (Tithe Files for Gwydir township, Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan, Penmachno, Trefriw & Llanrhychwyn, 1840-42).

There was little change in the number of farmers throughout the period. Whereas in 1748 at least 243 farmers (excluding Eidda) paid land tax, (the threshold for which was about eight acres), the number of occupiers of holdings of eight acres and above in 1840 was 257.<sup>154</sup> The lack of farm consolidation in Nantconwy, as in much of Wales, reflected the strong demand for smaller holdings, while few tenants could be found with sufficient capital to stock larger farms. Landowners also understood how controversial consolidation would be with tenants, amongst whom a reduction in the number of farms would be seen to deprive family members of the opportunity to gain a tenancy. Indeed the 1890s Royal Commission on Land commented that underlying the considerable volume of evidence it received in favour of

<sup>152</sup> TNA MAF 68/272, (Agricultural returns, 1870); Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 31.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas, 'Estates' p. 295.

<sup>154</sup> Around 1776, 246 farms paid land tax. All farms of eight acres and above paid tax. Seven holdings of 3-7 acres paid tax, while a further 29 holdings of this size identified from estate surveys did not: GA XQL/LT 2/1-7; 'Gwydir terrier': Bangor Mostyn 8464, (Sketch map of Lord Grosvenor's lands in Penmachno, n.d., c.1780).

smallholdings and against consolidation was the suggestion that those who had been brought up on the land had a kind of moral right to have a means of obtaining their livelihood therefrom throughout life.<sup>155</sup> In Nantconwy, opposition to engrossment was made forcefully clear by Dolwyddelan tenants when:

‘The Scots came to Dolwyddelan on Lord Willoughby D’Eresby’s command to survey the parish and divide it up into larger units by putting five or six small holdings into one large farm as had been done at Cwmlannerch. The news spread like wildfire throughout the district and the inhabitants of Dolwyddelan saw they were sure to lose their homes. They decided to send a tough man to tell the strangers that they should leave the area by the following evening, if they wanted to see the morrow. The Scots were so afraid that they left the next morning, leaving the inhabitants of Dolwyddelan to parcel out their land as they saw fit.’<sup>156</sup>

#### **4. *Smallholdings***

By the late eighteenth century, a growing population created a demand for land in Nantconwy as more farmers’ children were unable to find tenancies of their own. With arable farming forming only a small part of the local economy, there was less need than in other farming regions for a reserve pool of agricultural labourers for harvest work which was typically performed cooperatively, and before the growth of slate quarrying and lead mining there were few alternatives to agricultural employment. In addition to the sub-division of farms, this demand for land was met in a number of ways, including the deliberate creation of smallholdings by estates, sub-letting, and encroachment from the wastes. This was in marked contrast to much of England, where there was a decline during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the number of cottagers with access to small amounts of land including common rights which enabled them to make a living, perhaps in conjunction with other occupations.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> RCL Report, p. 357.

<sup>156</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 310. This incident probably relates to the 1840 tithe commutation survey.

<sup>157</sup> Barnett ‘Allotments’, p. 173.

## Estate policy

After the Gwydir estate became part of the vast Ancaster estates in the late seventeenth century, Gwydir agents pursued a policy of dividing up the demesne lands and former large gentry farms for which farmers with sufficient capital could not be found. In 1766, the 947 acre Gwydir demesne which contained some of the best farming land in the fertile Conwy was let to the Gwydir agent and rector of Trefriw, Mr. John Royle, but with growing demand for land, the estate progressively took land away from the demesne to be let separately. Following the first survey of the Gwydir estate in 1767, 36 acres were detached to be let in parcels of four or five acres to the townspeople of Llanrwst; much of the town was also owned by the estate. The motivation seems to have been to meet demand for smallholdings and bolster tenants' livelihoods rather than to increase revenue, as the rent increase on demesne plots was only a third of the average increase across Nantconwy farms.<sup>158</sup> By 1806, the agency of the Gwydir estate had passed to an Anglesey lawyer and the amount of the demesne was further reduced to 263 acres, enabling more smallholdings to be created.<sup>159</sup> A similar process was involved in progressively sub-dividing the Wynns' first demesne farm at Penamnen in Dolwyddelan which by 1784 had been split into three large farms, one of which was shared by four partners. The seventeenth-century demesne summer pastures at Cwm Clorad on the northern flank of Moel Siabod were also let out to four tenants by 1784.

In Bettws y coed, the large valley farm of Cwmlannerch was subdivided into eighteen units by 1784, comprising four farms of 16 to 25 acres, two smallholdings with a cottage and one or two acres (one of which also held seven acres of rough pasture), and a 49 acre meadow which was further subdivided into 12 parcels varying in size from one to 14 acres

---

<sup>158</sup> NLW Gwydir 2; NLW Gwydir 4, (Rental of the Gwydir estate, 1767).

<sup>159</sup> NLW 9727D.

Map 6). These valley holdings could be let to the highest bidder and were nearly all rented by occupiers of small or mountainous farms in or near Bettws. In two cases, the occupants were not farm tenants, suggesting that land was also being rented by cottagers or perhaps by sons living on the family farm.<sup>160</sup>

Map 6, Smallholdings on Cwmlannerch, 1784



Source: 'Gwydir terrier'.

<sup>160</sup> 'Gwydir terrier'.

In 1806, a new division was made of Dôl Cwmlannerch (Cwmlannerch meadow) into seven portions. Two were shared, one of the partners in both cases also holding one of the Cwmlannerch farms plus mountain land in Pen yr allt, while a Pen yr allt farmer had a holding in Dôl Cwmlannerch. The meadows were remodelled again in 1819, when the Gwydir estate planted hedges to make five divisions. These arrangements enabled farmers to rent a share of former communal hay meadow for growing winter feed to complement their upland holdings and could also provide a first step on the farming ladder for those without a farm tenancy. By 1841 however the arrangement for letting out meadows had come to an end and Cwmlannerch had been consolidated into a single 162 acre farm, sparking fears of similar consolidation in Dolwyddelan.<sup>161</sup>

The number of smallholdings increased still further in the early nineteenth century. The fifth Duke of Ancaster had been one of the pioneers of the allotment movement in Lincolnshire, where Arthur Young reported that cottages on his estate had:

‘from 3 to 8 acres, and some 14 or 15, upon which they keep a couple of cows, a few ewes, and always a pig or two . . . It is found a very great benefit to them, and at the same time they are enabled to bring up their families without the aid of the parish. Not a cottager on the Duke’s estate ever demands the aid of the parish, unless very great sickness befalls them . . . Moreover, possession of land does not make them bad labourers, but on the contrary, they are remarkable for being orderly, decent church-going men.’<sup>162</sup>

The Duke’s successor, Mr. Peter Burrell (later Lord Gwydir), appears to have been equally alive to the benefits of smallholdings, for during the post-war agricultural depression, the central agent of the Ancaster estate, Lewis Kennedy, drew up a plan for smallholdings in the fertile Conwy valley to be let to Trefriw villagers with families. Conditions of the scheme were:

---

<sup>161</sup> NLW 9727D; LA 3ANC7/23/2/36, (Fahy to Kennedy, 13 Feb. 1819); TNA IR 18/48/7, (Bettws y coed tithe schedule).

<sup>162</sup> A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Lincolnshire* (London, 1799), pp. 418-20.

- 'They must not hold any other lands under Mr. Burrell.
- Plots two acres of arable land, right to pasture one cow on the meadow lands rented in common with the villagers of Trefriw.
- Only one white crop without potatoes or green crop in between, unless it is old pasture new turned.
- The original work of enclosing or draining the lands to be done originally for fee portion to the holdings of the tenants, to be paid for or done by them as the agent may direct for the improvement of the lands.
- Failure to pay rent will lead immediately to forfeiture of tenancy.'<sup>163</sup>

Trefriw allotment holders may also have been helped by neighbouring farmers under the system of 'love-ploughing' described by Walter Davies:

'The poor labourer is seldom denied his neighbour's team to plough his garden, or to carry his fuel; and the only return expected by the farmer is the labourer's assistance for a day in the corn harvest. Even where this kind of love-ploughing, as it is called, cannot be procured to the extent necessary for four or five acres, a team might occasionally be hired; or an exchange of work might take place between the team-owner and labourer.'<sup>164</sup>

The cottager economy of the Gwydir estate was widespread in north Wales and continued into the late nineteenth century. For example, one Caernarvonshire landowner described to the 1867 Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, how:

'All his labourers were farmers and that he always let land, varying from six to about fifteen acres, with his cottages . . . The occupiers generally keep one or two cows, grow a little corn and potatoes; they occasionally have to leave their work for a day or two to work on their own land, but not enough to destroy their usefulness as farm labourers. The ploughing on these small holdings is done by men who go about making a living by letting out ploughs and horses, or else two men, each of whom keeps a horse, join together to plough one another's land. A regular labourer ought not to have more than two or three acres of land. They can keep a cow and pig on that.'<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> LA 3 ANC 7/23/2/71, (Plan for letting ground to villagers at Trefriw, 1819).

<sup>164</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 87.

<sup>165</sup> *PP 1867-8, XVII (4068)*, Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture. First Report, Part I, p. 30.

## Sub-letting

Cottagers could also gain access to land through a sub-let or other form of payment to a tenant farmer. Evidence on the extent of sub-letting is usually difficult to find, but a 1792 record of small tithes for Gwydir township affords a rare insight into the range of Nantconwy inhabitants engaged in animal husbandry. Small tithes were paid to the Rector of Llanrwst on potatoes, for every tenth sheep's fleece and every tenth lamb, and there was a modus of a penny on each cow, heifer and foal. The small tithes amounted to £11 11s 6d, excluding the Gwydir demesne which paid a modus of £1 19s 2d.<sup>166</sup> There were nineteen Gwydir township farms paying land tax in 1792, but 34 people paid small tithes, and a further nine inhabitants were listed as potential payers. As there were 85 families in the township in 1801, this suggests that at least 40 per cent, and probably over half of families had access to land in 1792. Ten farms were farmed by a single farmer, with one farmer holding two farms. Two large mountain holdings, Rhos y Golcerth and Garth, were officially rented to partners. On the remaining six farms, fifteen people paid small tithes, evidence of unofficial sharing or sub-letting, or possibly of cow-keep for two people who paid only a penny or tuppence in tithe. Altogether, 13 per cent of small tithes were collected from people who were not official tenants or partners responsible for a share of land tax (shown in green in Table 19). In addition, the tithe collector purchased eight lambs for 4s each from William and David Jones at Garth farm, who were probably farm servants.

*Table 18, Gwydir township small tithes, 1841*

1075 sheep at 1/- the tenth fleece	£5 17s 6d
35 lambs at 4/- each	£6 0. 0
Modus on cows 1d each	7s 3d
Modus on heifers & foals	5s 0
15 acres potatoes @ 1/9 per acre	£1 6s 3d
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13 15s 0</b>

<sup>166</sup> GA Nanhoron Estate Papers XD101/14/4, (Gwydir small tithe, 1792); GA XQL/LT 2/4, (Gwydir land tax, 1792).

Table 19, Small tithe evidence of farm sharing and sub-letting, 1792

Holding of 1792 Gwydir township small tithe payer	1792 land tax occupier	1792 small tithes payer	Small tithe amount	Percentage of small tithe	Status
Bryn Coch (part)	William Griffith	William Griffith	1s	0.9	Gwydir estate tenant
Bryn Coch/Cae Coedyn	Owen Roberts	Owen Roberts	1s 9d	6.5	Gwydir estate tenant
Bryn Engan	David Roberts	David Roberts	£1 13s	14.2	Gwydir estate tenant
Bryn y Gefeiliau	Hugh Hughes	Hugh Hughes	2s 2d	0.9	Tenant of Lord Brownlow
- Cae Awr	Hugh Hughes	Edward Davies	4s 2d	1.8	Labourer's cottage on Bryn y Gefeiliau farm, access to Mynydd Cribe common
Cae Gwegi	Evan Cadwaladr	Evan Cadwaladr	1s 11d	0.9	Mostyn estate tenant
		John Hughes	1d	0.1	
		Richard William	0		
Cae Mawr	Roger David	Roger David	9s 5d	4.1	Tenant of small local owner
Cae'n y coed	John Hughes	John Hughes	1s 10d	0.8	Gwydir estate tenant
Cerrig Gwnion	Thomas Jones	Thomas Jones	7d	0.3	Corsygedol estate tenant
Craig Forys	Elias Jones	Elias Jones	1s 11d	0.9	Gwydir estate tenant
		William Williams	8d	0.3	Unofficial sharer or sub-let
Doldiweinydd		Robert Parry	2d	0.01	Corsygedol estate tenant and owner of Coedcynhelier farm, Bettws y coed
		William Foulke	5d	0.02	Sub-let
Garth	William David & partners	William Evans	13s 9d	6.7	Joint Gwydir estate tenants, but William & David Jones (farm servants?) also kept sheep
		William David	2s 1d	0.9	
- Garth Lwyd		William Cadwaladr	0		Labourer's cottage on Garth farm, no tithe paid in 1792
		Griffith Jones	0		
Glynn	Mr. James Pugh	James Royle	9s	3.9	Son of former Gwydir estate agent
Hafod Fraith	Richard Owen	Richard Owen	£1 6s	11.2	Corsygedol estate tenant

Hafodty Cae'n y coed		Catherine Williams	3d	0.2	Gwydir estate tenant
Maesnewyddion	William Parry	William Parry	18s	7.8	Corsygedol estate tenant
Pencraig	Mr. Robert Owen	Robert Owen	16s 11d	7.3	Brother of William Owen Esq owner of Pencraig estate?
		Richard Owen	4s 8d	2.1	Brother of owner and/or tenant?
- Cae Gwyn	Mr. Robert Owen	Mr. Robert Owen	8d	0.3	Corsygedol estate tenant
- Cae'r hiddigl	Mr. Robert Owen	Henry Jones	0		Sub-let by tenant of Lord Brownlow
- Ty'n Mynydd		Hugh Humphrey	8s 7d	3.7	Sub-tenant of Pencraig, access to common on Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn
- Gwiga		Robert Morris	0		Sub-tenant of Pencraig
Rhiwddolion	Catherine Hughes	Catherine Hughes	10s 9d	4.6	Tenant of small owner
		Robert Thomas	1s 2d	0.5	Sub-let
		Robert Roberts	5s	2.2	Sub-let , became sharer by 1797
		John Ellis	5d	0.3	Sub-let
		Owen Davies	5d	0.3	Sub-let
Rhos y Golceth	David Jones & partners	David Jones	17s 8d	7.6	Partner since 1747
		Alice Davies	4s	1.7	David Jones' 33 year old daughter and partner
		Owen Cadwaladr	4s 9d	2	Son of previous Rhos partner
Tan y Garth		Robert Jones	6d	0.3	Sub-let of Maesnewyddion
Tyn ddol		Benjamin Williams	9d	0.3	
Wyddfyd	Evan Cadwaladr	Evan Cadwaladr	5s	2.2	Tenant of small owner
<b>Total</b>			<b>£11 11s 6d</b>		

Sources: GA Nanhoron Estate Papers XD101/14/4; GA XQL/LT 2/4; British Library, O. R. Dawson, 'OS Surveyors' drawings, Caernarvonshire' (1818); GA XD/38/214.

Some idea of the possible makeup of the 1792 tithe payments can be gleaned from the valuation of the township's small tithes for commutation in 1841 (Table 19). The 1841 small tithes were around a fifth higher than in 1792. The number of cows, heifers and foals in 1792 was probably similar to the 1841 figure, suggesting that in the late eighteenth-century, Gwydir township cottagers were able to keep one or two cows. The price of lambs, 4s apiece, was the same at both dates. In 1792, the wool from the small tithes was sold for £4 13s 4d, 81 per cent of the 1841 income from fleeces. It is therefore clear that some sub-tenants also kept sheep. One of the largest sub-tenants, Hugh Humphreys of Ty'n Mynydd (House in the Mountain), paid a greater sum than almost half the township's farmers, representing about thirty sheep. Ty'n Mynydd was a cottage on Pencraig farm had a one and a half acre arable field in 1787; two further fields were later enclosed from the Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn waste on which Humphreys could also have kept sheep. (Map 7)<sup>167</sup>

*Map 7, Ty'n y Mynydd (16) and later enclosures from the waste*



Source: GA XD/38/214.

<sup>167</sup> GA XD 38/362, (J. G. Williams Esq. to Kennedy', 12 October 1824).

By 1830 however, the Gwydir estate had bought the former Corsygedol and Mostyn estate farms in Gwydir township and the Mynydd Cribe common was enclosed as a bi-product of a much larger parliamentary enclosure in Llanrwst parish. This enabled the Gwydir estate to detach the sheepwalks from several of the Moel Siabod farms, and to let them, along with its allotments on Mynydd Cribe, to the highest bidder, creating a market in mountain sheepwalks similar to those already operating on Gwydir estate lands in Bettws y coed, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn.<sup>168</sup> Henceforth, people who were not farm tenants could still gain access to sheepwalk in partnership with an established tenant, but with the Gwydir estate capturing the rent rather than allowing its tenants to sub-let significant areas of land. Nonetheless, despite a degree of crackdown by landowners on sub-letting, it remained fairly common at least until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>169</sup>

At the same time, there was an increase in agisting – farmers taking in other people’s animals to graze. Valley farms took in lambs over winter while upland farms took extra stock in summer, and there were regular complaints at the Gwydir estate manor court about agistors letting sheep run into the estate’s plantations or the road. Renting cow-keep also became common in mid nineteenth-century Nantconwy amongst a wide cross section of the population, as explored further in Chapter 3. For example four sub-tenants and local residents rented cow-keep from the Capel Curig Inn in the 1850s, including a couple of farm labourers, a blacksmith, and a shoemaker who also rented turf ground; the going rate was £1 10s or £2 a year, equivalent to the rent of a cottage.<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Richardson, ‘Capel Curig’, p. 27.

<sup>169</sup> ‘RCL Report’, pp. 358-61.

<sup>170</sup> GA XD/38/1, (Manor Court Book of Maen Homan, 1832-1871, [hereafter, ‘Gwydir manor court book’]); NLW 16/49, (Bob Owen Croesor’s rent book, c.1850).

Potatoes, which provided considerably more calories per acre than corn, formed a vital element in Nantconwy's expanding smallholder economy. Nicholas Owen mentioned them in 1792 as an important part of the diet of peasants in the Ogwen valley in the neighbouring parish of Llandegai, together with oat-bread, butter, cheese, milk and occasional dried mutton and beef. Another Tour writer remarked on women digging potatoes in Capel Curig, and Walter Davies praised the neatness of potato culture in Caernarvonshire and eastern Merioneth, both by farmers and cottagers.<sup>171</sup> Potatoes became more widely adopted during the high food prices of the Napoleonic Wars and developed into a cash crop: by the early nineteenth century, Nantconwy was able to spare a large surplus for export through Conway, often to Liverpool.<sup>172</sup> The lifestyle of smallholders in Nantconwy at this period was probably similar to mountain areas of Merioneth, where:

'Every cottager (almost without exception) keeps his pony and his cow, the one to assist his labours, the other to furnish him with food. Meat, indeed, he seldom tastes, but his diet is not contemptible – oaten cake, or bread made with a mixture of wheat and rye, hard cheeses, potatoes, and excellent butter milk, furnish a meal substantial and wholesome . . . The peasant generally adds to his establishment a sow or a hog; which, when fattened, he carries to market and sells to assist in paying his rent.'<sup>173</sup>

The smallholder economy was however dealt a severe blow when potato blight spread to Wales in 1846-7, a year after Ireland. Although it did not cause famine in Wales, the blight went down in popular memory as bringing great hardship.<sup>174</sup>

## Encroachment

Many of the smallholdings that appeared in Caernarvonshire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were created by unauthorised encroachment from the waste, although

---

<sup>171</sup> Owen, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 43; W. Hutton, *Remarks upon North Wales* (Birmingham, 1803), p. 173.

<sup>172</sup> Rev. J. Evans, *The Beauties of England and Wales, Vol. XVII - Part I* (London, 1812), p. 326.

<sup>173</sup> Rev. R. Warner, *A Walk through Wales in August 1797* (Bath, 1798), p. 187; Davies, *General View*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>174</sup> G.J. Williams, *Hanes Plwyf Ffestiniog [History of Ffestiniog Parish]* (Wrexham, 1882), p. 112.

this often had the tacit consent of the parish vestry who regarded smallholdings as an effective way of keeping down the poor rates.<sup>175</sup> Most of the thirty or so new smallholdings which sprung up in Penmachno were carved out of the commons, the topographer Hyde Hall recording that the 17 new houses built during the first decade of the nineteenth century were mainly encroachments upon the waste.<sup>176</sup> This represented a 10 per cent increase in Penmachno households at a period when agriculture was booming due to high wartime demand but other employment was scarce, and families without a foothold on the land were vulnerable to food shortages and high prices. The new ground was broken up for cultivation by manual labour, using pickaxe, mattock and breast plough.<sup>177</sup>

Occupants of a number of these encroachments who later gave evidence in an 1858 legal dispute between the Crown and Col. Pennant over the Penmachno wastes afford a rare insight into this stratum of local society. Some witnesses like 79 year-old Cadwaladr Andrew of Pen y Foel claimed that their encroachments were over 60 years old, the period after which the Crown could no longer reclaim its rights. Others were less circumspect: 80 year-old David Jones who lived at another encroachment, Ty Newydd, acknowledging that ‘the principal part of the encroachments have been made lately – there are only two or three enclosed upwards of 60 years’. Encroachments varied in size from less than an acre up to seven acres and usually contained a house, yard and garden or arable fields. The typical encroacher was in his mid-20s, but at least one woman had also cleared land and built a house: Mary Jones told how her mother had built Gorphryn when she was unmarried, and had extended it in 1801 when Mary was ten. In middle age some encroachers built additional houses on their

---

<sup>175</sup> Plume, 'Enclosure movement', p. 64.

<sup>176</sup> Hyde Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 135. I use the term ‘waste’ for unenclosed mountain land not attached to a farm, and ‘common’ where there is evidence that such land was used as common grazing.

<sup>177</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 6.

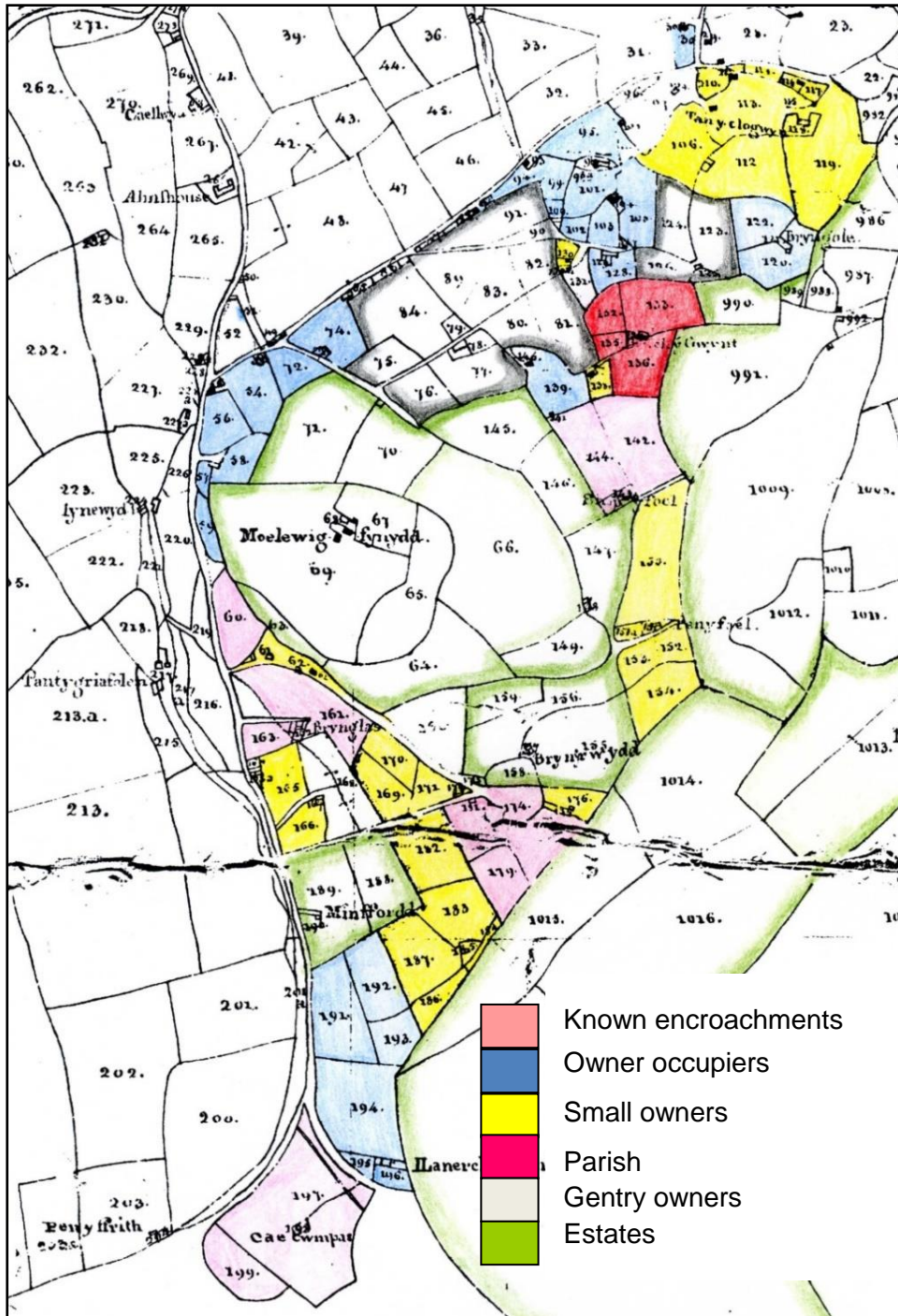
enclosure and became mini-entrepreneurs. The mason Owen Jones, who was born on the local farm of Pen y Bryn, enclosed four acres from the mountain and built his house at Ty'n y Cae around 1808 when he was 26; ten or twenty years later he built two further cottages on the land, which in 1841 were let to agricultural labourers. The largest encroachment of seven acres was enclosed by Griffith Humphreys in 1809 when he was aged 25.

By the 1840s, many of the encroachments had passed to the second generation or been sub-let. The 1842 Penmachno tithe commutation records show 29 independent smallholdings in the area of former common, with a further three smallholdings under eight acres from the sub-division of the old gentry farm of Hafodwryd (Map 8). Forty-five per cent of the encroachments were still owner-occupied, but the majority were tenanted. Only four smallholders were now dependent mainly on their smallholding, and the largest group combined smallholding with some agricultural labouring. Labourers formed a majority of the remaining owner-occupiers but the new tenants included people in a wider range of occupations such as weaver, mason, wool spinner, quarryman and miner. Two of the encroachments were bought by the combined Lloyd, Anwyll and Hughes charities for the Penmachno poor; one being occupied by a pauper put in by the parish, and the rent of the remainder distributed to the deserving poor (Table 20).<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* (London, 1845).

Map 8, Penmachno encroachments on 1842 tithe map



Sources: TNA IR 18/48/61 and see text.

Table 20, Occupations of Penmachno smallholders, 1841

Occupation	Encroachment owner-occupier	Encroachment tenant	Hafodwryd tenant	Total
Farmer	1	3		4
Agricultural labourer	6	5	1	12
Independent	2	2	1	5
Craft	1	4	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>27</b>

Sources: TNA IR 18/48/61, Penmachno tithe schedule (1842); *PP 1844*, XXVII (587), 1841 census abstract of returns.

A number of encroachments also took place on waste land in the lead mining district at Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn. Nine cottages and enclosures were identified in an 1806 Gwydir estate valuation, but in this case the estate claimed ownership and charged nominal rents of between 10s 6d and £1 11s 6d a year for cottages with land. The pattern of occupancy in 1841 appears similar to that in Penmachno: two cottagers described themselves as farmers, including 87 year-old David Morris who was the tenant in 1806 and may have originally enclosed the land. The remaining cottages were occupied by agricultural labourers, lead miners and quarrymen.<sup>179</sup>

## 5. *The contested commons and wastes*

In 1750, much of the mountain land in Nantconwy remained unenclosed, but over the next century the ownership and use of the commons and wastes were contested between the Crown, landowners, farmers, and the poor. These changes took place largely without recourse to Parliamentary enclosure, continuing a long tradition of enclosing land from the waste which under Welsh law had been an acceptable means of providing new members of the *gafael* kinship group with a homestead.

---

<sup>179</sup> NLW 9727D.

## Bringing the commons into private ownership

The sixteenth-century Acts of Union abolished the medieval Welsh system of *gafael* land tenure and enabled private ownership, but did not put in its place the manorial system or any other way of regulating land holdings or the use of the commons. This left something of a legal vacuum and brought the tacitly assumed interests of the Crown as manorial lord of former bond townships into conflict with customary attitudes on ownership and control of the waste.<sup>180</sup> The old hundred courts continued to meet into the eighteenth century, but judging by the number of legal disputes taken to the Court of Exchequer, they do not seem to have provided an effective means of regulating expansion into the wastes.<sup>181</sup> Potential for disputes was exacerbated because the precise boundaries between townships, different *gafael* lands and between freehold and Crown land in mixed townships like Penmachno were often unclear.

The first recorded encroachments into Crown lands in Nantconwy occurred when two small farms in Penmachno formerly belonging to the Knights of St. John were enclosed to provide a holding for a clergyman after the dissolution of the monasteries. Further enclosure of the Penmachno Crown commons by freeholders soon followed. The Crown attempted to reassert its rights in 1577 by establishing a commission led by the Bishop of Bangor to divide and separate Crown lands in Penmachno from the lands and tenements of free tenants. A jury of twelve local freeholders was prepared to describe the outer bounds of the township, but when it came to the division between freehold and Crown land within the township, the jury claimed that they 'could make no perfect division thereof otherwise than by the words of the Record of Caernarvon for that there hath been no particular survey thereof since Edward the third his

---

<sup>180</sup> Jones-Pierce, 'Landlords in Wales', p. 372.

<sup>181</sup> E.G. Jones, *Exchequer Proceedings (Equity) Concerning Wales: Henry VIII - Elizabeth* (Cardiff, 1939).

time'.<sup>182</sup> This failure to clarify the boundaries of Crown land was to cause endless trouble for the next three and a half centuries.

The township of Penmachno was subsequently among the Crown lands worth £350,000 granted in fee farm to the City of London by Charles I, for sale in order to recover the accumulated sovereign debt. However the City failed to find a buyer for Penmachno, so the former Crown farmer continued to lease the township at the customary rent of £6 10s a year, devising most of the land to the Lloyds of Dulassau who had built up the largest estate in the area.<sup>183</sup> Parliamentary commissioners sent in 1649 to survey Crown lands and dues for Nantconwy also failed to establish boundaries, excusing themselves that 'to go upon the premises to survey or find out anything we durst not being so devilishly threatened by the malignants'.<sup>184</sup> The Crown farmer of Penmachno, Sir Richard Lloyd, was obliged to go into exile during the Interregnum and when he returned after the Restoration, his relatives revealed the extent of further enclosure of Crown waste that had taken place. Altogether, £28 of the Lloyds' annual rental in Penmachno was in respect of freehold lands and £102 was for King's lands, which Sir Richard promptly added to his estate.<sup>185</sup>

By 1750, when most of Nantconwy was owned by absentee landowners, knowledge of any distinction between freehold and Crown land had become blurred and the collection of Crown rents was not enforced. As estates were surveyed to see whether they were capable of improvement to increase their value, interest grew in the substantial areas of unenclosed mountain or moorland waste. The Welsh language differentiates between *tir comin*, common

---

<sup>182</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2482, (Commission for the survey of the vill of Penmachno, 1577).

<sup>183</sup> Metropolitan Archive CLA/044/05/025, (Copy grant to Ditchfield and Highlord with notes of Crown leases, c.1628)

<sup>184</sup> BUA Penrhyn Add. 2503.

<sup>185</sup> NLW Elwes 1229.

land used by a large number of people, and tir cyd which is open mountain or moorland grazed by a small number of farmers of adjoining land, a relic of the old share-lands.<sup>186</sup> The eighteenth-century surveyors were apparently oblivious to the legal status of the wastes, but their surveys do nevertheless reveal several degrees of shared land usage in Nantconwy (Map 9).

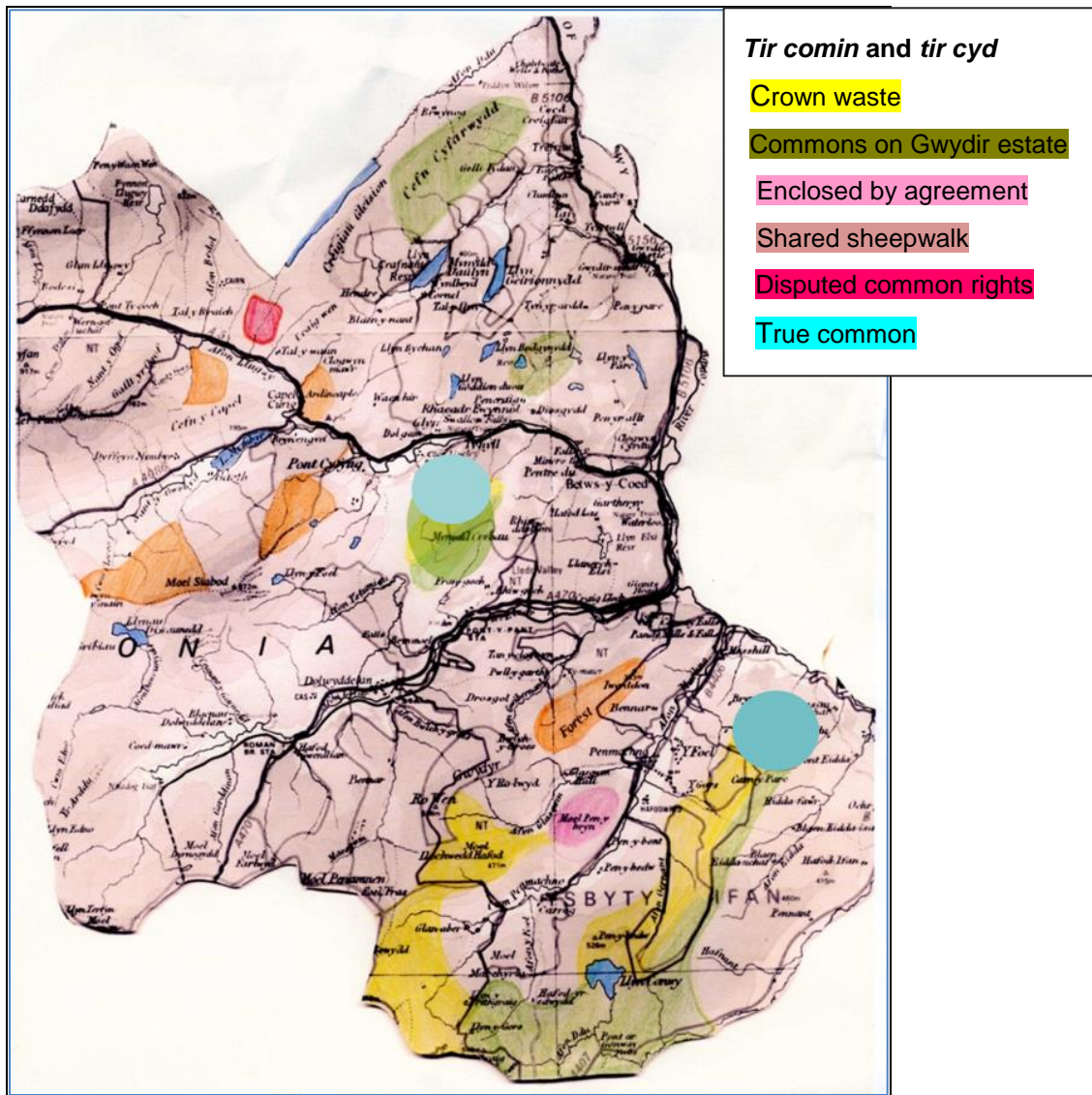
Where a single estate owned all the enclosed land on lower hillsides, surveyors typically designated the former township share-lands as sheepwalk to valley farms, albeit this was sometimes shared between a number of farms. Common was most likely to remain where farms from several estates shared unenclosed summer pastures, as between the former free township of Bettws in Penmachno parish, and the former monastic lands in Eidda, where boundary stones marked out each parish's area. Moel Pen y Bryn in Penmachno township was enclosed by agreement between the landowners, without apparent regard for the Crown's interest. In other cases like Yr Allt between Penmachno and Dolwyddelan, undivided sheepwalk was shared in a customary ratio between tenants of the Gwydir and Grosvenor estates, and with one of the few remaining Natives of Dolwyddelan.<sup>187</sup> The extensive Crown wastes around the head of Cwm Penmachno were grazed by designated farms, but used by other local inhabitants for cutting peat and rushes and for digging slates.

---

<sup>186</sup> L.D. Stamp, 'The Welsh commons', in W.G. Hoskins and L.D. Stamp, *The Common Lands of England and Wales* (London, 1963), p. 227.

<sup>187</sup> 'Gwydir terrier'; BUA Bangor Mostyn 8464.

Map 9, Crown waste and common land in Nantconwy, 1750



Sources: see text.

In 1760, George III surrendered the revenue from Crown lands in return for a guaranteed civil list income and henceforth, income from Crown lands came to be regarded as part of state revenues.<sup>188</sup> In north Wales, this seems to have prompted landowners to cease paying their quit and fee farm rents to the Crown. By the 1820s, arrears of over £50,000 were uncovered for north Wales on an annual Crown rental of £3,000. A drive by the Office of Woods and

<sup>188</sup> R.B. Pugh, *The Crown Estates* (London, 1960), pp. 16-23.

Forests to reinstitute Crown rents and collect arrears was received with indignation by the north Wales landowners. They combined together to argue that the Crown could not compel the payment of 'seigneurial' and chief rents unless the particular parcels of land and their boundaries could be precisely identified, and that the Crown had abandoned its rights by not collecting rent for a long period.<sup>189</sup>

Most landowners eventually reached a compromise with the Crown to limit arrears and resume payment of Crown rents, but several Nantconwy owners continued their opposition, including the Wynns of Peniarth and Lord Mostyn in Penmachno and Eidda, and the Penrhyn estate owners in Capel Curig. These gentry were partly motivated by a strong belief in private property rights, but they were also interested in the mineral or sporting rights, the moors of Penmachno abounding in grouse and the mountain lakes in trout. The Crown in turn was concerned at the extent of unregulated encroachment from the waste by farmers and landowners, and by the number of smallholders who had thrown up a *tyunnos* (house of one night) in the popular belief that they could lay claim to ownership of a house constructed in a single night and the surrounding land within axe-throwing distance.<sup>190</sup> Indeed the Receiver of Crown rents warned in 1834 that if things went on as they were, the Crown would soon not have one single acre of common land left, due to 'the practice of the landed proprietors to turn the waste into what they call private sheep-walks; that is, each man directing his farmer to graze his sheep upon so much of the waste lands as are contiguous to the respective farms'.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>189</sup> *PP 1834*, XV (579), Report from the Select Committee on land revenues of the Crown, p vii; BUA Porth yr Aur 14,040, (Crown legal advice on north Wales landowners' case, 1821).

<sup>190</sup> G.R. Jones, 'Field systems in North Wales', in A.R.H. Baker and R.A. Butlin (eds.), *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 478.

<sup>191</sup> *PP 1834*, XV (579), p. 24

Despite this concerted effort by landowners to claim the waste as their own private property, the Crown was still acknowledged as lord of the manors. The Commissioners of Woods and Forests therefore hit on the idea of re-establishing manor courts in north Wales as a way of regaining control over encroachments. This was not welcomed by landowners or tenants in Nantconwy, and the Crown Receiver described ruefully how his initial attempt to convene the court in 1830 was frustrated:

‘the public house was taken possession of by the agents and tenants of the present Lord Willoughby de Eresby (Lord Lieutenant of the County) and of Lord Mostyn; I had no place but the kitchen to make the proclamation in, which was also filled with persons opposed to the court being held. Only three persons summoned on the jury answered to their names, though the whole were, I understand, present, and I was obliged to retire without accomplishing my object.’<sup>192</sup>

The Crown saved face by its discovery that the court had formerly covered the three hundreds of Nantconwy, Arllechwedd Isaf and Creuddyn plus the borough of Conway, where it was reconvened the following year. The Nantconway manor court continued to meet annually into the twentieth century, but it was boycotted throughout by tenants of the hundred of Nanconwy itself. The court’s proceedings nevertheless shed interesting light on the Crown’s preferred method of dealing with encroachments. Enclosure of common land for a cottage and garden resulted in fines of between 6d and 2s 6d. The highest fine was £1, paid in 1846 by the parishioners of Caerhun in the lower Conwy valley for enclosing 30 acres for the use of the poor. These fines might appear derisory, but in fact the policy of the Office of Woods and Forests until the 1860s was to facilitate enclosure of waste lands. Encroachers were required to acknowledge the rights of the Crown by the payment of a nominal rent or by purchasing, which gave them security against their enclosure being demolished. Crown rents were initially charged at about a quarter of the value of the house

---

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

and land, in recognition of the tenant's investment in enclosing the land and erecting buildings, but rents were increased to a more realistic level after 30 or 40 years.<sup>193</sup>

As a way of deterring his tenants from attending the Crown manor court, Lord Willoughby de Eresby established a rival manor court for his Gwydir estate. The court met annually from 1833 to 1871 and its proceedings and business were not unlike those of a medieval court baron. It dealt with the typical range of issues affecting a rural community: the state of roads and bridges, nuisances, straying animals, boundary disputes, trespass and damage to crops, poaching, and the regulation of the commons. Lord Mostyn also re-established a manor court in Eidda.<sup>194</sup>

In Penmachno, on the other hand, the refusal of the two major landowners to acknowledge Crown rights over unenclosed commons and sheepwalks led to a long series of legal disputes. It was important for Crown officials to keep up a claim to the wastes, owing to legislation preventing the Crown from resuscitating rights that had lain dormant for 60 years. On the other hand, they were reluctant to take costly legal action, especially where evidence of Crown right was less than watertight. Instead, the Office of Woods and Forests developed a process of undertaking 'acts of ownership' which challenged the landowner to bring an action for trespass against the Crown but put the burden of proof of ownership on the landowner. These were of three main types: use of the soil for pasturage, digging peat and cutting rushes, game rights, and mineral rights.

---

<sup>193</sup> TNA CRES 5/235, (Presentments to Nantconway Court Baron and Court Leet, 1831-1900); *PP* 1894, XXXVII (C.7439), RCL Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II, p. 478, minutes 27,517-24.

<sup>194</sup> 'Gwydir manor court book': BUA Bangor Mostyn 6246, (Instructions for holding the court leet for the manor of Eidda, (nd, early 19c).

The question of whether pasturage over unenclosed land was exercised on an exclusive basis by a single farm or was shared between different farms therefore became crucial. During the eighteenth century, local slaters had used the Penmachno wastes for small scale quarrying, but when in 1810, a new landlord refused to pay Crown mineral royalties for a larger quarry on Tyddyn Bach farm, a Ffestiniog shepherd acting as Crown witness gave evidence that sheep and cattle from the neighbouring farms intermingled with those from Tyddyn Bach on the mountain and *he* had never seen them disturbed or gathered from amongst the others.<sup>195</sup> Lord Mostyn then applied for a Crown lease of mineral and sporting rights, but having beaten off all other bidders, he left the quarries idle, being more interested in stopping development so that he could enjoy undisturbed grouse shooting over the wastes.<sup>196</sup>

As slate quarrying expanded in Ffestiniog and Penmachno, and with an increasing number of applications to the Crown for mineral licences on the Penmachno wastes, the Office of Woods and Forests decided in 1831 that a survey was needed. But when the Crown surveyor James Spooner approached the commons, he found his route barred by Lord Mostyn's gamekeeper, David Pierce, and over two hundred local people, including farmers who had been led to believe that the Crown wanted to take away their right of pasture on the wastes, and *tyunnos* residents concerned that they might be deprived of their homes and land as had occurred in several Parliamentary enclosures in Caernarvonshire. The protestors formed a human wall to peaceably block the surveyor's route, but eventually one of the mob pushed Mr. Spooner causing him to fall. The upshot was that Pierce the gamekeeper and his associates were found guilty of assault at the Caernarvon Assizes, but got off extremely lightly compared to earlier Caernarvonshire anti-enclosure protestors by merely being bound

---

<sup>195</sup> BJA Porth yr Aur 29,904, (Letter of John Pugh, 1814).

<sup>196</sup> TNA CRES 49/879, (Applications for leases of minerals, Penmachno, Petition of Sir E. Pryce-Lloyd, 1813).

over to keep the peace. Two women ringleaders of a mob which had impeded the enclosure survey of the commons of Pistyll and Nefyn had previously been imprisoned for six months, and the leaders of anti-enclosure riots at Llanaelhaearn had been sentenced to death (commuted to penal servitude).<sup>197</sup> Lord Mostyn was clearly not sufficiently sure of his ground to oppose the Crown any further and gave up his claim to mineral rights, though maintaining his rights to the game. The Office of Woods and Forests now lost no time in letting the mineral rights around Cwm Penmachno, and after a few years of flouting the Crown gamekeeper, Lord Mostyn obtained the sporting rights peaceably from the Crown, recompensed other Penmachno landowners for allowing him to shoot over their lands, and paid his tenants to preserve the game by keeping other people off the land.<sup>198</sup>

However the dispute over the Penmachno wastes flared up again in the 1850s after Col. Pennant, (later Lord Penrhyn), bought the Mostyn lands in Penmachno and Eidda as a sporting estate. Armed with evidence from the Public Record Office of past failures to define the boundaries of Crown land, Pennant again claimed ownership of the Penmachno sheepwalks used by his tenants, and bought up other farms in the parish, often at a high price, to ensure his undisputed control of the wastes. Evidence from eighteen long-standing residents showed clearly how Pennant sought to eliminate any taint of common use rights by insisting on the division of shared sheepwalks and the construction of new boundary walls and ditches, as well as denying access to the poor who had customarily cut peat and rushes on the wastes.<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, (Report of John Spooner, 1831); Dodd, *Industrial Revolution* p. 78; Plume, 'Enclosure movement', p. 136.

<sup>198</sup> TNA CRES 49/1632, (Deed concerning mineral, sporting and sheepwalk rights in Penmachno', 1870); TNA CRES 49/643, (Penmachno Crown rights, witness statements, 1858).

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

Privately, both the Crown and Col. Pennant's lawyers were aware of the 1628 grant of Penmachno to the City of London, and believed that the City still held a 999 year lease. This uncertainty blocked development in the parish and the Crown repeatedly refused to grant land for further enclosure around existing encroachments, or mineral leases in areas where quarrying had not yet developed. The long stand-off between the Crown and north Wales landowners was partially resolved by an 1860s Exchequer court case which gave judgement in favour of the Crown on a similar dispute in Merioneth. Following this, the Crown was prepared to grant exclusive sheepwalk rights on waste land in Wales, subject to landowners acknowledging the Crown's mineral and sporting rights.<sup>200</sup>

Clarifying ownership of the Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn wastes also became more important with the development of lead mining in the area. The boundary between the Trefriw *gafael* lands bought by Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, and the Crown township of Gwydir were not defined, in fact the Crown appears to have lost sight of Gwydir township altogether by the mid-eighteenth century. The boundary between areas of waste claimed by the Gwydir and Pencraig estates was determined in 1819 by a private court case over mine drainage.<sup>201</sup> Parish boundaries were first clearly delineated at the time of the tithe commutation surveys in 1840, when the bounds of Llanrhychwyn parish were pushed down to the River Llugwy in Capel Curig, thereby incorporating much of what had been the old Crown township of Gwydir. The Office of Woods and Forests belatedly became concerned about possible encroachment by the Gwydir estate and challenged its title to extensive areas of hill land between Trefriw and Capel Curig. The estate was however able to deflect the challenge using the 60 year rule, by

---

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> LA 3ANC 7/23/2/46, (Letter of Fahy to Kennedy, 18 April 1819).

pointing to the Gwydir terrier of 1784-6 which showed most areas of unenclosed land, including Mynydd Bwlch yr Haiarn, as part of the estate.<sup>202</sup>

The only case of Parliamentary enclosure in Nantconwy concerned Mynydd Cribe in Gwydir township, which occurred as a by-product of a much larger enclosure of moorland in the Denbighshire townships of Llanrwst parish. This 221 acres of boggy moorland on the slopes of Moel Siabod had survived as a relic of former bond *gafael* share-lands because it was used by tenants of several landowners. The tenants regulated use of the common amongst themselves, indeed the Gwydir estate had to enquire of its tenants which farms used the common. There was no question here of Parliamentary enclosure improving agriculture: the land remained in its natural state, with no walls between the different landowners' allotments or even dividing the 'enclosed' land from the remaining area of common in Dolwyddelan; thirty years later it remained a 'sterile wasteland'.<sup>203</sup> This was typical of much Parliamentary enclosure of the Welsh uplands, the majority of the thirteen Parliamentary enclosure acts in Caernarvonshire covering over 39,000 acres being more concerned with redistributing ownership of Crown land than with agricultural improvement.<sup>204</sup> Indeed the 1896 Royal Commission on Land concluded that:

'It would be idle to suppose that the main motive of the Welsh landowners who eagerly used the facilities given by Parliament was to extend the margin of cultivation. They saw clearly enough that the movement gave them the opportunity of acquiring the sheep-walks and pasture lands till then unenclosed as their own in severalty.'<sup>205</sup>

But even at the height of the enclosure movement during the Napoleonic Wars, enclosure of the wastes was only profitable if mineral rights were at stake, and considerable land sales

---

<sup>202</sup> GA XD/131/1495, 1497 & 131/278/2, (Crown claim to waste, 1895).

<sup>203</sup> DA PD/69/1/226, (Llanrwst enclosure award and map, 1830); BUA David Griffith, (Journal of David Griffiths, Capel Curig schoolmaster, 1863).

<sup>204</sup> Dodd, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 85.

<sup>205</sup> RCL Report, p. 214.

were needed to cover the expenses of gaining several of the Caernarvonshire awards. Landlords had more pressing improvements to invest in, such as farm buildings, mountain walls, drainage and roads. A suggestion from the owner of the small Fedw Deg estate to seek an enclosure act to control growing encroachment on the Penmachno commons was not supported by the major landowners, who preferred merely to assert their claims.<sup>206</sup>

Elsewhere in Nantconwy, landowners largely resolved issues about ownership of the Crown wastes by buying out other landowners including most of the remaining owner-occupiers. Sir Edward Pryce-Lloyd gained control of Glasgwm, Penmachno in 1805 after buying out the last Native of Dolwyddelan, enabling him to rationalise intermixed holdings, divide sheepwalks in severalty and shoot uninterrupted over all his farms' sheepwalks.<sup>207</sup> The Gwydir estate consolidated its position on the commons above Trefriw by buying the large independent farm of Gomannog, and its exchange of lands in Gwydir township with the Mostyn estate enabled it to rationalize sheepwalks on Moel Siabod.

### **Use and regulation of the commons**

Although crops of oats, barley, potatoes and some wheat could be grown in the Nantconwy valleys, the natural economy of the hill farms was one of transhumance. The ffriths of Dolwyddelan had been used as summer pasture for the Welsh prince's cattle, and parts were still used as demesne lands by the Wynns of Gwydir into the seventeenth century. However, tenants were only allowed to graze as many cattle on the commons in summer as they could keep in winter; an attempt in 1552 by three local yeomen to take in a hundred cattle of strangers to graze on the commons of Moel Siabod in Dolwyddelan led to a quarter sessions

---

<sup>206</sup> BUA Bangor 102,606, (Letter of D. Price-Downes).

<sup>207</sup> BUA Bangor Mostyn 8480, (Map of the Penmachno estate, 1806).

case reinforcing local custom.<sup>208</sup> As sheep numbers increased during the nineteenth century, the shortage of winter feed and shelter was partially resolved by a reverse process of transhumance, with mountain farms paying valley farms to graze their yearling lambs over-winter. In the absence of manor courts, it was normal for north Wales tenants to meet annually and determine the number of cattle and sheep that could be sent to the unenclosed pastures and sheepwalks according to the size of each farm.<sup>209</sup> The Gwydir estate manor court also dealt with periodic disputes over the regulation of the commons, including, rather predictably, one between the tenants of the privatised but unfenced half of Mynedd Cribe and the tenants of the remaining area of common land in Dolwyddelan.<sup>210</sup>

Communal regulation of farming in Nantconwy was at its most sophisticated in the uplands above Trefriw. Here some 14 farms belonging to the Gwydir estate and four other owners ringed a common on the mountain ridge of Cefn Cyfarwydd. Three farms had already enclosed their share of the common, so complaints arose when their sheep and cattle were turned onto the unenclosed remainder. Several cases came before the manor court about tenants over-stocking this small common, which were settled by introducing stints of three sheep per acre for smaller farms and two per acre for the largest farm, Brwynog Ucha.

Customary regulation was also influenced by the athleticism of Welsh mountain sheep. Mountain walls designed to keep sheep on the mountains and out of the enclosed lands during summer had to be 5'9" high. There was a well-understood usage in Trefriw that no one was allowed to keep sheep in the vale or meadows, and to prevent sheep coming down from the uplands, custom required the hill farm tenants to make up their section of the

---

<sup>208</sup> W. Ogwen Williams, *Calendar of the Caernarvonshire Quarter Session Records* (Caernarfon, 1956), p. 97.

<sup>209</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p. 378.

<sup>210</sup> 'Gwydir manor court book' (1835).

mountain wall before 5<sup>th</sup> April each year. As late as the 1860s in Eidda, all sheep had to be taken to the mountain commons in summer and they were brought down to graze the stubble in autumn. Although the lower fields were enclosed, few farmers could afford the investment to make stock-proof fences, which precluded growing winter crops. Where farmers wished to grow turnips, estates resolved the issue by making wire available to their tenants.<sup>211</sup>

The collection of estrays proved another area of some controversy between landowners and the Crown. The Gwydir estate appointed its own bailiff to collect straying animals while the Crown sheriff's bailiff for Nantconwy looked after other commons. When the sheriff's bailiff impounded stock belonging to Gwydir tenants, the Gwydir steward led a party to break open the pound and release them.<sup>212</sup>

In Penmachno on the other hand, disputed ownership prevented any effective regulation of the Crown wastes. Unauthorised encroachment of smallholdings on the common in the centre of the parish was possible because this was Crown land used by tenants of several different landowners. A number of small farms had already been carved out of the waste in the early eighteenth century by local landowners, including the 38 acre Moelewig y Fynydd by the owner of the large former gentry farm Hafodwryd. In another case, the one acre smallholding of Fuches Goch was enclosed from the mountain with the consent of the Benar landowner on payment of an annual ground rent of 15s. Benar was situated on the northern side of the Machno valley, but had common rights on the Hwlfa common to the south; the encroached area was considered part of Benar's sheepwalk, though it had also been used

---

<sup>211</sup> Anon., 'Ysphyty Ifan', p. 123.

<sup>212</sup> NLW Gwydir BRA 125, (Collection of estrays in Nantconwy, nd, late 18c.).

by two other farms to graze and milk their cattle in early summer.<sup>213</sup> Both incidents suggest some connivance of local freeholders in allowing common land to be enclosed.

Some of the largest encroachments were carried out by tenant farmers, like John Hughes, the enterprising tenant of Hafodwryd, who in the 1810s enclosed three sides of a ridge called Llechwedd Hafodwryd and kept a shepherd who lived in a hut on the ridge to prevent sheep from straying across the unfenced boundary from the mountain. Hughes caused considerable ill-feeling by starting to charge Penmachno residents for summer grazing and taking in the cattle and horses of strangers. He also sought to prevent other inhabitants from gathering rushes in the customary way, on one occasion removing two cartloads of rushes gathered by a neighbouring farmer. Landowners made some initial attempt to prevent encroachment by farmers and the poor, the stewards of Benar and the Pengwern Estate taking down some new enclosures around 1800, though they appear to have given up the attempt, possibly in the face of growing local hardship.<sup>214</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century however, the lack of clear ownership allowed might to triumph over custom. After purchasing the Mostyn estate in Penmachno, Col. Pennant effectively extinguished common rights previously exercised by his tenants and the poor, by demarcating sheepwalks and debarring other inhabitants from cutting peat and rushes on the wastes.<sup>215</sup>

## **Changing attitudes**

The picture that emerges is one of landowners, tenant farmers and the poor all regarding Crown waste as up for grabs, but where usage was increasingly contested in the period after 1750. For landowners, obtaining clear title to sheepwalks was vital to improve the value of their lands. Unenclosed commons or wastes shared by tenants of more than one estate were

---

<sup>213</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>214</sup> TNA CRES 49/643.

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

of dubious status, and it is noticeable that while the surveys of the 1760s frequently mentioned commons, by the late eighteenth century, surveyors preferred the term 'shared sheepwalk'. The 1784 survey of the Gwydir estate showed its own tenants' shares of the unenclosed Cefn Cyfarwydd common as part of each farm, though intervening land belonging to other landowners was termed 'common' ( Map 10). In the tithe commutation surveys there was even more reluctance to describe land as common: the surveyor appointed by the Gwydir estate declared that there was no common in Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn or Dolwyddelan, despite the frequent intervention of the manor court to regulate stints and boundaries on the commons of these parishes. Mineral rights became an added incentive for claiming private ownership of the waste, though in the nineteenth century, aristocratic owners like Lord Mostyn and Col. Pennant were prepared to block development in order to preserve the game on their grouse moors.

Farmers were principally concerned to safeguard their mountain sheepwalks which were vital to the upland farming economy. Where Parliamentary enclosures in Caernarvonshire and mid-Wales resulted in the conversion of common grazing areas into new farms, they were often met with significant opposition. In Nantconwy, tenant farmers generally preferred exclusive sheepwalk to an allocation of common, to prevent overstocking by their neighbours at a time when sheep numbers were increasing considerably. By the eighteenth century, extensive mountain farms were often shared amongst several tenants, who sought to mark out their own section of mountain sheepwalk, while others asked the Gwydir manor court to arbitrate on a division. Tenants therefore needed little encouragement to enclose 'their' share of common, and generally supported the landowners' attempts to claim ownership or to establish exclusive rights. Some farmers were also not averse to charging the poor for use rights such as cutting peat or to accepting payment from landowners to preserve the game by excluding the poor from the former commons.

Map 10, Cefn Cyfarwydd on Gwydir terrier, 1784



The attitudes of Crown officials underwent the greatest change over the period. The local agents of the Crown in the eighteenth century adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards the administration of the Crown lands, allowing rents to go unpaid and common land to be enclosed without reference to the rights of the Crown. This changed after 1820 with renewed Parliamentary oversight and increasing professionalization of the Civil Service. Against the background of increasing population, food shortages and riots during the Napoleonic wars, the Crown extended its role as a facilitator of enclosure, its aim in Wales being more to regulate rather than to prevent encroachment. Indeed the 1844 Commission on Commons

Inclosure found that there was generally no attempt in Wales to evict *tyunnos* squatters and suggested that local residents, even those with common rights, tended to connive at them because they were usually built by friends and relatives. The community supported the expansion of these subsistence smallholdings, which were essential to livelihoods at least until the mid-nineteenth century. The Crown merely asked that encroachers should acknowledge its rights by paying a small rent or by purchasing before encroachments had existed for 60 years.<sup>216</sup> There was another major change in the Crown's attitude from the 1860s however, allied to the growth of the Commons Preservation Society which campaigned for greater emphasis on the public amenity value of commons. Henceforth the Crown agents for Caernarvonshire adopted a policy of maintaining wastes as wastes, though they were prepared to reach agreements with landowners granting exclusive rights of sheepwalk on unenclosed land.<sup>217</sup>

Amongst the poor of Caernarvonshire, enclosure aroused considerable opposition in parishes where they had customarily pastured their animals or dug for slates on the commons, especially from those who had enclosed and cleared waste land through backbreaking labour and were faced with eviction or paying market rents for their smallholdings.<sup>218</sup> The curtailment of use rights, especially peat cutting, could also add significantly to household costs or deprive them of fuel altogether. Following enclosure of the Denbighshire townships of Llanrwst, the poor who were no longer able to cut peat from the commons were unable to heat their homes or cook their food owing to coal being too expensive, and this encouraged increased theft of wood from the Gwydir plantations.<sup>219</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> RCL Report, p. 590.

<sup>217</sup> *ibid.* Vol. II, p. 479.

<sup>218</sup> Plume, 'Enclosure movement'.

<sup>219</sup> DA DD/WY 6840.

In Nantconwy, the poor were spared the hardships of eviction, though creeping privatization of the commons and wastes affected some through the reduction of summer grazing areas on the unenclosed mountain, and the ability to cut peat and rushes. In Capel Curig, Lord Penrhyn excluded Gwydir estate tenants from their customary turf grounds on a disputed area of waste.<sup>220</sup> But the poor did retain their use rights in some areas: in Dolwyddelan, the mountain of Moel Siabod was by the 1780s designated as separate sheepwalks to the major farms, but it is clear that cottagers continued to cut turf there in the mid-nineteenth century, apparently in some cases for sale. An estate official tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Gwydir manor court to apportion areas of turbary to tenants according to the size of their tenements, and that all cottagers residing in Dolwyddelan should cut no more turf than sufficient for their own use.<sup>221</sup> Even in Penmachno, the poor could still cut peat on Penrhyn farms provided they paid an acknowledgement. Where customary use of commons was lost, the development of a market in grazing rights, cow-keep and turbary during the nineteenth century provided the poor with some substitute, albeit at a cost.

## ***Conclusions***

In 1750, the majority of Nantconwy households tenanted their own farm and agriculture was in a transitional state between peasant farming and production for the market. Ninety per cent of farms were already owned by large or medium-sized estates, but consolidation into a smaller number of large estates continued throughout the period up to 1860, driven by dynastic marriages, strict settlement, and the tendency of landowners to regard their upland farms as the most disposable when sales became necessary to relieve financial difficulties. Landowners were mostly absentees who took little interest in the running of their upland

---

<sup>220</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 133.

<sup>221</sup> 'Gwydir manor court book'.

estates, though those that did consolidate their sphere of influence in Nantconwy, notably the Gwydir/Ancaster estate and the Lloyd/Mostyn estate later bought by Col. Pennant, were able to improve the value of their land by reorganising intermixed holdings, laying claim to the unenclosed commons or letting out holdings of meadow, rough grazing and sheepwalk to the highest bidder. In the nineteenth century however, the Mostyn and Penrhyn estates preferred to use much of their mountain land in Eidda and Penmachno as a sporting estate, while the Gwydir estate expanded its mineral and forestry interests.

Except for the small remaining number of 'Natives of Dolwyddelan' with tenant right leasehold, most farms were rented at rack rents.<sup>222</sup> Landowners were therefore in a position to take advantage of rising agricultural prices and increased demand for tenancies from the 1760s to raise rents. Rent increases shook out a few of the least efficient farmers and reduced the number of multiple holdings, but also contributed to more sub-division, sharing and sub-letting of farms. Landowners contributed towards agricultural improvement in a number of ways, especially by investing in roads, improving farmhouses and farm buildings, the erection of mountain walls, and improving drainage and flood prevention on the most valuable valley lands.

Although a few Nantconwy farmers adopted improved farming methods in the eighteenth century, estates had difficulty in attracting tenants with capital. Most tenants preferred to farm in time-honoured ways adapted over the centuries to suit the local topography, poor soils, harsh mountain climate, and to ensure that subsistence needs were met in an area not well served by long distance grain markets. Landowners began to actively encourage improved agricultural practice to shore up rent and land values after the Napoleonic Wars, through the

---

<sup>222</sup> The term 'Natives' probably derived from the Latin *nativae*, [bondsmen].

introduction of husbandry clauses in leases, while the Gwydir estate installed a trained local agent. Farm output increased in a number of ways. Crops improved with improved drainage, over-cropping was reduced, the fallow period shortened and grass seed introduced to lay down hay meadows after a period of crops. The most important change was the continued expansion into the uplands, with a significant increase in sheep numbers and through enclosing more land, including smallholdings which were cultivated intensively for potatoes and oats. Farmers generally benefited from bringing the wastes into private ownership, either by enjoying exclusive sheepwalk or by being able to rent additional mountain land. Even so, Nantconwy farming remained rather backward due to farmers' relative lack of knowledge, caution about experimenting, lack of capital, and because they could not afford to employ more labour. Only after the repeal of the Corn Laws brought more reliable supplies of cheap corn to Nantconwy did farmers begin to convert arable land to grass or rough pasture and rely on buying corn from the market, though this conversion went much further later in the nineteenth century.

It is unlikely that agricultural productivity and prices increased sufficiently to match rent increases, and the failure of landowners to reduce rents when agricultural prices slumped after the Napoleonic Wars left Nantconwy farmers with even less capital for improvements, and demand for agricultural labourers reduced as land reverted to pasture. Farmers struggling to afford the rent had an incentive to bring in partners or sub-let land, pasturage or cow keep. The Gwydir estate allowed farm splitting and sharing and deliberately increased the number of smallholdings on its land before 1840, while tenants resisted any attempt at consolidation. In addition, perhaps 40 or 50 smallholdings were enclosed from the waste, mainly during the period of high prices during the Napoleonic Wars and the post-war agricultural slump.

Despite the absence of significant agricultural improvement, the number of families making a living from the land increased by around 40% between 1750 and 1850. The number of farmers of eight acres and above remained broadly constant, and the increase was largely in men described in the census as agricultural labourers: in fact, many of these were the occupiers of the increased number of smallholdings or of land sub-let by farmers, and were more akin to traditional cottagers than to proletarianized landless labourers. Most of these new cottagers had never enjoyed formal common rights. By the mid-nineteenth century they were at times disadvantaged by curtailment of their access to peat and rushes, but these generally remained obtainable and the growth of a market in pasturage, cow-keep and turbary enabled them to continue small scale farming.

While the general story of agricultural improvement in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is of an accelerating trend towards a higher productivity, more capitalist agriculture, Nantconwy witnessed an increase in the number of subsistence smallholdings, as more people faced with a shortage of waged employment sought to make a livelihood, or part of their living, from the land. The next step, in Chapter 3, is to investigate the organisation of agricultural work, including the role of women, the amount of hired labour employed, and the extent to which farming households undertook multiple occupations to supplement their agricultural livelihoods.

## Chapter 3. The farming community

### 1. *Aims and introduction*

Welsh farmers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have often been regarded as peasants, lumped together with Irish smallholders and Scottish crofters as part of an impoverished Celtic fringe.<sup>223</sup> But the median farm size in Nantconwy throughout the period was around 90 acres: there was a spectrum of holdings from smallholdings under eight acres to large farms of over a thousand acres, though with a rise in the number of subsistence smallholdings after 1790. This chapter investigates how far Nantconwy farms might be regarded as family or capitalist farms based on the share of labour supplied by family members, servants and labourers, and the way farmers adapted to different phases of the family life-cycle. It also discusses the role and importance of women farmers, and of by-employment in the economy and society of Nantconwy.

In addition to the estates system, market rents and enclosure, the formation of large farms employing predominantly wage labour has also been regarded as a key component of agricultural improvement and modernization. This view has not been without its critics, for example Allen argued that seventeenth-century yeomen in the south Midlands accomplished most of the growth in crop yields and about half of the rise in labour productivity which occurred over the period 1500-1800. This was achieved mainly on family farms of under 60 acres, and only one eighth of south-Midland farms were capitalist labour-employing enterprises of over 100 acres at this time, disproving the need for large capitalist farms to bring about major productivity gains.<sup>224</sup> Shaw-Taylor alternatively proposed that employment

---

<sup>223</sup> A. Howkins, 'Peasants, servants and labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c.1870-1914', *AgHR* 42 (1994), pp. 49-62.

<sup>224</sup> Allen, *Enclosure*, pp. 18-19.

of labour should be the key determinant of whether a farm is considered a family or a capitalist farm, because this measures the extent to which the workforce was proletarianized. He argued that Allen had seriously over-estimated the size of farm that could be farmed without recourse to hired labour and that the decline of family farms and rise to dominance of agrarian capitalism had taken place in southern and eastern England by 1700.<sup>225</sup>

Shaw-Taylor proposed the conceptual categories of smallholding, family farm, transitional farm and capitalist farm. A smallholding does not provide an adequate income to its holder who must therefore have had additional means of support from some other economic activity. A family farm is large enough to support its holder and perhaps other family members, but small enough for family labour to supply most of the necessary labour, while the majority of the labour on a capitalist farm is supplied by wage labour with two or more employees per farmer. In mid-nineteenth century England, capitalist farms predominated in areas characterized by good soils and more intensive cultivation, while family farms were more important in areas of poor soils characterized by less intensive cultivation, most notably in upland areas such as Cumbria, Derbyshire and North Yorkshire.<sup>226</sup>

A related debate concerns whether the occupiers of English smallholdings and small farms should be considered as peasants not fully integrated with the capitalist system. In the early eighteenth century, it was not unusual for cottagers to combine work as agricultural labourers or rural craftsmen with running a smallholding, and they were often able to enjoy a reasonably comfortable standard of living.<sup>227</sup> The cottager lifestyle was severely eroded in many parts of

---

<sup>225</sup> L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming in England', *ECHR* 65 (2012), pp. 44-5, 57-58.

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

<sup>227</sup> C. Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011).

England through enclosure, farm engrossment and loss of the commons, and as population growth greatly increased the number of landless labourers and craftsmen.<sup>228</sup> Nevertheless, the small farmer and rural tradesperson/smallholder or labourer with land remained widespread in many parts of the country in the late nineteenth century, and occupational divisions were not necessarily clear-cut. In place of a dichotomy between peasant and capitalist agricultural societies, Read therefore called for a model of the family farm as a distinct non-capitalist mode of production with different material interests from both capital and labour, where the use of hired labour fluctuated with the family life-cycle.<sup>229</sup>

Peasant and family farming societies are typically more concerned with providing a livelihood for family members than with profit maximization, but different societies have found varying solutions to achieving a balance between size of farm and family life-cycle. Chayanov's classic study of the pre-Revolution Russian peasant economy both provided a theory of peasant behaviour at the level of the individual family farm and argued that the peasant economy should be regarded as an economic system in its own right, rather than a form of incipient capitalism. The land was worked by peasant proprietors largely without hired labour, and the family aimed to strike a balance between satisfying its subsistence needs and a subjective dislike for manual labour. As children came of working age, families took on more land to increase the amount of food grown, but sold land after children left home to set up their own families. This system of adapting the amount of land farmed to family size was

---

<sup>228</sup> J. Humphries, 'Enclosures, common rights and women: the proletarianization of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *JECH* (1990), pp. 17-42; J. M. Martin, 'Village traders and the emergence of a proletariat in south Warwickshire, 1750-1851', *AgHR* 32 (1984), pp. 179-188; J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>229</sup> M. Reed, 'The peasantry of nineteenth-century England: a neglected class?' *History Workshop Journal* No. 18 (1984), pp. 53-76.

possible because the Russian countryside was thinly populated, and due to the existence of an active land market.<sup>230</sup>

Where the amount of land was fixed, an alternative solution was for the use of hired labour to change over the family life-cycle. In the eighteenth-century peasant households of the Walviertel region of Austria, where holdings were impartible, peasants employed live-in servants if they had no children or they were too young to work on the land. Servants were regarded as a labour-substitute for children, though labour requirements increased with farm size. The household cycle was therefore determined by the need to maintain a stable labour force on the farm, and the availability of living space.<sup>231</sup> The household cycle was therefore determined by the need to maintain a stable labour force on the farm.

In south-west Wales at the end of the nineteenth century, farmers often moved between tenant farms at different stages of their family life-cycle. Farms of up to 40 acres were regarded as suitable starter holdings for newly-weds or farm labourers, and were not generally passed down the family. When children reached working age, the family would seek a larger holding and children worked on the family farm performing the same work as servants; during this household phase, wealth could be accumulated to set up the next generation. If a father was wealthy enough, he might rent two farms, sub-letting the smaller farmhouse to a labourer until his son was able to take over the main farm. If the family had more children than they could employ, some had to go as farm servants elsewhere, often with relatives. Marriage was usually delayed until a suitable holding became available. The

---

<sup>230</sup> B. Kerblay, 'Chayanov and the theory of peasantry as a specific type of economy', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 150-160; E. A. Hammel, 'Chayanov revisited: A model for the economics of complex kin units', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102 (2005), pp. 7043-7046.

<sup>231</sup> L.K. Berkner, 'The stem family and the developmental cycle of the peasant household: an eighteenth-century Austrian example', *American Historical Review* 77 (1972), pp. 400-404.

young couple would receive help from their kin to stock the farm, in recognition of their unpaid labour during adolescence. Unlike Austrian peasant proprietors, the tenant farmers of south-west Wales were unlikely to retire; when the children married or left home, the elderly couple would typically move back to a smaller farm. Children were given their portion at marriage rather than at their parents' death or retirement, but in the 'folk image' of an ideal family farm life-cycle, at least one unmarried son would stay at home during the parents' old age to help with the farm, and he would eventually succeed to the holding. This regular movement between farms in a tenant farming context was facilitated by the availability of holdings of varying sizes on the same estate; landlords were usually prepared to grant tenancies to near kin of their existing tenants in preference to others. However, family resources and the number of farms available did not allow all children of farmers to be established on their own farm and some children had to migrate to the industrial areas of south Wales.<sup>232</sup>

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a significant decline in women's agricultural employment in England, part of a wider decline in women's economic roles (outside the bastions of female employment in the textile industry) which has frequently been linked to the rise of capitalism and the decline in household production.<sup>233</sup> As farm size grew in the eighteenth century, the increasing number of landless male labourers in English regions where agrarian capitalism was dominant contributed to a reduced demand for women in agricultural work.<sup>234</sup> Ideological changes also restricted women's occupational roles, with placed increased emphasis on a woman's place being in the home, and greater prominence on the role of the male breadwinner who engaged with the outside public world.

---

<sup>232</sup> D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 87, 106-146.

<sup>233</sup> B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989); P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (Basingstoke, 1996).

<sup>234</sup> Allen, *Enclosure*, pp. 249-50;

During the nineteenth century it became increasingly difficult for farmers' widows and daughters in southern England to take over farm management. Landowners often regarded them as incompetent and required them to appoint a bailiff or to have a son help them run the farm. Women had difficulty in gaining access to capital, in managing a predominantly male labour force, and in marketing their goods; where widows did take on farm management, they often farmed as a holding operation until a son was old enough to take over.<sup>235</sup> There remained wide regional variations in women's economic roles, but the extent of regional differences concerning women farmers has been little explored.<sup>236</sup> Throughout the period 1750-1860, a much higher proportion of farmers throughout Wales were women than in England, and in Nantconwy, women comprised up to 22 per cent of farmers. This chapter therefore explores how and why women became farmers, and the role they played in running the farm, as well as the contribution of farmers' daughters and female farm servants.

We saw in Chapter 1 that in the mid-eighteenth century, almost all Nantconwy families were involved in agriculture, and that the number of rural craftsmen and tradesmen grew only slowly till the mid-nineteenth century. The number of labourers and smallholders increased until the 1830s: many occupied only a small amount of land and there was little demand for labourers other than those living on or near the farm who performed work similar to farm servants. This raises the question of whether farming, smallholding and labouring families

---

<sup>235</sup> L. Davidoff, 'The role of gender in the 'first industrial nation'; agriculture in England 1780-1850', in R. Crompton and M. Mann (eds.), *Gender and Stratification* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 208; N. Verdon, 'The 'lady farmer': gender, widowhood and farming in Victorian England', in R.W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Farmer in England 1650-1980* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 246-7.

<sup>236</sup> P. Sharpe, 'The female labour market in English agriculture during the Industrial Revolution; expansion or contraction?' in N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 51-75; A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), p. 403.

had additional sources of income through by-employment. The extent and nature of by-employment is investigated using inventories for the period 1750-1800 from the Nantconwy probate database, together with nominal record linkage between records detailing landholding, such as land tax, tithe commutation and estate records, and records containing occupational data such as parish or ratepayer records, licensing records, census enumerators' books and trade directories. Contemporary accounts by tour writers, topographers, nineteenth-century antiquarians, and from government reports and Eisteddfod essays yield additional information.

The research seeks to identify how widespread by-employment was and whether incomes from by-employment were used for subsistence or to enjoy a higher standard of living; to what extent by-employment served a conventional local market, or represented proto-industrial production for national or international markets; its place in the household economy and the division of labour within the family; and how by-employment incomes were affected by greater specialization and factory industrialization. This sheds new light on the role of by-employment in an upland rural context, as most existing research focuses on English lowland counties.

A number of theories have been put forward to explain the growth of multiple occupations in early modern Britain and their subsequent decline. Adam Smith famously argued that the division of labour, greater specialization and trade were the root causes of increased productivity and wealth.<sup>237</sup> The classic image of by-employment as one of a poor smallholding peasant family undertaking a craft like weaving was challenged in a large-scale study of multiple occupations in Kent and Cornwall by Overton et al., who found a spectrum

---

<sup>237</sup> A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (Oxford, 1993 edition) p. 11.

of by-employment from the risk-minimizing farmer-craftsman to aggressively entrepreneurial risk-takers who diversified their production in order to make more money.<sup>238</sup> Trades most likely to be combined with farming were weaving, milling, baking, brewing, building and woodworking. By-employment appears to have declined in most parts of England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as rural craftsmen lost their foothold on the land through enclosure and the creation of larger farms, and increased population density enabled greater specialization.<sup>239</sup> This was frequently accompanied by a transition from a family economy where family members worked together in the household enterprise, to a family wage economy associated with the rise of the male breadwinner.<sup>240</sup> There was however a transitional period when local societies changed from a household production economy to a wage economy, where families might mix farming, proto-industrial or craft production with waged employment to diversify their economic activities against the bad times and to make the most of the good.<sup>241</sup> This has been characterized as an adaptive family economy and might be regarded as family by-employment, which may have remained more common till a later date in sparsely populated areas.<sup>242</sup>

Up to the Civil War, by-employment largely provided goods and services for a local market, but before the industrial revolution peasant household handicrafts developed in certain regions increasingly producing goods for national and international markets.<sup>243</sup> This proto-industrial production often started as a rural by-employment using cheap labour which was

---

<sup>238</sup> Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, p. 70.

<sup>239</sup> Martin, 'Village traders', p. 185; C.A. Crompton, 'An exploration of the craft and trade structure of two Hertfordshire villages, 1851-1891', *Local Historian* (1998), p. 155.

<sup>240</sup> L. Tilly and J.W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (London, 1989).

<sup>241</sup> Wall, 'Adaptive family economy', pp. 265, 294.

<sup>242</sup> S.A.J. Keibek and L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Early modern rural by-employments: a re-examination of the probate inventory evidence', *AgHR* 61 (2013), p. 271.

<sup>243</sup> See e.g. J. D. Marshall, 'Stages of industrialisation in Cumbria', in P. Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 140-145.

previously under-employed for part of the agricultural year, which afforded a competitive advantage over urban producers. Towns located in the manufacturing zones were the main centres of trade and commerce, with much of the profit accruing to middle-men, either under the putting-out system, or who purchased the manufactured goods from independent local producers. Ultimately, cottage industry could become a full-time family occupation.<sup>244</sup> In some cases, proto-industrialization acted as a springboard for the next stage of industrialization because it led to capital accumulation, market connections, entrepreneurial skills and agricultural progress. But not all proto-industrial regions went on to develop factory industries: capital accumulated in proto-industry might shift into non-industrial investments such as farming, brewing, inn-keeping and retail trading.<sup>245</sup> In these areas, the loss of proto-industrial employment could have severe economic and social repercussions.

## **2. Family and capitalist farms in Nantconwy**

### **Family labour and employees**

Shaw-Taylor's framework of a spectrum from smallholdings to capitalist farms raises a number of issues, including the accuracy of data on farm size and the number of men employed; differences between labour-intensive arable farms and more capital-intensive pastoral farms; the respective roles of family and employed labour; the amount of work undertaken by female family members and employees; and the role of communal cooperation.

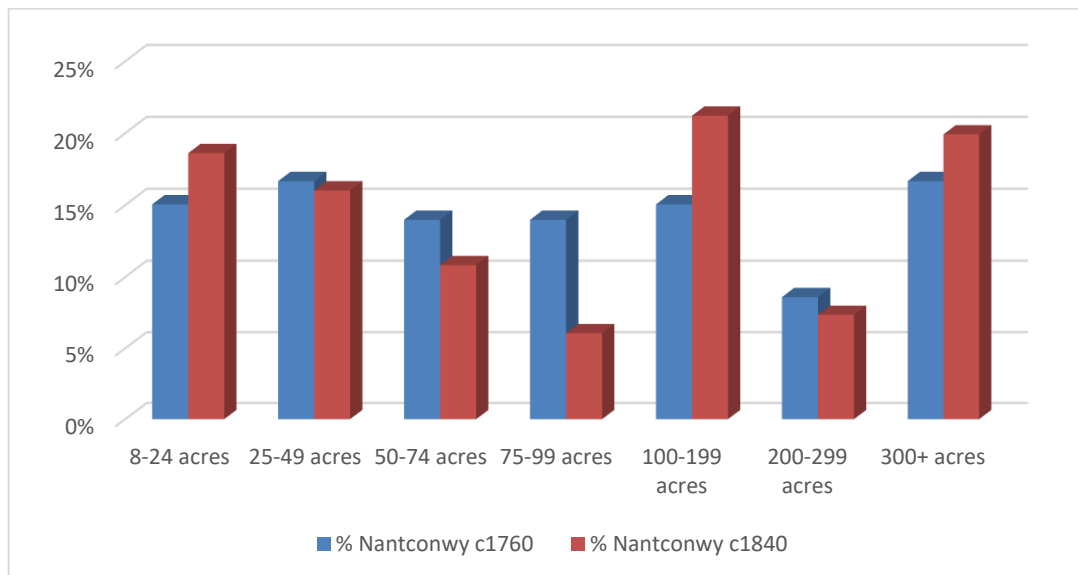
---

<sup>244</sup> F.F. Mendels, 'Proto-industrialization: the first phase of the industrialization process', *JEC* 32 (1972), pp. 242-3; M. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700 - 1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London, 1994), p. 67; L.A. Clarkson, *Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of Industrialization?* (Basingstoke, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

Farm size in Nantconwy does not appear to have changed significantly over the period 1750 to 1860. The distribution of farm sizes around 1770 was assessed from five estate surveys undertaken in the 1760s to the 1780s, and a further three surveys around 1800 where the farms were known from land tax records to have remained unchanged.<sup>246</sup> These yielded acreage data for 191 farms representing 77 per cent of Nantconwy farms paying land tax. Sheepwalk was not always included in the survey acreage and a number of farms also had access to large areas of common land or waste.

*Figure 13, Distribution of Nantconwy farm sizes c.1770 and c.1840*



Sources: For c.1770 see footnote 246; for c.1840; TNA IR 18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67.

Data for farm size around 1840 was calculated from tithe commutation surveys produced for all Nantconwy parishes except Eidda. By this time, some areas of common and waste had become separate holdings or added to existing farms, though 2,000 acres of common and the extensive Penmachno sheepwalks where ownership was disputed were excluded from the titheable acreages. However this was offset by farm splitting and the growth of

<sup>246</sup> NLW Gwydir 2; BUA Bangor Mostyn 5959; GA XD/38/214; BUA Bangor Mostyn 6058; 'Gwydir terrier'; NLW Gwydir 70; GA XD/131/6 (Plan of Cwm Celyn, Bettws y coed, 1850).

smallholdings, leaving the median size of farm unchanged at 90 acres both around 1770 and in 1840 (Figure 13).

The male occupational estimates from baptismal registers suggested that there were about 0.6 labouring families to every farmer in mid-eighteenth century Nantconwy, and that farms were worked principally by family labour and farm servants. The peak proportion of agricultural labourers was probably reached in the 1810s, with an estimated 1.2 labourers' families to every farmer.

Data from the 1851 census has often been used to assess both farm size and male labour employed, though some historians have questioned its accuracy for a number of reasons. Small farms were under-recorded in the census compared to the number of land occupiers recorded in the tithe records of c.1840 or the later Agricultural Returns: in the 1851 census, only 3.4 per cent of 'farmers' occupied farms of less than 5 acres, whereas in the 1870 Agricultural Returns, nearly a quarter of agricultural holdings were in this category.<sup>247</sup> This probably arose because farm occupiers with another principle occupation frequently omitted to give farm size and employment details. In addition, about ten per cent of household heads who gave their occupation as 'farmer' failed to include acreage data.

Census data on the number of men employed are more problematic; indeed the 1851 Census report described the return of workpeople by farmers as 'purely tentative'. In particular, it was admitted that 'some uncertainty prevails as to whether the farmers returned all their indoor servants'.<sup>248</sup> By comparing the number of men employed against male farm

---

<sup>247</sup> D.R. Mills, 'Trouble with farms at the Census Office: an evaluation of farm statistics from the censuses of 1851-1881 in England and Wales', *AgHR* 47 (1999), pp. 58, 66; L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Family farms and capitalist farms in mid nineteenth-century England', *AgHR* 53 (2005), p. 164.

<sup>248</sup> *PP 1852-3, LXXXVIII* (1691), Census of Great Britain 1851; Population, pp. lxxviii-ix.

servants actually living in the farmhouse, a number of writers have found that live-in farm servants were frequently excluded from the figures for 'men employed'. This seems to have been a particular problem in pastoral areas where a higher proportion of farm servants were employed.<sup>249</sup> In Buckinghamshire on the other hand, only 27 households in the county failed to record farm servants in the total of 'men employed'.<sup>250</sup> A possible explanation for such wide regional discrepancies lies in local understanding of the term 'labourer'. In many parts of the country it was used to mean outdoor or non-resident farm employees, not including farm servants.<sup>251</sup> Confusion over nomenclature was particularly likely to have occurred in Wales, where the Welsh language instructions asked householders to return the number of *gweithwyr*, which implied living-out labourers who were usually married: this would have been widely understood to exclude the living-in farm servants, known as *gwas* and who performed most of the regular farm work.<sup>252</sup>

Nantconwy farmers and enumerators clearly had difficulty in following the 1851 census instructions concerning both farm acreage and the number of men employed. Faced with the uncertainty about the type of mountain land to be included, some farmers erroneously included all their mountain sheepwalk, while 12 per cent of farmers either declared that they did not know the acreage or did not provide a figure. No attempt was made to estimate the amount of additional rough pasture, mountain land or common. A further problem arose from lack of data for farms where the occupier had a main occupation other than farmer: of the 23 Nantconwy occupiers of farms over eight acres known from the earlier tithe records who did not give farmer as their occupation in the 1851 census, only two supplied acreage details.

---

<sup>249</sup> J.A. Sheppard, 'East Yorkshire's agricultural labour force in the mid-nineteenth century', *AgHR* IX (1961), p. 45; P.M. Tillott, 'Sources of inaccuracy in the 1851 and 1861 censuses', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 119; Thomas, 'Carmarthenshire', p. 65.

<sup>250</sup> Shaw-Taylor, 'Family and capitalist farms', p. 176.

<sup>251</sup> Tillott, 'Sources of inaccuracy', p. 119.

<sup>252</sup> *PP 1851*, XLIII (1339), Forms and Instructions, p. 8; Jenkins, *Agricultural Community*, p. 77.

While most of the holdings concerned were fairly small, some larger farms were also excluded, such as a 496 acre farm in charge of a bailiff, and a 131 acre farm in Bettws y coed occupied by a slater and plasterer. Altogether, these omissions meant that only 57 per cent of the 46,325 acres included in the Nantconwy tithe commutation surveys (which excluded large areas of common land in Penmachno) were accounted for in the 1851 census.<sup>253</sup>

*Table 21, Male labour over 14 years old on Nantconwy farms in the 1851 census*

	<b>Farmers*</b>	<b>Farms employing men in census</b>	<b>Farms with live-in male servants not declared in census**</b>	<b>Men employed declared in census</b>	<b>Live-in male servants not declared in census**</b>	<b>Sons working on farm</b>
Total	264	89	64	158	73	136
Percentage		34%	24%			

\*Note: 'Farmers' includes all those who gave farmer as their occupation, or as part of a dual occupation, and women classified as 'farming widow'.

\*\*Based on the number of live-in farm servants over 14, less the number of men stated as employed by each farm; this is an under-estimate, as some of the 'men employed' declared in the census would have lived in separate housing.

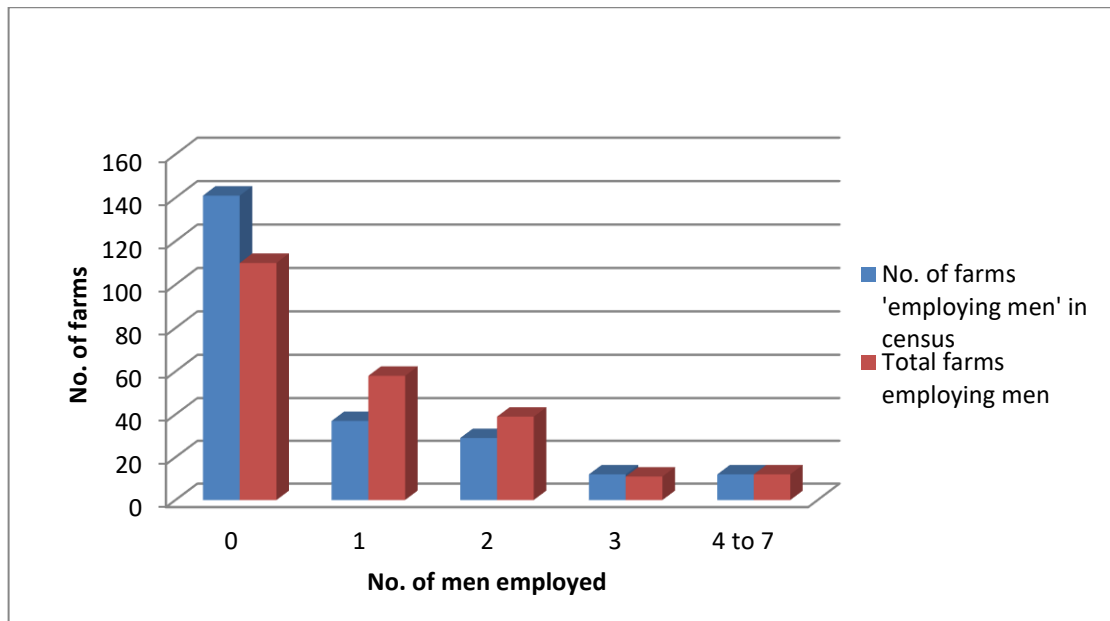
Information on the number of men employed on Nantconwy farms was also unreliable. Three census enumeration districts provided no data on men employed. The census compilers assumed that where a farmer made no return on the number of labourers employed, this meant they did not employ any labourers.<sup>254</sup> This was not the case in Nantconwy: of the 264 farmers in the 1851 census, 89 (34 per cent) were shown as employing one or more men. However a further 64 farmers who did not record employing any labourers had live-in male farm servants over the age of 14, and farmers who did record men employed often had more male live-in farm servants than the number of men they reported as employing (Table 21).

<sup>253</sup> Excludes Eidda, for which there was no tithe commutation survey.

<sup>254</sup> *PP 1852-3, LXXXVIII (1691)*, p. lxxix.

There was clearly a significant overall under-recording of men employed on Nantconwy farms. A lower estimate of the number of men employed would therefore be the number of men stated as employed (158), plus the known live-in servants not included in the men employed figure (73), a total of 231. In addition to the 134 male farm servants living on farms, 114 Nantconwy agricultural labourers lived outside the farmhouse, some of whom must have been included in the men employed total. This gives an upper limit of 248 men employed, not including sons and other male relatives. The proportion of male farm employees over 14 in Nantconwy not included in the census figures was therefore between 32 per cent and 36 per cent.

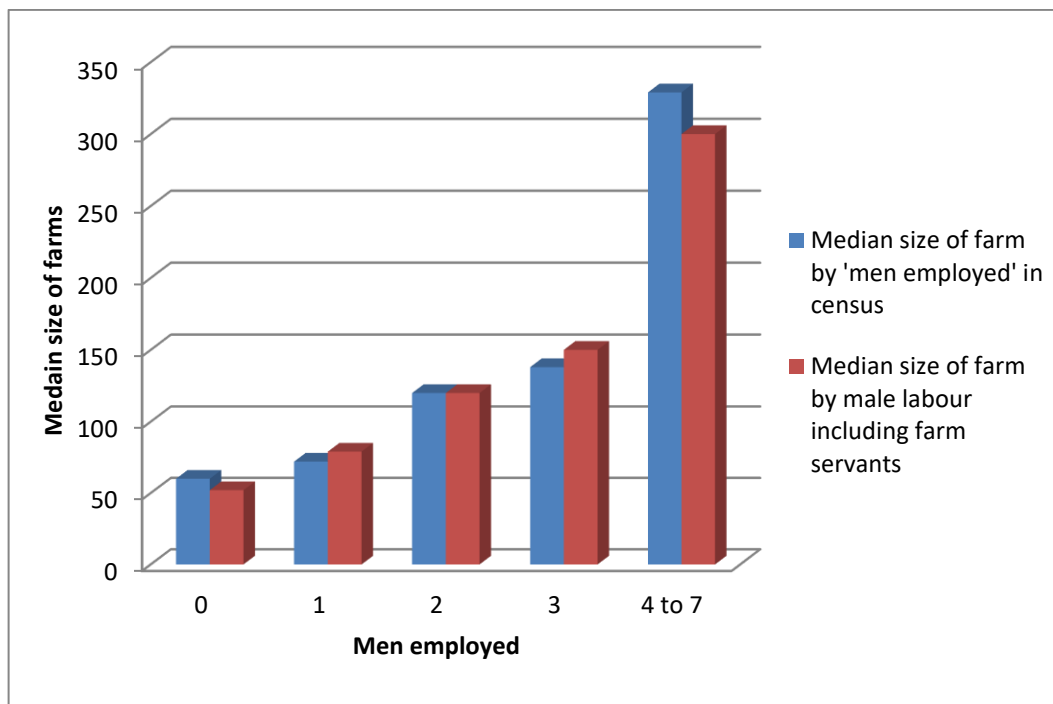
*Figure 14, 'Men employed' and total male servants over 14 living in farms in 1851 census*



Including the minimum number of missing farm servants increases the proportion of farms employing two or more men from 21 per cent to 27 per cent covering 47 per cent of the acreage, and decreases farms employing no men from 61 per cent to 48 per cent, covering

31 per cent of the recorded area (Figure 14). Even so, Nantconwy would still be characterized as an area of predominantly family farms, using Shaw-Taylor's definition of an area where over 25 per cent of farmland employed no adult males. Most Nantconwy farms under 50 acres employed only family male labour and the median size of farm employing one man was 79 acres. The maximum number of men employed was seven, at the mixed 500 acre farm of Hafod Ifan in Eidda, while the largest farm in the area, 962 acre Glynllugwy in Gwydir Township, employed six men (Figure 15).

Figure 15, Median Nantconwy farm size (acres) by 'men employed'

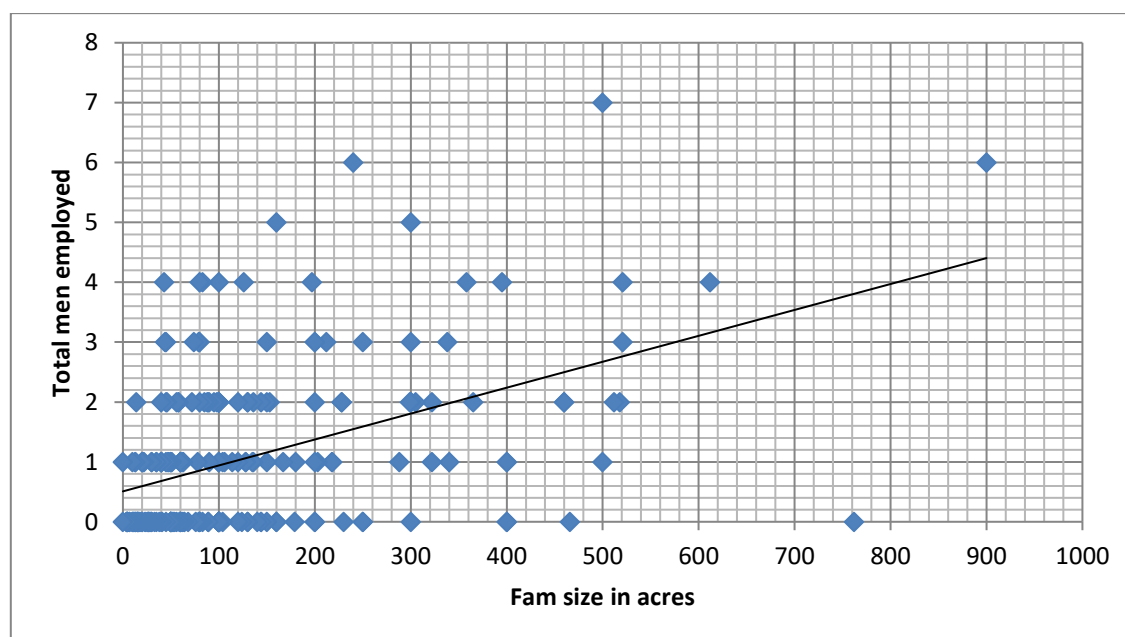


Welsh farmers generally preferred to employ live-in farm servants, both because of the year round requirements of looking after stock, and because it was cheaper to board servants than to raise cash for wages.<sup>255</sup> Low margins in Nantconwy's mainly pastoral economy meant that farms could only be staffed to meet the routine needs of stock rearing, milking and butter

<sup>255</sup> Howell, *Land and People*, p. 94.

making in summer, and feeding and mucking out stock in winter.<sup>256</sup> Married labourers often lived in cottages on the farm and were given board, in which cases their wages were about 40 per cent lower than those without board.<sup>257</sup> This system became even more prevalent later in the nineteenth century, the 1867 Report of the Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture stating that ‘the agricultural labourer as understood in England, viz. as a man providing his own food and that of his family and dependent altogether on wages he received from his employer, is comparatively rare over a large part of Wales’.<sup>258</sup>

Figure 16, Nantconwy male employment including farm servants by farm size



There was no clear relationship between size of farm and the number of men employed; a few farms over 400 acres claimed to employ no male labour, though some farms of under

<sup>256</sup> J. Gibson, *Agriculture in Wales* (London, 1879), pp. 26-27.

<sup>257</sup> *PP 1834*, XXX (44), Report on the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws, Appendix B1, Answers to Rural Queries, pp. 641-2a.

<sup>258</sup> Quoted in *PP 1893-4*, XXXVI (C.6894), Royal Commission on the Agricultural Labourer, Vol. II, Summary Report, p. 8, which added that this was still the norm in 1893.

100 acres employed four men (Figure 16). These differences reflect a number of factors: the inaccuracies in the data on both farm size and men employed, the extent of more labour-intensive arable cultivation on the farm, and the amount of family labour used. In addition to men employed, 136 sons aged 15 and above were recorded in the 1851 census as ‘farmer’s son’, or ‘at home’. The average number of male family members across all Nantconwy farms was 1.4, just below the national average, though this figure was affected by the fact that 22 per cent of Nantconwy farmers in 1851 were women. The number of sons and other male relatives was therefore higher than the national average. Some farms were clearly small enough to be run by a single farmer, or more likely a farming couple. This shows most clearly where sons living at home were *not* employed on the farm, though this occurred in only a small number of cases – 19 sons working mainly in craft occupations or quarrying, compared to 136 working on the farm. On the other hand, a third of farms employed two or more male family members (Table 22). There was therefore a strong trend for at least one son to work on larger farms when old enough; where a farmer did not have sons of working age or they had left home, male farm servants or labourers were more likely to be employed. The male workforce also included 21 boys aged 10 to 14, four of whom were sons of the farmer; they went under the designation of ‘farm boy’ ‘errand boy’ or for older lads, ‘farm servant’. The younger boys would not generally have been paid: they were often from overburdened labourers’ families and were taken into the farmhouse on the basis of their keep.<sup>259</sup>

*Table 22, Male family members working on Nantconwy farms*

Number of male family members aged 15+					
	0	1	2	3	4
Number of farms	21	151	57	21	4
Percentage	8%	59%	22%	8%	2%

<sup>259</sup> H. Evans, *The Gorse Glen* (Liverpool, 1948), p. 166.

Reliance on family labour increased in an attempt to cut costs after the Napoleonic Wars, and again during the 1840s economic depression. Sons were frequently described in the census as 'agricultural labourer employed on farm', but would generally not have been paid. They were rewarded with a portion at marriage, help on setting up their own farm, or in taking over the farm tenancy as the last child remaining at home.<sup>260</sup> This way of life was still to be found on Welsh farms in the 1940s.

There was a marked tendency in England for women to withdraw from farming work during the nineteenth century, though a higher proportion of women undertook farm work in highland and pastoral areas in 1851 than in southern arable areas.<sup>261</sup> There are well-known problems with the recording of women's employment in nineteenth-century censuses, and the role that female servants played on farms has been much debated.<sup>262</sup> Nevertheless, women comprised 24 per cent of the recorded Welsh agricultural workforce in 1851 and constituted up to 36 per cent of farm employees in Nantconwy.<sup>263</sup> In the 1851 census, the precise role of women farm servants was not clear, but the 1861 census provided more detail on the degree of specialization amongst women farm servants in Nantconwy: 36 per cent of the 106 female servants were described as dairymaids, 13 per cent as general farm servants, and 51 per cent as house servants.

It is likely that many of these house servants would also have undertaken some farm duties, especially on smaller farms where there was less division of labour. All women servants in north Wales worked in the fields when required, and planting and gathering potatoes, milking, making butter and cheese, looking after farmyard animals, turning and stacking turf, and

---

<sup>260</sup> Jenkins, *Agricultural Community*, p.80.

<sup>261</sup> N. Verdon, *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 196

<sup>262</sup> See Verdon, *Rural Women Workers* pp. 80-83 for a summary of the debate.

<sup>263</sup> *PP 1893-4*, XXXVI (C.6894), p. 10.

assisting with the hay harvest appear to have been standard women's work throughout north Wales.<sup>264</sup> In evidence to the 1867 Parliamentary Commission considering whether the employment of females in agriculture had an injurious effect on their morals or their proper training for domestic duties, various north Wales clergymen gave reassurance that women farm servants were now mainly employed in 'domestic duties', which were however described as including milking, feeding pigs, planting potatoes and making hay. Other functions, such as loading or spreading muck, chaff-cutting, thrashing, harrowing and sheep shearing were performed by women in certain areas, especially where there was a shortage of male farm labour due to competition from quarries (Figure 17).<sup>265</sup>

*Figure 17, Women shearing sheep near Bettws y coed*<sup>266</sup>



<sup>264</sup> T. Rowlandson, 'Agriculture of North Wales', *JRASE* VIII (1846), p. 572.

<sup>265</sup> *PP* 1867-8, XVII (4068), Employment of Children etc., First Report, p. viii, p. 31; *PP* 1893-4, XXXVI (C.6894), p. 11.

<sup>266</sup> David Cox, 'Sheep shearing', Birmingham Museums (1849).

A clear-cut gender division of labour was still very much apparent in south-west Wales farm organization at the end of the nineteenth century, with men responsible for the cultivation of crops and looking after horses and store cattle and women undertaking dairying, work in the farmyard, butter and cheese-making, gathering hay and binding corn, tending cattle, cleaning stables, loading dung carts and cultivating potatoes.<sup>267</sup> In Nantconwy, where crops played a minor and decreasing role in local agriculture, there does not appear to have been such a strict gender division of labour and women's roles also included shepherding, sheep shearing and collecting peat.

In the 1851 census, farmers' wives and daughters over the age of 14 outnumbered female servants on Nantconwy farms by two to one, with 174 wives, 103 daughters and 132 servants. Wives probably spent some of their time on family duties, though in the early twentieth century it was estimated that Welsh smallholders' wives worked 80 per cent of their time on the farm.<sup>268</sup> Instructions for the 1861 census were that 'Sons or daughters employed at home or on the farm, may be returned – *'Farmer's Son'*, *'Farmer's Daughter'*, but the 1861 CEBs for Dolwyddelan and Gwydir usefully categorized sons and daughters in the same way as farm servants. Thus we can see that in these two parishes, 11 farmers' daughters acted as dairymaids, two as house servants and two as general farm servants.

Sons were most frequently described in 1861 as carters or shepherds, giving a clear impression that wherever possible, sons and daughters fulfilled the leading farm hand roles before paid farm servants were employed. House servants were likely to be employed in specific circumstances: where there were not enough daughters once dairying was taken

---

<sup>267</sup> Jenkins, *Agricultural Community*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>268</sup> E. Thomas, *The Economics of Smallholdings: a Study based on a Survey of Small Farming in Carmarthenshire* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 54.

care of, or in addition to a dairymaid on large farms; if the farmer was a widower or bachelor; or if the farmer's wife had several young children to look after. Women farmers were also more likely to engage domestic help, giving them more time to undertake the farm management. Where farms were attached to inns or took in lodgers or visitors the likelihood of house servants being employed also increased.

The amount of male and female family labour was significant – an average of 2.6 family members per farm (counting wives as 80 per cent). The role of female farm servants was also material. Taking a lowest estimate (assuming the lower estimate of male farm workers of 231, and that 51 per cent of female servants on farms were engaged purely in domestic work), the average number of adult male and female family and employed workers on Nantconwy farms was 3.9. If female servants were counted as full time, an average of 4.3 family members and employees worked on Nantconwy farms. The majority of Nantconwy farms may have been family farms insofar as the majority of farm work was undertaken by family members, but this does not mean that they were necessarily small, either in terms of acreage or of total labour force. Whether work was undertaken by family members or by employees was largely determined by whether there were sufficient family members of the right age rather than by size of farm.

### **Co-operative farming**

Cooperation also reduced the need for employed labour on Nantconwy farms, where the wider family and neighbours supplied much of the extra labour needed for hay harvest and sheep shearing. Lord Willoughby, the owner of the Gwydir estate, issued a challenge in a London newspaper around 1840 to see if anyone could match the example on one of his Dolwyddelan farms, where the tenant John Jones, his son, grandson and great-grandson

were to be seen mowing hay, with his wife, daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter raking it in.<sup>269</sup> Cooperation between Welsh farmers at harvest time was a long-standing tradition. In his tour through north Wales at the end of the eighteenth century, the Rev. John Evans described how:

'They form societies of assistance, called *Cymmorthen Cynhauaf*. As soon as one or two farmers have finished their own [harvest] . . . they repair, with their servants and horses, to assist their backward neighbour. This they do without any other fee or reward than their maintenance, and the consciousness that arises from the performance of an act of brotherly kindness.'<sup>270</sup>

In mid-nineteenth-century north Wales, co-operation also extended to ploughing. Many small farmers did not possess a horse, and even a 100 acre farm might only have one; it was therefore common to share with a neighbour or hire a plough at 10s an acre. Sheep shearing was also a communal activity, when neighbours mutually assisted one another on appointed days.<sup>271</sup> Co-operative sheep shearing lasted well into the twentieth century; Thomas Fairbank who farmed Dyffryn Mymbyr, Capel Curig, in the 1930s described how:

'We need forty men to shear the Dyffryn flock in one day, so I scarcely see John Davies and Thomas [the farm workers], who are away each day helping neighbours so that all the farms for miles round will send us help . . . For a fortnight they have been shearing from morn till night.'<sup>272</sup>

Smallholders and other non-agriculturalists might also help with shearing, in return for the right to cut peat on the farmer's mountain land.<sup>273</sup> Where farmers let cottages on the farm to quarrymen and others, this often went with an expectation of help at harvest as well. Although mutual help in Nantconwy was not developed to the same extent as in the potato-setting

---

<sup>269</sup> E. C. Roberts, *Dolwyddelan a'i Chumeriadau Hynod [Dolwyddelan and its Exceptional Characters]* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1924), p. 22.

<sup>270</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, pp. 350-351.

<sup>271</sup> Rowlandson, 'North Wales', p. 582.

<sup>272</sup> Firbank, *I Bought a Mountain*, pp. 125-6.

<sup>273</sup> J. G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973), p. 60.

farm and cottage groups of south Wales where an elaborate system of labour debts operated, the farmer might till a cottager's potato ground and help to manure and cart the crop, in return for the cottage family's help at peak times on the farm.<sup>274</sup>

As land hunger increased in the early nineteenth century, a market also developed to supply services to small farms and to make better use of larger farms where the tenant lacked capital to stock it to an optimal level. Occupiers might rent summer or winter grass from their neighbours, or exchange with one another.<sup>275</sup> In 1834 for example, Gwydir estate staff anxious to protect their new forestry plantations sent a warning letter to tenants who allowed their own sheep to graze in the Gwydir forestry in order to take in other people's sheep over winter on their pastures.<sup>276</sup> The consequences of these cooperative traditions were that farmers could manage with less capital and labour than would otherwise have been required, and that there was also relatively little work available for labourers over and above the regular workforce.

### **3. Women farmers**

#### **Number of women farmers** <sup>277</sup>

During the nineteenth century the proportion of women in charge of farms was much higher in Wales than in England: 15 per cent of Welsh farmers in 1851 were women compared to 9 per cent in England and Wales as a whole, with Caernarvonshire having one of the highest percentages within Wales. These women were predominantly widows: during most of this

---

<sup>274</sup> Jenkins, *Agricultural Community*, p. 52; *PP 1893-4*, XXXVI (C.6894), pp. 24-5.

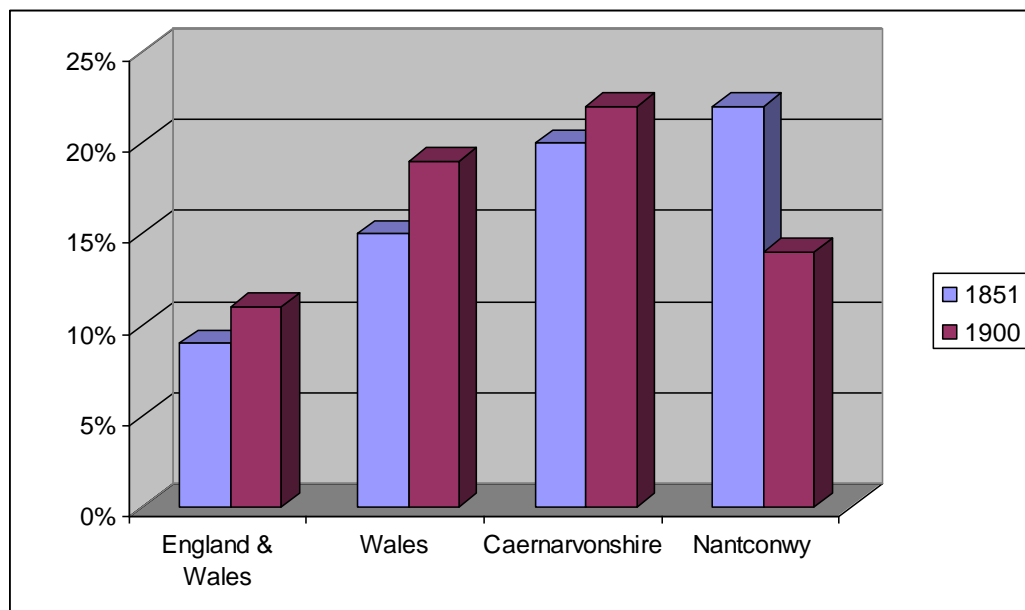
<sup>275</sup> L. Kennedy, *The Present State of Tenancy in the Highland and Grazing Districts in Great Britain* (London, 1829), p. 205.

<sup>276</sup> GA XD 38/362, John Duncan to L. Kennedy, 26 March 1841.

<sup>277</sup> An extended version of this research was published in: F. Richardson, 'Women farmers of Snowdonia, 1750-1900', *Rural History* 25 (2014), pp. 161-81.

period, married women could not hold property in their own right and were designated in the censuses as 'farmer's wife' or as having no occupation. Both the percentage and the absolute number of women farmers in Wales increased during the late nineteenth century, as more men than women left farming, though in Nantconwy the number of women farmers declined after the sale of many Gwydir estate farms in the 1890s (Figure 18).

Figure 18, Proportion of women farmers in 1851 and 1901



Source: 1851 and 1901 censuses.

For the period before census occupational data became available in 1841, I estimated the proportion of women farmers from land tax returns for 1748 to 1810. Tenant and farm size data were available from estate rentals and surveys and from the tithe commutation records of around 1840. With the exception of tithe recipients and excise officers, all land tax payers in Nantconwy occupied farmland. The minimum size of farm paying tax in 1748 was 9 acres in the more fertile Conwy valley, though the median size for farms occupied by women, where this could be ascertained from contemporary estate records, was 98 acres. The 1748 land tax returns suggested that 10 per cent of Nantconwy land occupiers were women, but estate

rentals told a different story: on the Berthddu, Gwydir and Penrhyn estates which owned nearly all the land in six of the eight Nantconwy parishes, 18 per cent of farm tenants in 1750 were women (Table 23).<sup>278</sup>

*Table 23, Nantconwy women farmers 1750-1861*

Source	c.1750		1796		c.1840		1851		1861	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Land tax	21	10	30	14						
Estate rentals	25	18	26	14						
Tithe commutation					41	16				
Census							60	21	35*	15

\*Incomplete census data for 1861

Sources: GA XQL/LT 2/1-7; NLW Nerquis Hall 1425, 'Survey & valuation of the lands of Watkin Edward Wynne Esq.' (1792); BUA Bangor Mostyn 5649, 'Mostyn rental' (1799); NLW Sale Catalogue Caern. 199; NLW 9727D; FRO Soughton Hall D/SH/824, 'Surveys of estates belonging to John Wynne Esq' (1808); TNA IR 18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67; 1851 and 1861 CEBs.

The under-recording of women in the 1748 land tax records arose for several reasons. By 1750, many of the seventeenth-century farm units had been subdivided into two or more holdings, though often only the tenant of the historic main holding was named in land tax records. Estate rentals on the other hand usually recorded women as tenants in their own right, or occasionally sharing a holding, as did men. Tax records were also more likely to be out of date, often recording a woman occupier's deceased husband as the taxpayer for several years after his death. Overall, it seems likely that the proportion of women farmers around 1750 was closer to the 18 per cent shown in estate rentals.

By 1800, more farms had been sub-divided, increasing the number of holdings paying land tax by 13 per cent and the number of women tax payers had increased to 14 per cent. The breakdown of land tax to individual holdings clearly produced a more accurate picture: an

<sup>278</sup> BUA Penrhyn 1670, 'Account for properties in county Caernarvon' (1748); GA XD/38/234, 'Rent collection book, Gwydir Estate' (1758-9); NLW Gwydir BRA 2; BUA Bangor Mostyn 5448, 'Rentrole of Robert Wynn of Berthddu' (1750).

analysis of 207 Nantconwy tenants of the Gwydir, Mostyn, Nerquis Hall, Soughton Hall and Wynnstay estates around 1800 also showed 14 per cent of farms being held by women. The tithe commutation records of around 1840, which provide an even more detailed picture of Nantconwy farm occupiers, show 16 per cent of holdings of over eight acres tenanted by women. (Eight acres was taken as the typical landholding where farming was the main occupation and similar to the minimum size of holding paying land tax). The average size of farms held by women was virtually identical to those held by men, with women holding 16.6 per cent of farm acreage. The higher percentage of women farmers recorded in the 1851 census (22 per cent) arises because of the inclusion of all holdings where the occupier recorded their occupation as farmer, some of which were under eight acres.

### **Access to land**

As over 90 per cent of the land in Nantconwy was owned by a small number of major landowners, obtaining a farm tenancy was the first requirement for women to become farmers. The practice of widows taking over farm leaseholds or copyholds had been widespread in England at earlier periods, but declined during the eighteenth century, as landlords ran out beneficial leases and leases for lives to create larger farms let at rack rents.<sup>279</sup> Although annual tenancies at will were the norm in eighteenth-century Nantconwy, landowners appear to have been happy to continue the longstanding tradition of giving the widow the first option on the farm.<sup>280</sup> This practice was confirmed in evidence to the 1890s Royal Commission on Land: Welsh landowners quoted numerous examples of de facto hereditary tenancies, where the same family had occupied a farm for over two hundred, and in some cases up to five hundred years. For example, Colonel Hughes of the Wynnstay estates, the largest estate in Wales, stated that: 'I cannot recall any case where the widow

---

<sup>279</sup> Allen, *Enclosure*, pp. 93-101.

<sup>280</sup> Howell, *Rural Poor*, p. 40.

was not allowed to succeed her dead husband as tenant if she so wished, or failing her, the son or other near relative.'<sup>281</sup>

A number of factors might account for the late survival of de facto hereditary tenancies in Wales. In the mid-eighteenth century ensuring that farms remained tenanted was a major priority, and the succession of family members avoided the risk of farms being 'on hand' producing no rent or requiring the agent to farm the holding himself. As sheep numbers increased during the nineteenth century, the practice of *cynefin* (hefting sheep to know their unfenced boundaries on the mountains, passed on from ewe to lamb) also meant that maintaining the same stock on a mountain farm became of great importance, and this was easier to achieve if the tenancy was taken over by a family member who inherited the stock. The attachment of north Wales farmers to their family holdings also created an important bond between tenants and landowners. This attachment was typified in Daniel Owen's novel '*Gwen Tomos*', where the hero relates how his family had been tenants on Wern Ddu farm for four or five generations, and 'its main concern was that one of them should always be a tenant at Wern Ddu'.<sup>282</sup> Indeed some estates held back from amalgamating holdings because, as Lord Newborough's agent pointed out in 1827, 'the dispossession of any of the old families would create such lamentation and woe'.<sup>283</sup> In hard times, agents found it difficult to obtain payment of rents, but the ultimate sanction of eviction meant that hereditary tenants were more likely to reach some accommodation with the estate. The general shortage of capital amongst Welsh farmers and their reluctance to improve husbandry methods also provided little incentive for agents to take a risk on new tenants with no attachment to the estate.

---

<sup>281</sup> J. E. Vincent, *The Land Question in North Wales* (London, 1896), p. 171.

<sup>282</sup> D. Owen, *Gwen Tomos* (1894, English translation by T. C. Williams and E. R. Harris, Wrexham, 1963), p. 16.

<sup>283</sup> Quoted in Howell, *Rural Poor*, p. 37.

Despite the clear mutual advantage of hereditary tenancies to both tenants and landowners, this did not mean that widows were generally given *preferential* treatment compared to other tenants, and estates do not appear to have afforded them greater latitude on arrears. For example, when Jane Williams applied to take over the family's 13 acre Fronfadog farm in Trefriw a year after her husband had suffered a fatal quarrying accident, the Gwydir agent recommended her case because 'she is left with 3 of a family, the oldest about 12, no arrears stands in the Gwydir books against them.'<sup>284</sup>

Widows, or indeed elderly male farmers who were farming on a reduced scale, could be particularly vulnerable at times of significant rent increase, which often led to a turnover of tenants. Women farmers responded in a number of ways to the challenge of high rent increases in the 1760s. Where their husband had accumulated two or more holdings, widows might pass a minor holding to another family member: when the Gwydir Estate increased the rent of Margaret Jones' 600 acre Dolwyddelan farm, Bwlch Cynnyd, by 26 per cent in 1767, she gave up a smaller 72 acre farm to her youngest son. By contrast, Ellin Williams, who held a quarter of Coetmore farm in Dolwyddelan, was unable to pay a proposed doubling of her rent from £8 10s to £17, but was given instead a reduced 16 acre holding plus a share of 1,600 acres of rough mountain land at £2 14s a year.<sup>285</sup>

Nevertheless, the degree of paternalism varied according to the landowner, the agent's recommendations and the financial position of the estate. When rents leapt again during the Napoleonic Wars, one more paternalistic landowner, Maurice Wynn who owned the Pengwern estate in Penmachno, clearly took tenants' personal circumstances into account in deciding whether to follow his surveyor's recommendations. He amended a recommended

---

<sup>284</sup> GA XD 38/362, Letter of John Duncan, 6 May 1841.

<sup>285</sup> NLW Gwydir BRA 2-4.

increase of £5 for a 77 year-old tenant, Gwen Richard, to only 6s on account of her age. Wynn's elderly male tenants were given similar consideration, even those holding large farms.<sup>286</sup>

## Access to capital or stock

As well as obtaining land, women farmers in this predominantly stock-rearing region needed capital, mainly comprising cattle and sheep. To identify the extent to which women inherited farm stock, 98 male farmers' wills and 56 probate administration bonds plus their associated inventories from the parishes of Bettws y Coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno were analyzed for the period 1750-1858 (Table 24). The results demonstrated clearly that the vast majority of the male farmers who made wills wished to afford their wife the option of continuing farming. In most cases, bequests of money, household goods or farm stock to other family members formed a relatively small part of male farmers' personal estates, and bequests to children of the proverbial shilling were not uncommon. Sons and daughters who had not yet left home were typically left a portion, with £20 or £30 representing a good inheritance around 1800. Where there was a surviving wife, she was bequeathed all or part of the residue of her husband's personal estate in 93 per cent of cases. In only seven per cent of cases was a wife left a purely monetary bequest, with the farm stock going to other relatives, and in most cases this appeared to be because she was elderly.

*Table 24, Bequests in male farmers' wills from three Nantconwy parishes, 1750-1858*

To whom male farmers left residue of personal estate	Number	Percentage
Wife sole residue	34	35
Wife part residue	32	33
Monetary bequest to wife	5	5
Other	2	2
No wife	25	25

Source: NLW Bangor Diocese online probate records.

---

<sup>286</sup> NLW Elwes 1426.

Male tenant farmers appeared equally likely to leave their wife the residue of their personal estate whether or not there were sons or daughters. Of the 44 wills which named a widow and children, the residue was given to the widow in 24 cases, with monetary bequests being given to children, while the widow shared the residue with one or more children in 21 cases. Where sons and daughters had already married or left home with a portion and might already be established on their own farm tenancies, Nantconwy fathers generally appear to have felt they had done enough for them. Younger children, especially if they were under age, were most likely to be given a share of the residue with their mother. Ellis Williams of Garnedd, Dolwyddelan, for example, revoked bequests of £20 each to three daughters who had received dowries since his will was first written, provided a £30 portion to his son John, and left the residue of his estate to his widow Mary Jones together with their youngest son and daughter.<sup>287</sup>

The quarter of male farmers with no surviving widow also left all or a share of the residue of their estates to daughters and sisters in half of cases, and to male relatives in 62 per cent of cases. Altogether, this meant that women were nearly twice as likely as men to inherit farm stock from male farmers. Gwen Jones of Tyddyn du in Penmachno was typical of widows who took over running the farm. Her husband Edward Morgan died in 1793, leaving a personal estate valued at £113 8s, from which Gwen was to pay bequests of £20 to their son John Edwards and £25 to daughter Catherine. Most of the value of the estate Gwen inherited was in animals: 32 cattle, 85 sheep, an old mare and a colt, together worth £98. She continued to run the farm till at least 1799.<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>287</sup> NLW B/1770/69W, (Will of Ellis Williams, Garnedd, Dolwyddelan, 1770).

<sup>288</sup> NLW B/1793/154W, (Will of Edward Morgan, Tuddun du, Penmachno, 1793).

While the majority of husbands who made a will were content to leave all or part of the residue of their personal estate to their wife, in the expectation that property would pass to their children after her death, this family strategy would be upset if a widow remarried. At a time when married women had no property rights of their own, a widow's remarriage resulted in all her property passing to her new husband. Not only would this mean that the children of the first marriage were unlikely to inherit their father's moveable property, it also made it less likely that the farm tenancy would pass to them after their mother's death. A significant minority of Nantconwy husbands guarded against this danger by imposing punitive conditions in their wills in the event of their widow remarrying.<sup>289</sup> Ellis Williams of Garnedd left the residue of his estate shared between his widow and two younger children on condition that if she remarried, she would receive only £12, with her share going instead to the children. In some cases, the remarrying widow would be entitled only to 'bed and bedding', or in the case of one of the wealthiest widows of the district, Catherine Jones of Benardd, Penmachno, 'only one feather bed, bolster and bedclothes' with her share of the £476 estate going to her four daughters.<sup>290</sup> Before 1820, over 40 per cent of husbands imposed such conditions; after this date, remarriage penalties became less common, being mentioned in only 13 per cent of male farmers' wills. This may reflect a decline in the proportion of farmers dying while their children were under age.<sup>291</sup> Given the disincentive, whether moral or financial, it is not surprising that very few farmers' widows did remarry – a factor which served to maintain the high proportion of women farmers in Nantconwy.

---

<sup>289</sup> Re-marriage penalties became common in England during the seventeenth century: B. J. Todd, 'The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), pp. 73-5.

<sup>290</sup> NLW B1780/99W, (Will of Rees Jones, Penmachno, 1780).

<sup>291</sup> For declining mortality after 1820 see Wrigley & Schofield, *Population History*, p. 120.

Just under a third of male farmers in the Nantconwy sample who left a widow died without making a will and in these cases the widow was normally granted administration of her late husband's estate. By ecclesiastical law, the widow was entitled to a third of her husband's moveable property, with the remainder going to children. It is not clear whether intestate Nantconwy farmers left less to their widows than those who made wills. It is possible that men were less likely to make a will if there were no surviving children, though as a higher proportion of these widows continued farming, it appears that they must have inherited sufficient stock to do so. (See Table 25.) Indeed, given the chronic under-capitalization of Welsh farming, widows inheriting farm stock were probably better-capitalized than most farmers' sons seeking their first tenancy.

Why did Nantconwy men generally favour passing on their personal estate to their wife rather than to children? A possible explanation lies in the fact that a farming marriage was from the start very much a partnership. Children of both sexes received a similar portion when they married or when their parents died; women were nearly as likely as men to bring stock to the marriage and often brought access to land by inheriting a tenancy. Until the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, the property a woman brought to a marriage and anything she earned during the marriage came under the control of her husband, through the common law principle of coverture.<sup>292</sup> Thus to some extent male farmers appear to have been acting equitably in bequeathing to their wife the property she had brought to the marriage and helped to build up during the couple's farming partnership. Furthermore, few Nantconwy farmers were wealthy enough to enable their widow to retire from farming, so inheriting most of her husband's estate was essential to enable widows to continue to earn their livelihood and to provide for any under-age children.

---

<sup>292</sup> A.L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (Abingdon, 1993), p. 24.

## Farming know-how

One of the main objections to women becoming farmers in nineteenth-century England was that landlords were afraid they would not understand the business of farming and would consequently be unable to pay the rent.<sup>293</sup> In order to continue farming, a Nantconwy farmer's wife or daughter must either have possessed sufficient farming know-how herself or have obtained help from a son, other male relative, or from a senior male farm servant. Commenting on the proportion of women farmers in Wales in the half century before the Second World War, the agricultural writers Ashby and Evans were somewhat dismissive of women's role in farm management: 'As most of these were widows who are frequently helped by their sons, this [census data] is not conclusive as to the part played by women in farm management'.<sup>294</sup> It is therefore pertinent to look at information from contemporary sources about the part Nantconwy women played on the farm as farmers' wives and daughters and their role in farm management after becoming the head of household.

We have already seen that women remained involved in a wide range of tasks on Welsh farms. Farmers' wives were customarily in charge of the dairy, including butter and cheese production, and of farmyard animals such as calves, pigs and poultry; they played a major role in managing the farm, including training and looking after servants, taking care of finances and marketing dairy, farmyard and garden produce.<sup>295</sup> During the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, increasing specialization in agricultural regions, the growth of services available from local towns or large villages and the mechanization of spinning and cloth production all led to a reduced role for many English farmers' wives, and those aspiring to a more genteel lifestyle tended to withdraw from an active involvement in the farm. A

---

<sup>293</sup> Verdon, 'Lady farmer', p. 247.

<sup>294</sup> A.W. Ashby and I.L. Evans, *The Agriculture of Wales and Monmouthshire* (Cardiff, 1944), p. 76.

<sup>295</sup> A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919), pp. 46-53; R.B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850* (London, 1998), p. 151.

significant decline in living-in throughout many parts of England reduced the responsibility of farmers' wives for looking after farm servants and directing their work. Social pressures against women's involvement in field work also led in grain-growing regions to a more predominantly male labour force, and English women farmers would have found increasing difficulty in hiring day labourers and enforcing their authority over male labourers when they no longer overlooked the men's domestic lives as house-mistresses.<sup>296</sup>

*Figure 19, Dairying near Bettws y coed, c.1850*



Source: NLW, W. R. D., 'Near Bettws y coed' (c.1850). Permission to reproduce this print granted by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / National Library of Wales.

However the trend for the withdrawal of farmers' wives from farm management by the early nineteenth century was not universal: the scale and character of their labour was influenced

---

<sup>296</sup> Davidoff, 'Role of gender', p. 203.

by many factors, including status, income, farm size, location and type.<sup>297</sup> Dairying remained an important part of Nantconwy agriculture, as underlined by the Rev. John Evans who visited Nantconwy at the end of the eighteenth century: 'the farmers are chiefly dairy men: and make their rents from butter, wool, and lambs . . . and herds of goats'.<sup>298</sup> As most farms kept two to four milk cows with a few owning ten or more, and made butter and cheese, farmers' wives retained a vital role in dairying (Figure 19). Indeed they continued to play an active role on the farm throughout the nineteenth century: as the Penrhyn agent, Col. Sackville West informed the Royal Commission on Land in the 1890s, farmers and their wives worked very hard, invariably so in the case of small farms under 50 acres. The same point was made by three farmers giving evidence on behalf of all the farmers in Dolwyddelan parish: tenants, their wives, sons and daughters all took part in the work of the farm, as it would be impossible to pay the rents if wages had to be paid instead of the children's unpaid labour.<sup>299</sup>

Lack of technical education for girls was another factor advanced to explain the low proportion of women farmers in mid nineteenth-century England, but in Wales the traditional nature of farming imposed fewer such barriers to women. The general lack of innovation amongst Welsh farmers was emphasized on numerous occasions, the Gwydir estate land agent giving his opinion to the Royal Commission on Land that 'no important changes in farming had taken place in 50 years'.<sup>300</sup>

Welsh farming traditions would also have posed fewer barriers to women in marketing their produce. At the end of the eighteenth century, Welsh women played a leading role in

---

<sup>297</sup> Verdon, "....subjects deserving of the highest praise': farmers' wives and the farm economy in England, c.1700-1850', *AgHR* 51 (2003), p. 24.

<sup>298</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p. 205.

<sup>299</sup> RCL, Evidence, Vol. 1, p. 546, minute 12,058; p. 703, minute 15,543.

<sup>300</sup> *ibid.*, p. 645, minute 14,103.

marketing. The Rev. John Evans noted how at Shrewsbury ‘the business of buying and selling is chiefly conducted by women here, and through all the markets of North Wales’.<sup>301</sup> Surplus wool not needed for family use in clothing, blankets and coverlets was sold at Llanrwst, one of the major wool markets in Wales which set the trend for prices. Here Evans remarked that ‘few men are to be seen, the business being conducted by women’.<sup>302</sup> Before the railway age, store cattle and sheep were generally sold off Caernarvonshire farms to drovers, who paid for them on their return from Midland or London markets; women farmers would therefore have encountered little difficulty in the marketing their livestock, as well as their more usual female produce of butter, cheese and eggs.<sup>303</sup>

Farmers’ widows and the occasional daughter who took over the running of Nantconwy farms therefore had considerable practical experience. There is also ample evidence in estate correspondence and from witnesses to the Royal Commission on Land that women tenants were actively involved in the day-to-day management of their farms. After the Napoleonic Wars, the Gwydir estate tried to forbid the long-standing practice of paring and burning peat to clear old pastures for crops. The local agent had difficulty in enforcing new husbandry clauses in leases, and reported: ‘The tenants in all directions are playing the very devil with the grounds, ploughing meadows, push ploughing and burning, burning heath on the mountains.’ Amongst the culprits he named were Margaret Evans for burning heather, Margaret Jones, Coetmore for ploughing pasture, and Margaret Cadwaladr, Brynmwllach, for ploughing meadow.<sup>304</sup> The records of the manor court set up by the Gwydir estate in 1832 also showed women tenants involved in regulating the farming community, bringing presentments and being held responsible for rectifying problems identified by other tenants.

---

<sup>301</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p.5.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 68, 281.

<sup>303</sup> P. G. Hughes, *Wales and the Drovers* (London, 1943), p. 23; Howell, *Land and People*, p. 117.

<sup>304</sup> LA Ancaster 3 ANC 7/23/2/77, (Letter of J Fahy, 14 April 1819).

Ann Hughes of Garth, Llanrhychwyn, for example, was ordered in 1836 to repair her share of the fence between her farm and the one next door. In the same year, Laura Evans of Pandy was one of four tenants instructed to send their teams to repair the road through Trefriw meadows. Catherine Williams was one of fifteen Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn tenants who brought a presentment in 1844 about sheep straying from the mountain constantly trespassing upon the complainants' lands, destroying fences, eating up the produce and causing much annoyance.<sup>305</sup>

It does not appear that most women farmers relied more on sons or hired more male labour than male farmers. The average woman farmer's household in 1861 had 2.9 people working on the farm, mainly sons and/or daughters; 60 per cent of the labour was supplied by women and 41 per cent of women-headed farms had an all-female workforce. Nearly a quarter of women farmers' sons still living at home did not work mainly on the farm, but were employed elsewhere as quarrymen or miners. Sons were recorded in the census as farmer's son, farm servant, carter or shepherd, making clear that the mother was regarded as the farmer, except in a couple of cases where retired women farmers had obviously made the farm over to a son. It is therefore clear that most women farmers remained actively involved in running the farm rather than being official tenants only.

### **Women's desire to continue farming**

The 14 to 22 per cent of Nantconwy farms occupied by women was unusually high compared both to the proportion of women farmers found in earlier societies and to the overall incidence of female-headed households in England. By contrast, in early eighteenth-century Montgomeryshire, women on the Llwydiarth estate who often inherited land through leases

---

<sup>305</sup> 'Gwydir manor court book'.

for three lives comprised only nine per cent of farm tenants.<sup>306</sup> The proportion of English households headed by widows over the period 1574-1821 has been estimated at 12.9 per cent, with female-headed households declining for the period 1787-1865 to 9.2 per cent.<sup>307</sup>

Widows in eighteenth-century England generally continued to run their farms only if there was no son to take over. In seventeenth-century Berkshire, men used their wills to encourage their widow and son to share control of the farm, and widows who inherited while their son was under age often surrendered all or part of their freebench to the 'waiting heir' at his majority or marriage in return for houseroom and board in her son's house.<sup>308</sup> The high proportion of women farmers in Nantconwy therefore suggests that widows here were both more likely to become household heads, and remained farmers for longer, being less likely to surrender their farm to a son than English women farmers of an earlier period.

To investigate how many Nantconwy widows continued farming, and for how long, an attempt was made to trace the careers of widows from the male farmers' probate sample who had inherited all or part of the residue of their husband's farm stock (Table 25). Evidence of continued farming activity came from widows' own wills and inventories, poor rates, land tax, estate and tithe commutation records, and censuses. It was possible to trace 58 per cent of widows, and of these three quarters were found to have continued farming, in some cases for many years after their husband's death.<sup>309</sup> The patchy nature of the sources meant that

---

<sup>306</sup> Humphreys, *Crisis of Community*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>307</sup> P. Laslett, 'Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century', in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 147; J. Humphries, 'Female-headed households in early industrial Britain', *Labour History Review* 63 (1998), p. 58.

<sup>308</sup> Hill, *Women*, pp. 242, 251; B. Todd, 'Freebench and free enterprise: widows and their property in two Berkshire villages', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (1990), pp. 184-87.

<sup>309</sup> The longest period was 42 years, NLW B/1755/61W, (Will of Griffith Williams, Bwlch Cynnyd, Dolwyddelan, 1755), and B/1798/48, (Will of Margaret Hughes, Bwlch Cynnyd [Williams' widow], 1798).

many of the women not traced might have died within a few years of their husband. Somewhat surprisingly, women who were granted probate administration by bond were more likely to continue farming, perhaps because they were less likely to have children.

*Table 25, Careers of widows inheriting stock, 1750-1858*

How widow inherited stock	Total	Evidence of continued farming	No evidence of continued farming	Insufficient evidence	Percentage of total who continued farming	Percentage of women traced who continued farming
Bond	36	21	4	11	58	84
Will	73	26	12	35	36	68
<b>All</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>75%</b>

Sources: NLW Bangor Diocese online probate records; CA CEP 11/30-1; CEP14/14-5; GA XQL/LT 2/1-2, 2/5; GA XD/38/234-5; XD/131/61; NLW Gwydir 4; NLW 9727D; Bangor Mostyn 5794; TNA IR 18/48/7, 20, 61; 1841 and 1851 CEBs for Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno.

Widows who gave up farm management had a number of courses open to them. A few passed the management of the farm to a son or daughter but continued to live on the farm, and might still farm in a small way. Those with sufficient capital might sell up and move to Llanrwst, or remain in their parish as a moneylender, like Ann Cadwaladr who gave up the large Penmachno farm Tyddyn bach to live off the interest on loans and mortgages totaling £466 left by her deceased husband, a wealthy drover.<sup>310</sup> Sharing the farm or sub-letting all or part was another option: mothers were more likely to do this as sons or daughters established their own families, and they themselves became elderly.<sup>311</sup> In other cases, widows continued to farm for some years, but retired as they became too old to farm the mountains, especially if they had no children to take over. One such was Mary Thomas, who gave up her tenancy of the remote Llanrhychwyn mountain farm of Lledwigan in 1842, though she sought to do this on her own terms when a new tenant could be found who was prepared to buy her stock as a going concern.<sup>312</sup>

<sup>310</sup> NLW B1802/1291, 'Inventory of Anne Cadwaladr, Tyddyn Bach, Penmachno' (1802).

<sup>311</sup> The Penrhyn agent informed the Royal Commission on Land that farm sub-letting was sometimes practised, especially by widows: RCL Evidence Vol. 1, p. 544, minute 12,010.

<sup>312</sup> 'Gwydir Letter Book, Letter of Mary Thomas', (11 February 1842).

While increased wealth and ideas of respectability led many English farmers' widows and spinster daughters to make their homes in market towns, living off a private income, ideals of 'separate spheres', with women as homemakers, were slow to permeate rural Wales. This was partly as a result of the language barrier, but when the cult of domesticity did become more influential later in the nineteenth century under the influence of Methodist ministers and more widespread education of girls, it appears that by no means all Welshwomen subscribed to the domestic ideal. The new social norms were negotiated with existing aspects of women's culture which emphasized communal solidarity, mutual dependency and complexities of kinship and neighbourhood.<sup>313</sup> Moreover, relatively few Nantconwy farming widows inherited sufficient wealth to fund a genteel retirement.

Although tenancies tended to remain in the family, it was by no means assured that a young adult son or daughter would be granted the succession of a large farm if a widow resigned her holding. Many widows therefore continued at least nominally in charge of the farm until they died, to ensure economic opportunities for their children and grandchildren. The history of the Hughes family of Brynygefeiliau in Gwydir township illustrates how the resources of large farm could be redistributed over time to accommodate changing family needs, within the custom of the widow remaining the household head:

- Grace Hughes took over the tenancy of the 640 acre farm from the Gwydir estate when she was widowed in 1839.
- In 1841 she was 55 and shared the farm with her eldest son Robert. Two younger sons, Maurice and William, also lived at home helping on the farm; her son-in law Price Davies

---

<sup>313</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes; Men and Women in the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987), p. 258; R. Jones, "Separate spheres'?: women, language and respectability in Victorian Wales', in G.H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 200, 213.

worked as an agricultural labourer, living with his wife Margaret and their children in a cottage on the farm.

- By 1851, the eldest son Robert had moved out to take on a smaller neighbouring farm of his own. The youngest son William had married and taken over a quarter of Brynygefeiliu; son-in-law Price Davies had also taken over a quarter, leaving Grace farming the remaining half, while her unmarried second son Maurice remained at home as a 'farmer's son'.
- In 1861, the son-in-law had died, and Grace's daughter Margaret had taken over as farmer of a quarter of the farm.
- In 1871, Grace, now 85, was still named in the census as the farmer of half the farm. Her son Maurice had died and her daughter Margaret was now living with her, presumably helping to run the farm; Margaret's sons David and Pierce assisted as shepherd and farm labourer. Grace's youngest son William now farmed half the farm.
- By 1881, Grace and William had both died. Grace's grandson David now farmed all of Brynygefeiliu, assisted by his brother; his 72 year-old mother Margaret remained living with them.

A number of factors therefore enabled women to become farmers in Nantconwy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Landlords were prepared to allow widows and daughters to take over farm tenancies, which were virtually hereditary. Male farmers nearly always bequeathed farm stock to their wife, providing her with the capital to continue farming. The persistence in Wales of traditional farming methods meant that women did not suffer a significant disadvantage in agricultural education, and most already had considerable experience as a farmer's wife or daughter. Although there were strong social and sometimes financial disincentives against women farmers remarrying, it was not expected that mothers would surrender the farm to a son when he became old enough to take over; the absence of

any formal right of family succession and the need to continue earning a livelihood meant that women often chose to remain at least nominally in charge of the farm till they died, though some did retire if they could afford to do so or when they became too old to continue farming in the harsh mountain environment. This combination of factors enabled a much higher proportion of women to remain in charge of Nantconwy farms than in England, but also contributed to the prevailing land hunger. When both parents died, the remaining farm assets were generally divided equally between children, taking account of portions already received and how well-established offspring were. As increasing life expectancy resulted in more children surviving into adulthood, this dispersal of farming wealth at every generation further contributed to the under-capitalization of Welsh farming.

#### ***4. By-employment and proto-industry***

##### **Inventory evidence**

In the eighteenth century, the population of most Nantconwy parishes had not reached the critical mass required to support many rural craftsmen. Most items, including wooden farm implements, household equipment and much clothing were made at home, with more specialist goods and services purchased from the market town of Llanrwst. In 1779, Llanrwst tradesmen included innkeepers, shoemakers, glovers, joiners, tanners, weavers and bakers, a saddler, tailor, hatter, harper, fiddler, and a barber.<sup>314</sup> By 1828, services had expanded to include butchers, corn and flour dealers, maltsters, coopers, curriers, nail makers, stonemasons, slaters, plumbers and glaziers, earthenware and glass dealers, tallow chandlers, grocers and drapers, milliners, dress- and straw-hat makers, clockmakers,

---

<sup>314</sup> GA XD/38/235, (Gwydir rental, 1779).

surgeons, carriers, and a variety of miscellaneous trades - evidence of a growing consumer revolution.<sup>315</sup>

The Nantconwy probate database yielded 154 inventories for the period 1750-1799, which were used to investigate the range and nature of by-employment. There were a further 132 inventories between 1800 and 1858, but these later inventories gave a less representative picture because household goods were less frequently itemized. There are a number of problems with using inventories to study by-employment. Some activities such as dairying, brewing, baking and food preservation might be carried out both for home consumption and for sale, so whether an activity constituted a commercial by-employment is not always clear. Most importantly, inventories are unlikely to cover the poorest 40 per cent of households.<sup>316</sup> To address these issues and to provide data for the period after 1800 evidence from other sources was therefore used wherever possible, including estate and licensing records, mining and quarrying take-notes and leases, and descriptions of local occupations by contemporary writers and nineteenth-century antiquarians. Trade directories began to cover Llanrwst in 1828, and Trefriw in 1849, but did not contain entries for the whole of Nantconwy until 1880.<sup>317</sup>

The majority of Nantconwy probate records did not record status or occupation except for people whose main livelihood was not agricultural, implying that farming was most inhabitants' main occupation. Confirmation of this was sought from the inventories: one cow or agricultural wealth of equivalent value was taken as the minimum evidence of farming activity.<sup>318</sup> Seven inventories showed no evidence of farming activity or by-employment – two

---

<sup>315</sup> *Piggott's North Wales Directory* (1828-9).

<sup>316</sup> Keibek & Shaw-Taylor, 'By-employments', p. 278.

<sup>317</sup> *Piggott's Directory; Slater's North Wales Directory* (1849).

<sup>318</sup> Keibek & Shaw-Taylor, 'By-employments', p. 258.

apparently retired men, a weaver and a joiner, a widow, a fisherman and a pauper. These were excluded from the further analysis (Table 26).

*Table 26, Occupation in Nantconwy inventory dataset, 1750-1799*

<b>Status or occupation</b>	<b>No.</b>
Male farmer	121
Woman farmer	16
Other main occupation, some farming	7
Part-household with some farming	3
Not farming	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>

Source: NLW Bangor Diocese online probate records.

Of the remaining 147 inventories, household goods and tools were itemized in sufficient detail in 61 per cent of inventories to give evidence of by-employment or production that could be used either for household consumption or for sale, such as spinning and brewing. The level of detail in inventories varied significantly between different parishes, with less itemization in Gwydir township and Dolwyddelan where large stock-rearing farms predominated and the value of stock considerably outweighed that of household goods and farming equipment. The detailed inventories may therefore not be representative of the area as a whole. Household goods were only infrequently appraised room by room, but where rooms were mentioned this sometimes provided additional evidence of productive activities, for instance where farms boasted a buttery or a brew-house.

In only three out of the 147 inventories for occupied Nantconwy residents was the deceased's primary occupation not farming: two fullers and a slater (who was probably involved in quarrying as well as building). There has been some debate as to whether dairying should be regarded as by-employment or part of farming.<sup>319</sup> As it involved a considerable amount of

---

<sup>319</sup> *ibid.*

female work in making butter and cheese for the market, which brought in additional income, it seems reasonable to treat dairying as a form of by-employment. 91 per cent of Nantconwy inventoried households were involved in dairying, so clearly this was an important part of the agricultural household economy. However, 56 per cent of the detailed inventories contained clear evidence of one or more other types of by-employment, and a further five had possible evidence (

Table 27).

*Table 27, Evidence of by-employment in Nantconwy inventories 1750-1799*

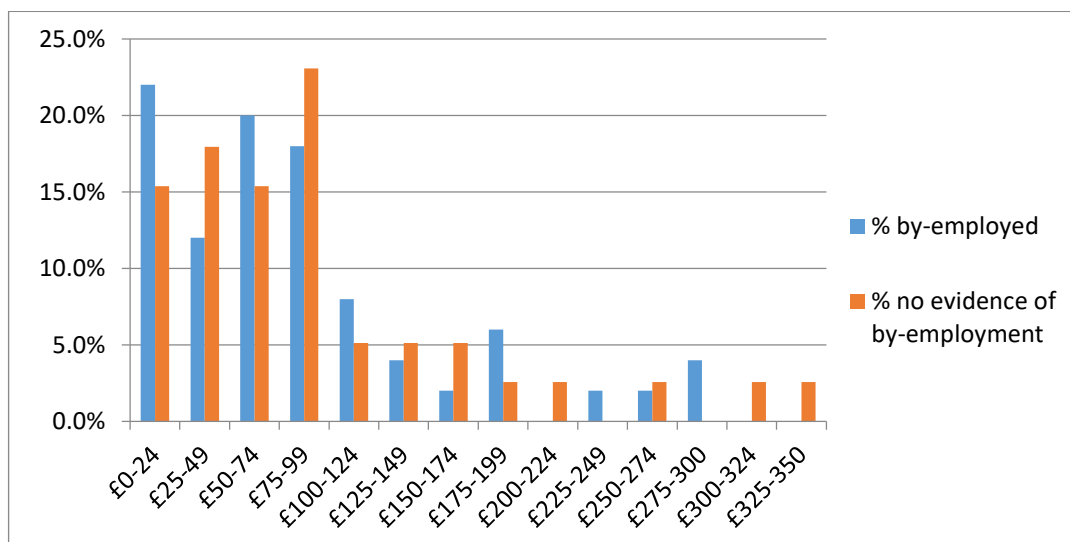
Evidence of possible by-employment	Percentage of inventories
Dairying	91
Spinning	57
Brewing	10
Other: drover, carrier, fuller, joiner, slater, miner	11

In contrast to the position found in Kent, by-employed households in Nantconwy do not appear to have been wealthier: the median value of inventories with firm evidence of by-employment, excluding dairying, was £63, compared to £75 for those with no clear evidence (Figure 20).<sup>320</sup> But this was probably because the majority of by-employed households were involved in spinning and knitting, which, as we shall see, were carried out across the social spectrum. Entrepreneurial by-employment activities such as brewing and inn-keeping, milling, droving and carrying, were more likely to be associated with wealthier households.

---

<sup>320</sup> Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, p. 171.

Figure 20, Nantconwy inventory wealth, 1750-1799



## Spinning and stocking knitting

Most contemporary sources stressed the importance of stocking knitting in the local economy, and the probate sample confirms that it was indeed a widespread proto-industry in much of Nantconwy. The parishes of Bettws y coed, Penmachno and Eidda were part of a hand knitting district which covered a mountainous tract of land some eighteen miles long and twelve miles wide, from Corwen to Dinas Mawddwy.<sup>321</sup> Bala in Merioneth and Llanrwst were the two principal markets for stockings in north Wales. Evans described Bala in 1804 as having ‘a very considerable manufactory of knit woollen goods, such as stockings, gloves etc. Knitting being the common employment of the neighbourhood, for both sexes and all ages: even the men frequently take up the needles and assist the females in the labour, whence the chief support of the family is derived.’<sup>322</sup>

<sup>321</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 403; Jenkins, *Woollen Industry*, p. 210.

<sup>322</sup> Evans, *North Wales* (London, 1804), pp. 67-8.

Weekly sales of stockings were estimated at £200 in 1747, and from £200 to £500 were sold each market day at Bala in the 1780s.<sup>323</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the principle hosiers of Bala estimated a similar level of sales at £17,000-19,000 a year, and £300 of stockings were reportedly sold at Llanrwst by the knitters themselves before the weekly market opened.<sup>324</sup> The knitters were independent producers, not subject to the putting-out system and the stockings, socks, gloves and 'Welsh wigs' (hats) were exclusively hand knitted. The knitting frame was never used in Wales, but hand-knitted products did not initially face direct competition from the Midlands framework knitting industry, which concentrated on cotton and worsted stockings. Carded wool used to make Welsh (and northern) stockings produced a warmer, softer and more durable product than the combed wool used in worsted manufacture and was not suitable for mechanized processes until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>325</sup>

In the eighteenth century, Welsh cattle drovers often took stockings to sell in English market towns. As the trade developed, it was largely controlled by middlemen known as 'Welsh hosiers', often the agents of Shrewsbury merchants, who travelled through the adjoining English counties supplying shops and warehouses, from whence stockings were dispersed throughout the country.<sup>326</sup> Some local men also profited from the trade: Mr. Davies of Bala was described by Fenton in 1813 as 'the great stocking merchant at Bala'.<sup>327</sup> At least six hosiers operated in Penmachno and Eidda in the 1810s and 1820s, though none appears to have grown rich. There were no references to hosiers in trade directories for Llanrwst which commenced in 1828, and by 1851 only one hosier was still plying his trade in Penmachno.

---

<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*, p. 403; Pennant, *Tours*, p. 211.

<sup>324</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p. 281; R. Fenton, *Tours in Wales 1804-1813* (London, 1917), p. 313.

<sup>325</sup> J. Thirsk, 'The fantastical folly of fashion: the English stocking knitting industry, 1500-1700', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Rural Economy of England* (London, 1984), p. 256; *PP 1845*, XV (609), Report on framework knitters, pp. 16-17.

<sup>326</sup> E. Pugh, *Cambria Depicta* (London, 1818), p. 189; Evans, *Beauties*, p. 113,

<sup>327</sup> Fenton, *Tours*, p. 123.

The money earned through knitting was small as the middlemen captured most of the profit. The cost of the raw wool averaged around 27 per cent of the finished item, but a higher proportion of the sale price for cheaper course stockings. However Nantconwy farmers were able to spin their own wool and there was a ready sale for any surplus wool at Llanrwst market, which was the main source of supply for the north Wales knitting industry. Walter Davies estimated that wages from the stocking trade totaled £13,100 p.a. around 1800. Prices to the producer ranged from 6s to six guineas a dozen depending on the quality, with higher quality stockings – those from Penmachno made from one or two ply wool being considered unrivalled for fineness of texture - selling at over 10s a pair. Coarser stockings made little profit, which in Davies opinion 'would never answer, were not the knitting of such the occupation of their leisure hours, in walking, or by the fireside in a long winter's night, without the expense of a candle, and the means of instructing children'.<sup>328</sup> A woman could typically card, spin and knit four pairs of stockings a week, earning a net 1s to 1s 4d a week in south Wales around 1800.<sup>329</sup>

The chief advantage of hand knitting was that it could be done while engaged in other everyday activities - carrying fodder to the animals, walking to the turbarry to turn or carry home the peat, or when travelling to market on foot or on horseback (Figure 21). At Llanrwst market, Evans found: 'no person is idle – but both the buyer and the seller are employed in knitting; and hundreds may be seen going and returning, earning their subsistence as they walk along'. It was also a social occupation; neighbours gathered at one another's houses for knitting assemblies which were enlivened by listening to old tales or the harp.<sup>330</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 404.

<sup>329</sup> W. Davies, *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of South Wales* (London, 1815), p. 442; J. Evans, *Letters Written During a Tour Through South Wales* (London, 1804), p. 434.

<sup>330</sup> Pennant, *Tours*, p. 211.

Figure 21, Knitting stockings on the way to market<sup>331</sup>



Nantconwy inventories confirm the importance of spinning as a by-employment during the second half of the eighteenth century. Spinning wheels were mentioned in 52 per cent of detailed inventories, and spindles in a further five per cent, with cards and wool mentioned occasionally. Spinning took place across the social spectrum. The unmarried elderly farm labourer and pauper Evan Williams from Gwydir township died in 1760 possessed of a spindle and a little bag with wool. Larger farms possessed two or three large and small spinning wheels. The greatest quantity of wool itemized was 18 pounds spun on a spinning wheel and a spindle in the household of a Dolwyddelan miller.

Earnings from hand spinning in the eighteenth century are debated; some estimates suggest that married women could earn 3s or 4s a week, though it is unlikely that Nantconwy women could earn this amount in view of the lower earnings reported from spinning and knitting

---

<sup>331</sup> R. Griffiths, 'Welsh fashions taken on a market day in Wales', (1851, Ceredigion Museum).

discussed above.<sup>332</sup> But as use of the spinning jenny spread in the 1780s and 1790s, women became unable to earn a bare subsistence through spinning alone.<sup>333</sup> It is likely that Nantconwy households that spun also knitted, for example the tour writer William Hutton commented that women in the Capel Curig area carded, spun and knitted.<sup>334</sup> Stockings were only mentioned specifically in one inventory: 13s' worth belonging to a small Penmachno farmer, William Jones in 1752. However stocking presses were found in eight of the larger farms, mainly in Penmachno. In more modest households, the completed garments were simply pressed beneath boards which were cut to the shape of a stocking and weighted down by a heavy stone for a week.<sup>335</sup>

Spinning and knitting therefore formed an integral part of the family economy on most Nantconwy farms in the knitting area, with wealthier farms producing a greater output. Stocking knitting could clearly be characterized as proto-industry insofar as rural producers, who were often farmers or smallholders, produced for a national market, with the marketing centres in towns. Because margins were low, stocking knitting could not provide a livelihood for a family, so proto-industrialization did not lead here to the growth of landless proletarian families like the handloom weavers of Merioneth and Montgomeryshire or the framework knitters of the English Midlands.<sup>336</sup> Rather, it provided an income supplement across the social spectrum, mainly for those who remained rooted in the land, and was therefore different to most forms of proto-industry which were largely the preserve of poorer members of rural society. It could constitute the chief means of subsistence for the poor (explored in

---

<sup>332</sup> C. Muldrew, 'Th'ancient distaff' and 'whirling spindle': measuring the contribution of spinning to household earnings and the national economy in England, 1550-1770', *EcHR* 65 (2012), p. 510.

<sup>333</sup> Berg, *Age of Manufactures*, p. 140.

<sup>334</sup> Hutton, *North Wales*, p. 173.

<sup>335</sup> S.M. Tibbott, 'Knitting stockings in Wales: a domestic craft', *Folk Life* 16 (1978), p. 68.

<sup>336</sup> Dodd, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 242; Clarkson, *Proto-Industrialization*, p. 22.

more depth in Chapter 4), provide an important additional income to improve the viability of small farms, or enable larger farm households to enjoy a higher standard of material comfort.

Contrary to Mendel's suggestion that proto-industry encouraged agriculture, in Nantconwy, where knitting remained combined with agriculture, it did not lead to a greater commercialization of agriculture and may in fact have retarded agricultural improvement. There were opportunities to farm more efficiently, but it was clearly more congenial for tenant farming families to increase household income by knitting, especially as this could not be used by landlords as a reason for increasing rents.

The stocking industry continued to expand till at least 1830, when sales at Bala were more than twice the level reported in 1810. Although one Bala hosier in 1835 paid 1s a pair for knitting stockings, the mechanization of the carding and spinning processes had reduced employment, and as competition from the mechanized Midland hosiery industry intensified, knitting gradually became the preserve of the poor, rather than a worthwhile by-employment for better-off farm families.<sup>337</sup> Knitting was still reported as the principle trade at Llanrwst in 1845, but by 1849, the manufacture of stockings had begun to decline in Bala and across the north Wales hosiery belt.<sup>338</sup> By 1851, only seven Nantconwy widows or spinsters were attempting to earn their living by knitting. A further nine earned part of their livelihood through the stocking trade, supplemented by outdoor poor relief.<sup>339</sup> But a few women continued to sell to the stocking man at Llanrwst market into the early twentieth century, and most people continued to knit for their own use.<sup>340</sup>

---

<sup>337</sup> *PP 1837-38, XXXV* (686), Municipal Corporations (England and Wales), pp. 4-5.

<sup>338</sup> *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* (1845 & 1849).

<sup>339</sup> 1851 census enumerators' books, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk), accessed 4 April 2015.

<sup>340</sup> Tibbott, 'Knitting stockings', p. 68.

## The woollen industry

There were a number of reasons why proto-industrial stocking knitting in Nantconwy did not provide a springboard for further industrialization in Nantconwy. The trade remained largely controlled by English merchants who bought from independent small producers. No capital was accumulated in Llanrwst or Nantconwy to enable investment in a mechanized knitting industry. Yet in fact, no-one was really interested in developing a mechanized knitting industry, for hand knitting had largely been a spare time activity in most households. Instead, the next phase of industrialization was to take place in the woollen, rather than the hosiery industry.

In addition to knitting for the market, eighteenth-century Nantconwy farms usually spun their own wool which was then sent to the weaver to be woven into blankets or cloth and then fulled at the local *pandy* (fulling mill), before being made up at home into various garments. Although Nantconwy was not noted as a major woollen cloth manufacturing area, William Williams of Llandegai regarded woollens as an important part of the local economy:

'The employ of the mountain people in summer and winter, besides feeding their cattle and dairy work, is that of carding and spinning their wool, of which they make cloth for their own wearing, and for sale in the neighbouring fairs and markets. Vast quantities of this and excellent woollen stockings are carried to Llanrwst, Caernarvon, and other markets far and near. They also make great quantities of linsey-wolsey for women's gowns . . . [and] spin a good quantity of course linen cloth for their own use, and a great part of it is sold.'<sup>341</sup>

Flax was also grown and spun on Nantconwy farms into the nineteenth century: premiums offered by Lord Gwydir in 1820 to his tenants for the encouragement of agricultural improvement included prizes for the best spinner of five- and four-hank yarn out of a pound

---

<sup>341</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 25.

of flax.<sup>342</sup> The antiquarian 'Gethin' vividly described his grandfather's childhood experience on a Penmachno farm in the late eighteenth century:

'Their night's work was to deal with the wool and the flax. The two spinning wheels sounded like two cats, constantly challenging each other and snarling, one for wool and one for linen, with the 'hanker' working diligently in the other corner, so that every farm cottage was like a little Manchester . . . They made all their clothes at home, and they had one roll for flannel, one for linen, one for cloth, one for toweling etc. When they needed aprons, gowns, petticoats or shirts, they had only to go to the roll and cut a piece according to their requirements.'<sup>343</sup>

Looms do not appear in any Nantconwy farmers' inventories, corroborating the testimony of contemporary commentators that yarn was sent to a weaver for making into cloth. Most parishes supported a couple of weavers in the mid-eighteenth century, and by the first decade of the nineteenth century, the whole of Nantconwy had become a textile manufacturing district, mainly supplying the local market. Cloth was generally sold at Llanrwst market and fairs.<sup>344</sup> Weavers were generally poor and the only direct evidence of a by-employed weaver was the case of William Evans of Llanrhychwyn, who was also a salmon fisher on the River Conwy and kept pigs and two cows, as well as growing potatoes on his smallholding.<sup>345</sup>

Fulling, the process of dressing the woven cloth by thickening and felting the fabric, was by contrast typically combined with farming. There were fulling mills in Trefriw, Penmachno, Dolwyddelan and Eidda, and four fullers left inventories showing evidence of stock rearing, dairying and arable farming, while their families were also involved in spinning. Although the

---

<sup>342</sup> LA. 3ANC 7/23/4/526, (Rules of competition for prizes given by Lord Gwydir, 1820).

<sup>343</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 32.

<sup>344</sup> Jenkins, *Woollen Industry* p. 238; Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 120.

<sup>345</sup> NLW B/1849/133 W,I, (Will and inventory of William Evans, 1849).

fulling mill was leased from the landowner, the fuller owned the fulling equipment and furnace, which passed from father to son, while his farm stock would typically be left to the widow.<sup>346</sup> Carding was the first stage of woollen manufacture to be mechanized, with carding engines spreading in north Wales from the 1790s, often attached to existing fulling mills.<sup>347</sup> In Nantconwy, carding machines were added to the fulling to mills at Eidda and Penmachno. In 1832 the Penmachno drover, William Jones, had invested £58, the majority of his wealth, in a carding machine, the most valuable single item recorded in any Nantconwy inventory.<sup>348</sup> With the growth of water-powered woollen mills in the nineteenth century, hand spinning declined and it became general practice to have wool spun into yarn at the local mill.<sup>349</sup> In 1818, Dolgarrog became the first mill in Nantconwy to mechanize all stages of woollen production except for weaving. This was followed by the large Conway Valley Mills at Trefriw in 1830 (Figure 22).<sup>350</sup>

Nevertheless, some factory operators retained their farming interests, for example in 1849, the inventory of Robert Jones of Factory, Trefriw, included pigs, cows, dairying equipment and corn as well as fulling mill equipment, tenter, a carding machine, and a spinning jenny.<sup>351</sup> Judging by census data in 1841-61, the new woollen mills were operated by men, which compounded the loss of spinning and knitting employment for women – see for example the case study in Chapter 1 of carder Robert Jones who migrated from Penmachno to manage a small woollen factory in Gwytherin.

---

<sup>346</sup> Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, pp. 135-8; NLW B/1754/104 W,I, (Inventory of John Williams of Pandy, Penmachno, fuller, 1754).

<sup>347</sup> J.G. Jenkins, *The Flannel Makers; a Brief History of the Welsh Woollen Industry* (Llanrwst, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>348</sup> NLW B/1832/130 I, (Inventory of William Jones, Erw Clochydd, Penmachno, drover, 1832).

<sup>349</sup> Tibbott, 'Knitting stockings', p. 63.

<sup>350</sup> Jenkins, *Woollen Industry*, p. 240.

<sup>351</sup> NLW B/1849/149 I, (Inventory of Robert Davies, Factory, Trefriw, yeoman, 1849).

Figure 22, Trefriw woollen mill<sup>352</sup>



### **Traditional by-employment: droving, innkeeping and milling**

Droving was one of the earliest forms of entrepreneurial by-employment, and many Welsh farmers were involved in the trade at times of year when they could leave the holding in the charge of family members or farm servants.<sup>353</sup> The chief drovers, who acted as dealers buying cattle in the markets or directly from farms, were often substantial farmers themselves. With droves worth up to £400, some initial capital was required, although Caernarvonshire

---

<sup>352</sup> L.S. Costello, *The Falls, Lakes, and Mountains of North Wales* (1845).

<sup>353</sup> R.J. Moore-Colyer, *The Welsh Cattle Drovers* (Cardiff, c.1976), p. 76.

drovers bought largely on credit.<sup>354</sup> A number of Nantconwy farmers are known to have acted as drovers. William Jones, tenant of the 955 acre moorland farm Vynhadog Ucha, Dolwyddelan, was the only person specifically named as a drover in the inventory sample. He was a substantial farmer, owning 17 cattle and 170 sheep, as well as goats, crops and a large quantity of hay.<sup>355</sup> Otherwise, the inventory sample provides little unequivocal evidence of eighteenth-century drovers, though it is likely that some of the wealthy farmers who died owing regular amounts of money to a number of people may have been drovers who had yet to settle up with farmers on their return from London or Midland markets. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Richard Evans of Penamnon made enough money as a drover to buy five farms in Penmachno from the small Bettws y coed landowner David Price Downs, and to give his sons the best education available at that time.<sup>356</sup> In a local economy where cash was in short supply until at least the mid-nineteenth century, drovers also lent money and provided credit to their neighbours and even to their landlord. In 1818 for example, the local Gwydir agent approached Richard Evans for a loan, in the hopes of avoiding an arduous winter journey to obtain a bill from the nearest bank in Denbigh to remit £380 to London.<sup>357</sup>

Some farmers and farmers' sons also supplemented family income by acting as drivers, like the twins Abraham and Isaac Jones, who occupied a large farm in Dolwyddelan with their mother in the 1840s and took turns to work for the drover Robert Jones, Bwlch bach.<sup>358</sup> In 1830, drivers were paid around 10-12d a day. Other farmers might act as jobbers, buying cattle and sheep locally and driving them to collecting points.<sup>359</sup> But as railways began to

---

<sup>354</sup> Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 19; R.T. Jenkins, 'A drover's account book', *TCHS* 6 (1945), p. 48.

<sup>355</sup> NLW B/1781/59 I, (Inventory of William Jones, Vynhadog, Dolwyddelan, drover, 1781).

<sup>356</sup> Roberts, *Dolwyddelan*, p. 33.

<sup>357</sup> LA 3ANC 7/23/2/30, (Fahy to Kennedy, 13 Jan. 1819).

<sup>358</sup> Roberts, *Dolwyddelan*, p. 27.

<sup>359</sup> Jenkins, 'Drover's account book', pp. 51, 54.

penetrate into rural Wales from the 1840s, the role of the long distance drover declined, and by 1865 the railways had captured the majority of livestock flows. Although demand for Welsh store cattle was maintained throughout the nineteenth century and there was a significant increase in sheep production, the satisfaction of this demand in the railway era was largely in the hands of capitalist dealers with access to large-scale credit. It does not appear that any such dealers emerged in Nantconwy after 1850 to replace the old generation of drovers, though the local driver remained very much part of the Welsh rural scene.<sup>360</sup>

It is initially somewhat surprising that the Nantconwy inventories contain no evidence of corn milling, as millers were typically wealthier members of rural communities. Although manorial mills had largely died out in the south of England by 1750, they survived into the nineteenth century in the north of England, the West Country and Wales.<sup>361</sup> Corn mills belonged to the landowners in eighteenth-century Nantconwy and some tenants were still required to grind their corn at the landowner's mill, a relic of medieval practice when the bond tenants of Penmachno, Trefriw and Dolwyddelan owed suit at the royal mills in their townships.<sup>362</sup> Although mill lessees were required to maintain the equipment – often requiring substantial investment – they did not own any tangible tools of the trade.

During the eighteenth century, milling seems to have been a form of entrepreneurial by-employment or investment for minor gentry and wealthy farmers, who supplied the working capital but engaged a partner or employed a miller to do the day to day work. In Trefriw, the Gwydir estate mill was leased in the 1760s by the small landowner Mrs. Hughes of Gymannog, and subsequently by the Gwydir agent, the Rev. John Royle. In Penmachno, the

---

<sup>360</sup> Moore-Colyer, *Drovers*, pp. 108, 118-9.

<sup>361</sup> J. Tann, 'Corn milling', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *AHEW Vol. VI, 1750-1850*, (Cambridge, 1989), p. 400.

<sup>362</sup> *Record of Caernarvon*, pp. 9-11; BUA 967, (Lease of Gelli Manach, 1790).

upper mill was occupied by a small landowner Lewis Lloyd Williams together with his substantial farm Hafodwryd.<sup>363</sup> The occupier of Bettws y coed mill in 1758 was a well-to-do yeoman, Owen Thomas, who also rented two large mountain farms in Gwydir township. After Thomas's death, the mill was rented by David Jones with partners: Jones also farmed the adjacent farm of Tyddyn y Llan and half of a smaller farm, Pyllan. In Dolwyddelan, the mill was tenanted in 1758 by Abraham Williams with widow Elizabeth Williams who farmed the 90 acre farm of Pwll y gath and half of 38-acre Buarthau. After the Napoleonic wars, milling became more of a specialist occupation, but once divorced from running substantial farms, Nantconwy millers seem to have experienced difficulty in raising the capital required for maintenance. In 1817 both the Trefriw and Bettws millers were in serious arrears with their rent, and by 1819, the Bettws mill was in a poor state, requiring £200 to renew the waterwheel and internal machinery with more up-to date iron parts.<sup>364</sup>

In eighteenth-century England, commercial beer production became an increasingly specialized urban occupation, and by the mid-nineteenth century had undergone something of an 'industrial revolution in brewing'.<sup>365</sup> But outside the larger towns of north Wales during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it remained common for inn-keeping to be combined with farming. The Rev. John Evans described how one Snowdonia inn-keeper 'committed the business of the inn to the female part of the family, while he occupied himself in a large farm; a custom general with inn-keepers through Wales'.<sup>366</sup> In remote districts of north Wales, by-employment of farmers as alehouse keepers continued into the mid-nineteenth century. Writing of his Denbighshire childhood in the 1850s, Robert Roberts

---

<sup>363</sup> GA XQA LT 2/3, (Penmachno land tax, 1796).

<sup>364</sup> LA 2 ANC 7/1/33, (Fahy to Kennedy, 18 Oct. 1817); LA 2 ANC 7/1/38, (David Jones, Llanrwst, to Kennedy, 22 July 1819).

<sup>365</sup> J. Brown, 'The malting industry', in Mingay (ed.), *AHEW* Vol. VI, p. 503.

<sup>366</sup> Evans, *North Wales*, p. 55.

recalled how 'the only inn in the district was fully three miles further down [the cwm], where indeed the innkeeper, Thomas Rogers, was far more famed for the excellence of his farming than for the quality of his brew.'<sup>367</sup>

Ale and beer drinking were far less common in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Nantconwy than in England. William Williams related how Snowdonia inhabitants 'very seldom brew ale except in some of the principal farmhouses: having no corn of their own growing, they think it superfluous expense to throw away money for malt and hops, when milk, or butter-milk mixed with water, quenches the thirst as well'.<sup>368</sup> This is borne out by the inventory sample. Brewing equipment was only mentioned in 12 per cent of the detailed eighteenth-century inventories, compared to 79 per cent in Kent and 28 per cent in Cornwall. Only one farm in Trefriw, mentioned a brew-house and none appear to have possessed a malt-house; although some farms possessed barrels, none recorded stocks of ale or beer. A better idea of which farms acted as inns can therefore be obtained from the Quarter Sessions recognizances of innkeepers recording sureties for licensees to keep good order in their alehouses. In 1777, there were nine licensed alehouses in Nantconwy, all associated with farms at the centre of the village near the church.<sup>369</sup> Only a quarter of farms possessing brewing equipment in inventories were licensed - showing that indeed some larger farms brewed ale purely for their own use.

The opening of a road to Capel Curig, built by the local landowner Lord Penrhyn in 1800, brought a new class of farmer-innkeeper to Nantconwy. The mountains of Wales gained in popularity during the Napoleonic Wars, when English tourists were unable to follow the

---

<sup>367</sup> R. Roberts, *A Wandering Scholar; the Life and Opinions of Robert Roberts* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>368</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 8.

<sup>369</sup> GA XQS/1779/80/127-8, (Recognizances of innkeepers, Nantconwy, 1778-80).

European Grand Tour and with the growth of romanticism. When the Rev. Bingley visited the Capel Curig alehouse on his tour through north Wales in 1798, he 'got here some eggs, bacon, and dreadfully bad new ale. They told us they had some dried goat, but though the house was rather famous for this species of food, we declined having any'.<sup>370</sup> Lord Penrhyn saw the commercial opportunities for a new inn at the site where 'Snowden and all his sons . . . burst at once in full view, and make this far the finest approach to our boasted Alps'.<sup>371</sup> He was able to divert the main posting service from London to Bangor through Capel Curig, making the new inn there a major stopping-off point for traffic to Dublin and a meeting place for quarter sessions, the Capel Curig hunt and the gentry of Caernarvonshire. He installed a former butler, Joseph Griffith, as the first inn-keeper. But an inn catering for the quality trade was unable to find adequate supplies in the local area, and Griffith took over two sizeable local farms to keep cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, and poultry and to grow corn, beans and fodder for guests' horses and those kept by the inn and coaching stable. On his death in 1810, Griffith was worth a net £1,756 – nearly three times the wealth recorded in any other Nantconwy inventory throughout the period.

The inn and coaching stables on the Great Irish Road brought a rapid expansion of employment to Capel Curig, including new occupations such as harper, waiters, ostlers, coachmen, chaise drivers, blacksmiths, tailors and a shopkeeper. Still, tourism was very much a seasonal trade, and with the opening of the north coast railway line to Holyhead in the 1840s, long-distance coaching went into rapid decline. Like previous generations, the new workers in Capel Curig preferred to mitigate the risks of seasonal employment by having

---

<sup>370</sup> Rev. W. Bingley, *A Tour round North Wales* (London, 1800), p. 319.

<sup>371</sup> Pennant, *Tours* Vol. II, p. 320.

a foothold on the land. The Capel Curig Inn and farm met this demand by sub-letting cow-keep and rights of turbary to several of its employees and service providers.<sup>372</sup>

*Figure 23, The Royal Oak mill, Bettws y coed*<sup>373</sup>



After 1800, the number of licensees in Nantconwy grew as population expanded, and new public houses were less likely to be attached to farms. The Royal Oak was made famous by the annual visits of David Cox, founder of the Bettws y coed school of artists, and with the growth of tourism to Snowdonia in the mid-nineteenth century, it evolved from being a rough fisherman's inn to a large hotel managed by an experienced hotelier from Harrogate, providing a wide range of facilities for guests, including lawn tennis, billiards, fishing, and coach excursions.<sup>374</sup> Nevertheless, it remained advantageous throughout most of the nineteenth century for larger hotels to have a farm attached. The Royal Oak employed a

---

<sup>372</sup> NLW16/49.

<sup>373</sup> Thomas Creswick, 'The Old Mill at Bettws y coed' (1857, © Lytham Art Collection). Permission to reproduce this painting has been granted by Fylde Borough Council.

<sup>374</sup> C.F. Cliffe, *The Book of North Wales* (London, 1850), p. 147; *Slater's North Wales Directory* (1883).

dairymaid in 1861, and was one of the first farms in the area to install a water-wheel, which had begun to spread through mountain districts by 1850 for the automation of butter-making and preparation of animal feed (Figure 23).<sup>375</sup>

## **Quarrying, mining and carrying**

If many specialist products and service began in Nantconwy as by-employments, what about the major new capitalist industries of slate quarrying, lead mining and their associated services, especially carrying? In the mid-eighteenth century, many Nantconwy farms dug stone and slates for their own use, including building the many miles of stone walls which replaced earthen banks mainly in the nineteenth century. But a few tenants undertook quarrying on a more commercial basis. Slater's tools were valued in the 1768 inventory of yeoman Hugh Parry of Rhiwgri, a 77 acre farm close to the later Bettws y coed quarry of Hafodlas, and later in the century, the tenant of the 45 acre Gelli Benlo farm in the same area was described as a slater.<sup>376</sup> Some quarries grew into larger commercial enterprises paying royalties to the landowner, such as Bwlch Quarry in Dolwyddelan, which in 1823-6 produced up to 493 tons of slate a year for the farm tenant William Jones.<sup>377</sup> But in the main, new capitalist owners moved in to take over the development of promising quarries.

As slate quarrying took off in Nantconwy, some small farmers worked at least part-time in one of the three dozen slate quarries scattered around the Gwydir estate and in Cwm Penmachno. One such was Robert Williams, tenant of the 13 acre Fronfadog farm in Llanrhychwyn, who was killed in a quarry accident in 1841. Quarrying could provide an important source of additional income to families on small farms, as the local Gwydir agent

---

<sup>375</sup> Cliffe, *North Wales*, p. 212.

<sup>376</sup> NLW B/1768/50 I, 1798/41 I, (Inventories of Hugh Parry, Bettws y coed, and John Hughes, slater, Bettws y coed).

<sup>377</sup> Williams & Lewis, *Gwydir Slate Quarries*, p. 18.

urged in supporting an application to reopen the small Cwm Clorad quarry near Capel Curig: 'it certainly is a great loss to the tenants that the quarry is not more in operation'.<sup>378</sup> As quarrying expanded however, the emphasis shifted from quarrying as a secondary occupation for farmers to one where smallholding or cow-keeping was often a secondary occupation for quarrymen's families.

A number of farming families were probably also involved in the early development of lead mining with picks and mining tools found in a several inventories of farmers living near the early lead mines in Llanrhychwyn and Penmachno.<sup>379</sup> The Gwydir estate was keen to promote employment opportunities for its tenants and their dependents. When granting take-notes for the lease of lead mines and quarries, it usually specified a minimum number of men to be employed and reserved the right to withdraw the lease if these conditions were not met. There is some evidence of farmers and their sons working in the Bettws lead mines in the early 1800s, but as the mines became larger scale operations, mining became a specialist skill practised by dynasties of mining families, though as we saw earlier, many combined mining with a smallholding.<sup>380</sup>

With the expansion of the lead and slate industries, carrying became an increasingly important by-employment for Nantconwy farm families. 'Gethin' tells us that when horses were replacing oxen for field work in eighteenth-century Penmachno, they were required to pay for their keep by outside work, carrying packs weighing 80 pounds each. Pack horses were used to carry corn to and from the mill, tubs of butter to market, and slates or lead ore

---

<sup>378</sup> GA XD 38/362.

<sup>379</sup> NLW B/1758/107 I, 1781/79 I, 1799/76 I, (Inventories of Owen ap William Pugh, Tyddyn Ifan Goch, Llanrhychwyn; Hugh Jones, Oernant, Penmachno; Robert Morris, Penbedw, Penmachno).

<sup>380</sup> GA XD 38/279, (Gwydir mine leases, 1769-1862).

from quarries and lead mines to shipment points.<sup>381</sup> References to panniers and pack saddles occur in six Nantconwy farmers' inventories, possible evidence that their farms provided carrier services.

The Gwydir estate also employed farm tenants to undertake a wide range of estate tasks including cartage, often connected with the estate's extensive forestry operations. In the period 1818-24 when tenants were struggling during the post-Napoleonic War agricultural depression, 42 farms supplied labour to the estate for periods varying from a few days to half a year. Much of this labour was offset against rents. At the time, the River Conwy was only navigable as far as Tal y Cafn, some eight miles below Gwydir Castle, and cartage of timber from the Gwydir plantations to Tal y Cafn was a frequent requirement, while coals and forestry seedlings were carried in to Gwydir. Other forestry tasks undertaken by tenants included barking oak trees for use in tanning, planting, thinning plantations and making new roads. The work was carried out by a variety of people from farm households. Richard Roderick, tenant of a small Capel Curig farm, spent half a year making flood embankments; two sons of Widow Evans of Pandy, Trefriw, performed 70 days' forestry work and cartage in return for a reduction in her rent, while David Roberts of Rhos y ceffylau in Capel Curig sent a maidservant for a month to strip bark. The rate paid by the estate varied from 6d to 12d a day for work by sons and servants to 18d for work undertaken by farmers, or 6s for cartage requiring a team of horses.<sup>382</sup>

The development of the slate and lead industries significantly increased the demand for carriers, to the extent that for some farmers carting slates proved far more lucrative than

---

<sup>381</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 32.

<sup>382</sup> GA XD38/265, (Gwydir cartage book, 1818-1824).

agriculture.<sup>383</sup> With many quarries sited over 300m above sea level, slates were initially carried down in panniers by horses or mules to a road where they could be loaded onto carts. During the period 1823-30, some farmers in the Ffestiniog area were able to earn up to £168 a year carrying slates to quays on the River Dwyryd; the Bowydd quarry alone employed 82 carters, mainly local farmers.<sup>384</sup> In the 1810s, during the early development of the Penmachno quarries - an extension of the Ffestiniog slate district - Penmachno farmers were unwilling to carry slate to the River Dwyryd over the 500m pass of Bwlch Carreg y Fran, and insisted on carting to Trefriw Quay on the River Conwy at twice the cost.<sup>385</sup> This source of income was severely reduced after the Ffestiniog quarry owners built a railway from Blaenau Ffestiniog to Porthmadog harbour in 1832 and the Penmachno quarries installed inclined planes to lift their slates over the pass to link with the railway. Dolwyddelan quarries gained rail access in the 1860s, but elsewhere in Nantconwy there were few specialist carriers, and farmers were able to supplement their income by carting slates throughout the nineteenth century.

### **The changing nature of by-employment**

In 1841 the vast majority of Nantconwy land occupiers still regarded farming as their primary occupation. Eighty-six per cent of farmers occupying eight acres and above in the tithe commutation records, and nearly a third of smallholders with less than eight acres, gave their occupation in the census as farmer, though this did not preclude by-employment: small farmers frequently worked in the quarries while their wife and children ran the farm. The most common occupations of other farm occupiers were as agricultural labourers, quarrymen, miners and masons. There was no significant difference in the size of farm held by those who described themselves as farmers, or with another occupation. Nearly a third of smallholders

---

<sup>383</sup> Lewis, *Lead Mining*, p. 280.

<sup>384</sup> J.G. Jones, 'The Ffestiniog slate industry: the industrial pattern to 1831', *JMHR* VI (1969), p. 62.

<sup>385</sup> M.J.T. Lewis and M.C. Williams, *Pioneers of Ffestiniog Slate* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1987), p. 18.

also described themselves as farmers, though smallholders were more likely to be by-employed, the most common occupations again being as agricultural labourers, quarrymen, masons or miners (Table 28).

*Table 28, Occupations of farm occupiers, 1841*

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Farm 8 acres +</b>	<b>Smallholding</b>
Farmer or drover	224	10
Agricultural labourer	8	9
Quarryman	8	5
Craftsman	3	4
Professional	4	0
Other	10	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>33</b>

Sources: TNA IR 18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67; 1841 census CEBs.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a number of factors resulted in further change to the nature of by-employment. The repeal of the Corn Laws brought reliable supplies of cheap corn to remote areas of rural Wales, which persuaded many farmers to give up cultivating crops for family subsistence. The potato blight, which struck Wales a year after Ireland, also dealt a severe blow to the subsistence smallholder economy. Railways began to penetrate into rural Wales from the 1840s, encouraging a major expansion of sheep farming to serve national meat markets which improved the profitability of mountain farms and required little labour.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, by-employment amongst farmers was clearly in decline, though some continued to pursue a range of secondary occupations. But as the range of non-farming occupations in Nantconwy grew, we begin to see the rise of small-scale farming used to supplement another primary occupation. An 1861 survey of the Gwydir estate affords an interesting indication of the range of people who kept cows in Nantconwy (Table 29). As would be expected, three quarters of the 227 holdings with one or more cow-houses were rented by farmers and a further six per cent by farmers who recorded a dual occupation

in the census. Farmers' dual occupations in 1861 included innkeeper, flour dealer, coal merchant, valuer, parish clerk, wheelwright, quarryman and lead miner.

*Table 29, Occupations of non-farmers with cow-houses, 1861*

Occupation	Percentage of non-farmers
Shopkeeper, innkeeper, clerical, business	33
Craftsmen: smith, mason, joiner	21
Quarryman, miner	19
Women: stocking knitters, domestic duties, retired	14
Labourers	10

Sources: GA XD/131/61; 1861 CEBs.

However 42 holdings with cow-houses were occupied by people whose primary occupation was not farming. Interestingly, it was the better off members of rural society who were most likely to keep cows - shopkeepers, innkeepers and people in clerical and managerial occupations. Next most likely were craftsmen, quarrymen and lead miners. Households headed by women also kept cows, and here we have a possible explanation as to why some stocking knitters were able to remain independent, while others were partially dependent on poor relief. Labourers were least likely to rent a property with a cow house, but might of course have access to cow-keep on their employer's land. Keeping cows therefore seems to have mainly become a way of enhancing the family's standard of living. As the Penrhyn land agent somewhat patronizingly described; 'most of the small holders . . . are quarrymen in receipt of good wages, who keep one, two or three cows on their land . . . They consume the produce of their stock to a great extent . . . their holdings are as it were a luxury, while they depend on their quarry wages for their living . . . His wife looks after the cow and he is very well off.'<sup>386</sup>

---

<sup>386</sup> RCL Report, p. 340; RCL Evidence Vol 1, p. 547, minute 12,080.

## ***Conclusions***

The way in which Nantconwy farmers achieved a balance between size of farm and family life-cycle combined some elements familiar from Russian and Austrian peasant societies, within the context of tenant farms based on medieval landholding patterns. The 'ideal type' was a virtually hereditary tenancy which might have been in the same family for generations, and normally passed to the widow after her husband's death and subsequently to a son or daughter remaining on the farm, often the youngest child. Most farms were family farms insofar as they employed more family labour than paid farm servants and labourers, but the balance between family and employed labour varied according to life-cycle, with more servants likely to be employed by farmers with young children, or by the elderly and widowers. Unmarried children worked on the family farm, which enabled parents to save in order to pay portions to help the younger generation start on a farm of their own. Children often inherited cattle and sheep, and also had the opportunity to build up their own stock on the family farm or by renting pasture or mountain land. When tenancies became vacant, estates generally gave preference to children of existing tenants. A system of virtually hereditary tenancies, the inheritance of farm stock, and the traditional nature of Welsh farming enabled many widows to continue farming and ensure a livelihood for other family members. The development of a market in former communal meadow or mountain land let separately by estates allowed farmers to expand or contract their operations according to their family life-cycle, or they could run more stock by paying a hill farmer to agist stock in summer or a valley farmer to take in stock over winter. In old age, few male or female farmers could afford to retire, but they might downsize by sharing the farm with one or more related or unrelated partners or by sub-letting. Thus Nantconwy farmers adjusted both the amount of land rented and the number of servants employed to the family life-cycle.

This ideal type arrangement was more likely to be found on larger farms. Small farms or mountain holdings on poor land were less likely to become hereditary tenancies and were often regarded as starter farms for farmers' children and sometimes labourers, from which they would move to more desirable farms if possible. Small farms were unable to support many children, and most children would be expected to leave home to become farm servants in their early teens, to take employment in the local quarry or lead mine, or to migrate. Indeed, as land hunger grew during the nineteenth century, more children of larger farmers also left the land.

By-employment played a crucial role in the agrarian economy of Nantconwy throughout most of the period, though changing significantly in its nature over time. Many dual occupations in the eighteenth century, such as innkeeping, droving, fulling and milling, arose because demand was insufficient to provide a full-time livelihood. Farmers therefore provided these services to a local market as a way of enjoying a higher standard of living. This type of by-employment declined during the nineteenth century as population growth and economic development enabled greater specialization. On the other hand, the widespread involvement of families across the social spectrum in proto-industrial spinning and stocking knitting may well have enabled more families to make a living from the land by bolstering the viability of small farms and encouraging the growth of smallholdings. The drop in earnings from this by-employment with the mechanization of spinning and the decline in the stocking industry after the Napoleonic Wars coincided with a period of agricultural depression which lasted till mid-century, leading farmers to look for other sources of income. This included work for the Gwydir estate and carrying for the growing lead and slate industries; small farmers meanwhile might work part time in the quarries.

The layoff of farm labourers after the war, and again in the 1840s, coupled with the loss of family incomes from knitting, undermined the livelihoods of the smallholder and cottager families who had combined subsistence agriculture with some farm labouring and proto-industrial production, and contributed to increased poverty and the out-migration of the 1820s and 1840s. While smallholdings continued to provide a subsistence livelihood to some mainly elderly people, they became increasingly an adjunct to another male occupation in quarrying, mining or craft work in order to improve family living standards.

Although carding and spinning, and later weaving woollens, migrated to local factories, this created only a small amount of employment, largely for men. The loss of domestic spinning and decline in stocking knitting therefore meant that women and children were less able to contribute to the diversified family economy through proto-industrial by-employment. However they continued to play an active role on the family farm as farmers, farmers' wives and daughters, or doing most of the work on the family smallholding while the menfolk worked elsewhere or pursued a range of by-employments in the established or new sectors. The feminization of agriculture may therefore have been even greater than suggested in the census figures.

## Chapter 4. Livelihoods of the poor, 1750-1837

### 1. *Aims and introduction*

The Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601 required all parishes in England and Wales to appoint two overseers of the poor to raise rates on inhabitants and occupiers of lands, in order to set the poor to work, relieve the impotent, apprentice poor children, and punish vagabonds before returning them to their place of birth. This legislation assumed that all parishes were likely to have some poor people without kin able to support them and who were in need of community help. The poor laws were operative in most English parishes by the 1630s and in virtually all by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>387</sup> But in 1748-50, no poor rates were reported as being levied in Caernarvonshire and by 1776, regular public-funded poor relief in Nantconwy was just beginning, with a total of £64 spent. This represented about 9d per inhabitant per year. Thereafter the cost of poor relief and number of people relieved grew more rapidly, though cost did not increase as fast pro-rata to 1811 population, as in England and Wales as a whole (Figure 24).

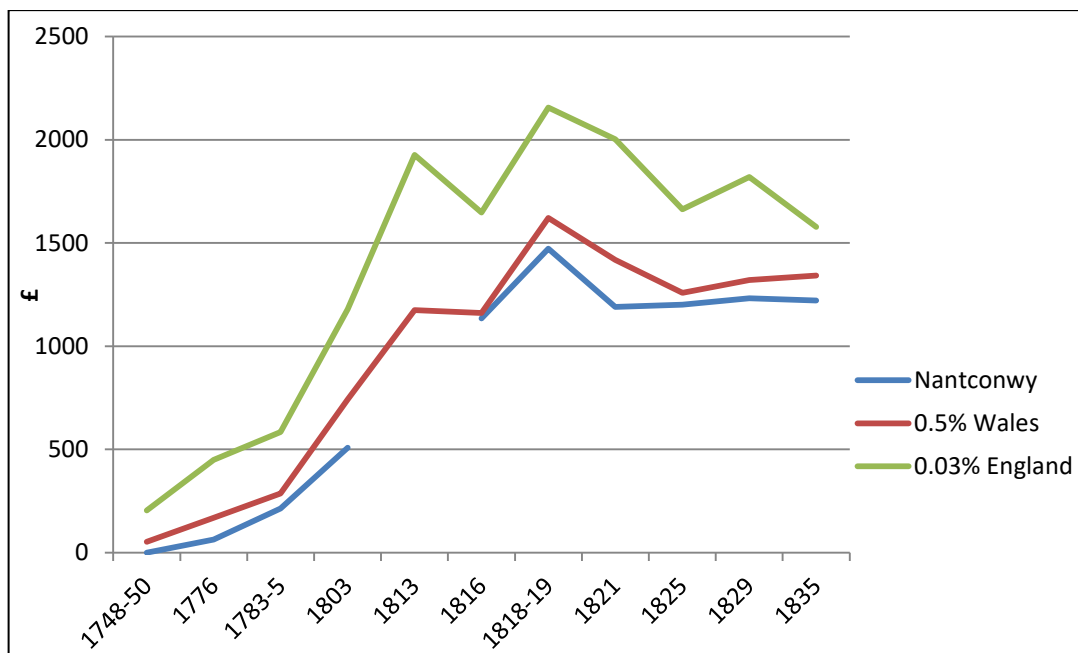
This chapter investigates how the poor of Nantconwy made a livelihood before the introduction of poor rates, the factors that brought about the gradual introduction of poor relief and rates in Nantconwy by 1785, and the part that poor relief and charity played in the overall livelihoods of the poor. The final section looks at how poor relief had changed by the period 1824-31 on the eve of the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1837. The aim is to explore who received poor relief and the kinds of relief afforded – how far need was recognised through regular allowances or pensions, or by casual relief in money or kind - and to contrast the Nantconwy experience with practice elsewhere in north Wales and in English regions.

---

<sup>387</sup> S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004).

Was there a change by the 1820s in the share of relief going to the conventional poor—orphans, the elderly and widows with children – with more support going to working men with families, as in southern England? How were the poor regarded within their communities - were they stigmatised, even blamed for their poverty, as attitudes hardened against rising rate bills, or were they treated with compassion? And how did the system of poor relief fit into the local economy of Nantconwy and north Wales more generally?

Figure 24, Growth of poor relief expenditure, 1750-1835



Note: Based on 1811 population weights, when Nantconwy population was 0.5% of the population of Wales, and 0.03% of England. No returns were received for Penmachno and Eidda for 1813-15.<sup>388</sup>

In addition to comparing poor relief in Nantconwy with Old Poor Law practice elsewhere in England and north Wales, the section investigates some of the practices that the 1834 Poor

<sup>388</sup> Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 304; *PP 1803-4*, XIII (175); *PP 1818*, XIX (82); *PP 1821*, IV (748); *PP 1826-7*, XX (18); *PP 1830-31*, XI (219); *PP 1836*, XXIX (595).

Law Amendment Act sought to reform, in particular allowances to able-bodied men, payment of pauper rents and provision of poorhouses, the widespread use of out-parish relief, and the treatment of unmarried mothers and their children. This then forms the basis for an exploration in Chapter 5 of the introduction of the New Poor Law, why many of its policies were tenaciously and often successfully opposed in Wales, and the impact of the new regime on the poor.

The discussion draws on an extensive literature about poverty and welfare during the Old Poor Law era, 1598-1834, in which three broad approaches can be distinguished.<sup>389</sup> The first focuses on legal and administrative developments - how the laws developed in response to emerging challenges, including the settlement laws which defined which parish was responsible for providing relief to individuals, the bastardy laws, permissive legislation allowing the formation of unions, building workhouses and the election of select vestries, and how the laws were interpreted at local level.<sup>390</sup>

Secondly, the social history of the poor embraces a number of broad themes. Research to identify who the poor were and the circumstances in which they required poor relief funded by rates has highlighted the 'economy of makeshifts' by which the English poor made a livelihood, embracing smallholdings and cottage gardens, exploitation of common rights, earnings from proto-industry, waged employment, credit, and crimes of necessity.<sup>391</sup> Those

---

<sup>389</sup> For a recent historiography of English poor relief before 1780, see J. Healey, *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620-1730* (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 15-25.

<sup>390</sup> S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part I. The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927); D. Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1926); G.W. Oxley, *Poor Relief in England and Wales, 1601-1834* (Newton Abbot, 1974); K.D.M. Snell, 'Pauper settlement and the right to poor relief in England and Wales', *Continuity and Change* Vol. 6 (1991), pp. 375-415; T. Nutt, 'The paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in Old Poor Law Essex', in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 102-121.

<sup>391</sup> The term 'economy of makeshifts' was coined by Olwen Hufton to describe how the poor in France attempted to make a living from a combination of smallholdings, seasonal migration, charity, theft

unable to survive by these makeshifts often suffered from life-cycle poverty – the young, the aged and infirm, widows, and parents over-burdened with dependent children – especially those without kin able to provide support, which became an increasingly frequent occurrence in parts of England where poverty could be inherited from generation to generation.<sup>392</sup> Some of the most powerful local studies have combined family reconstitution with analysis of poor law records to identify who the poor were and the levels of relief they received over their life-cycle.<sup>393</sup> These have revealed considerable regional and local differences in the generosity of relief afforded. The south and east of England has been broadly characterised as more generous, intervening earlier in an individual or family descent into poverty, while the north and west was more parsimonious, relieving fewer people and at a lower level of benefit.<sup>394</sup> The poor had access to a mixed economy of welfare which embraced the support of kin, the kindness of neighbours, hospitality, alms, and various types of philanthropy including endowed charities and almshouses, though as the scale of poverty grew during the eighteenth century, the role of poor relief came increasingly to dwarf other types of welfare except in very well-endowed parishes.<sup>395</sup> There has also been a more recent emphasis on the voices and experiences of the poor, heard through settlement examinations, appeals,

---

and smuggling: O. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974); S. King and A. Tomkins, *The Poor in England, 1700-1900: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); Hindle, *On the Parish*.

<sup>392</sup> T. Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from seventeenth-century Norfolk', in R.M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 351-88; B. Stapleton, 'Inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850', *Social History* 18 (1993), pp. 339-55.

<sup>393</sup> L. Botelho, 'Aged and impotent: parish relief of the aged poor in early modern Suffolk', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp. 91-111; S. King, 'Reconstructing lives: the poor, the Poor Law and welfare in Calverley, 1650-1820', *Social History* 22 (1997), pp. 318-338; S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834* (Woodbridge, 2011).

<sup>394</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>395</sup> Innes, 'Mixed economy of welfare'; Hindle, *On the Parish*.

pauper letters, petitions and inventories, which reveal the extent to which local practice was negotiated and the poor themselves were active agents.<sup>396</sup>

The third strand of debate concerns the economic history of the poor law. It has been argued that the unique system of tax-funded poor relief that developed in England (but not Scotland and Ireland) was a concomitant of the growth of wage labour with the development of agrarian capitalism, in effect a substitute for access to land and common rights.<sup>397</sup> Economic aspects played an increasing role during the period after 1780, when livelihoods became more precarious and poverty levels increased in England with the loss of family incomes from spinning and subsequently other forms of proto-industry, more restricted access to land and commons resources, a decline in farm service, and with rising population and increased susceptibility to trade cycles contributing to under- and unemployment. Between the 1770s and 1810s poor relief expenditure increased threefold nationally, as ratepayers preferred to substitute individual relief awards for a general increase in wage rates. While real male wages stagnated over the ensuing seven decades, periods of sharp inflation resulted in short term crises for those dependent on inadequate monetary earnings. The rising cost and number of people receiving poor relief became of increasing political concern, especially as relief was extended beyond the traditional life-cycle recipients to include a growing proportion of able-bodied men.<sup>398</sup>

---

<sup>396</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985); P. King, 'Pauper inventories and the material lives of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 155 -191; T. Sokoll, 'Old age in poverty: the record of Essex pauper letters, 1780-1834', in *ibid.*, pp. 127-154; Healey, *First Century of Welfare*.

<sup>397</sup> L. Patriquin, *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor Relief in England, 1500-1860. Rethinking the Origins of the Welfare State* (Basingstoke, 2007).

<sup>398</sup> A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1999); H. French, 'How dependent were the 'dependent poor'? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change* 30 (2015), pp. 193-222.

The particular form of poor relief adopted in each area was generally attuned to the changing shape of poverty and to local employers' needs, such as subsidizing low wages or maintaining a sufficient pool of labour to meet harvest peaks, but was also constrained by the resources available.<sup>399</sup> The welfare regime of every parish differed slightly according to local needs and 'welfare cultures' that emerged from the interaction between ratepayers and the poor.<sup>400</sup> While poor relief mitigated the worst impact of economic change, contemporary political economists voiced concerns that it might both hinder the relocation of labour from areas of declining employment to growth areas and encourage more rapid population growth.<sup>401</sup> Recent historians have argued that the poor laws did not restrict mobility and may actually have encouraged greater mobility and a shift to wage labour by providing a safety net that allowed the poor to abandon their reliance on subsistence agriculture, family and community and enabled them to take greater risks.<sup>402</sup> The settlement laws in particular encouraged movement of surplus labour from rural to industrialising areas, and could be used flexibly through the payment of out-parish relief to support migrants during illness or trade downturns.<sup>403</sup> However in areas where relief was more parsimonious such as the north of England, this may have spurred the poor to seek more productive work opportunities.<sup>404</sup>

There has been no systematic overview of the implementation and operation of the Old Poor Law in Wales. King and Stewart concluded in 2001 that methodological and analytical developments in the study of the English Poor Laws had not been extended to Welsh history,

---

<sup>399</sup> G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990); S. King, 'Poor relief and English economic development reappraised', *EcHR* 50 (1997), pp. 360-368.

<sup>400</sup> French, 'Dependent poor', p. 215.

<sup>401</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh 1817), Vol 1 pp. 227-235; T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London, 1803).

<sup>402</sup> J.P. Huzel, 'The demographic impact of the Old Poor Law: more reflexions on Malthus.' *EcHR* 33 (1980), pp. 367-381; Solar, 'Poor relief and economic development';

<sup>403</sup> J.S. Taylor, 'The impact of pauper settlement, 1691-1834', *Past and Present* 73 (1976), pp. 42-73.

<sup>404</sup> King, "Poor relief and English economic development", p. 367.

while monographs about the operation of the laws in England and Wales generally contained little specific information concerning Wales. Moreover, the handful of modern Welsh studies mainly concern the New Poor Law era, leaving unanswered such important questions as how generous was Welsh poor law provision before 1834, the extent to which it followed practice in English regions, and the degree of diversity within Wales itself.<sup>405</sup> The position has not changed significantly since their survey. Dodd's classic narrative account of the Old Poor Law in north Wales implied that systematic poor relief was generally unnecessary before about 1760 due to the effectiveness of informal relief, and conveyed the broad outlines of poor relief practices that had developed by the early nineteenth century.<sup>406</sup> This picture has been largely confirmed by local studies based on vestry records, though Howell painted a bleaker picture of penny-pinching Welsh vestries unwilling to recognize the extent of need and paying wholly inadequate allowances, unchecked by any active supervision by Justices of the Peace.<sup>407</sup> Perhaps the most useful study of the Old Poor Law in north Wales is Thomas's detailed analysis tracing the introduction and development of poor relief in eight parishes in the hundred of Ardudwy, northern Merioneth, an area adjoining and very similar to Nantconwy.<sup>408</sup>

---

<sup>405</sup> King & Stewart, 'Poor Law in Wales'; for one more scholarly analysis of the dying stages of the Old Poor Law in south Wales, see A. C. Davies, 'The Old Poor Law in an industrializing parish - Aberdare, 1818-36', *WHR* (1977), pp. 285-311.

<sup>406</sup> A.H. Dodd, 'The Old Poor Law in north Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1926), pp. 111-32.

<sup>407</sup> A.E. Davies, 'Some aspects of the operation of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire, 1750-1834', *Ceredigion VI* (1968), pp. 1-44; R.L. Brown, *The Parish Pauper and the Poor Law: the Poor in Welshpool* (Welshpool, 2002); C. Flynn-Hughes, 'Development of the Poor Laws in Anglesey and Caernarfonshire between 1815 and 1914' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1945); C. Flynn-Hughes, 'Aspects of Old Poor Law administration and policy in Amlwch parish 1770-1837', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society* (1945), pp. 48-60; S.A. Williams, 'Care in the community: women and the Old Poor Law in early nineteenth-century Anglesey', *Llafur* 6 (1995), pp. 31-42; Howell, *Rural Poor*.

<sup>408</sup> B.B. Thomas, 'The Old Poor Law in Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro', *BBCS* 7 (1935), pp. 153-191.

## **2. *The economy of makeshifts in Nantconwy***

It has been suggested that the late introduction of poor relief financed by parish rates in Wales may have been due to weakness at the county quarter sessions level and in parish governance.<sup>409</sup> This was certainly the view of Judge Daines Barrington, an Englishman appointed to the north-west Wales circuit in the 1760s, who was horrified to find the poor knocking on his door seeking alms.<sup>410</sup> Having discovered that there were no overseers of the poor in the counties of Caernarvonshire and Anglesey, or in many parts of Merioneth, he spent several years haranguing the Justices of the Peace (JPs) at the opening of the Great Sessions about their responsibility for implementing the poor laws. In 1769 he gave notice that if the magistrates did not appoint overseers the following Easter, he would report to a higher authority. This had the desired effect in Merioneth, but with the exception of the hundred of Isaf, Judge Barrington concluded that there did not appear to be the least intention of carrying the laws into effect in Caernarvonshire and Anglesey. He therefore referred the issue to the Lords Commissioners of the Great Seal, asking what steps could be taken to compel the magistrates to implement the law. The prospect of taking legal action against the local magistrates clearly caused great embarrassment in central legal circles, and the issue was quietly buried. Judge Barrington was not however prepared to let the matter drop, writing some 200 letters to various people in authority urging a solution. By 1775, Anglesey and two of the six Caernarvonshire hundreds had appointed overseers and started to collect poor rates. The Lords of the Exchequer finally informed Judge Barrington that they were not prepared to spend government money on legal action against the Caernarvonshire JPs, which would constitute an unprecedented step, but they hoped that the Caernarvonshire hundreds which had not yet implemented the poor laws would soon follow the good example

---

<sup>409</sup> P. Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 49-50.

<sup>410</sup> E. Jones, *Observations on the Scheme before Parliament for the Maintenance of the Poor* (Chester, 1776), pp. 24-5.

of other areas of north Wales.<sup>411</sup> One of the hundreds concerned was Nantconwy, where there were few if any JPs. Faced with the failure of Caernarvonshire JPs to act and the impotence of the judiciary, the poor were apparently to be left to shift for themselves for a while longer. But as we shall see, the absence of overseers and poor rates did not necessarily mean that Nantconwy parishes neglected the relief of the poor.

First and foremost however, Welsh contemporaries believed that poor relief funded by rates on the English model simply was not needed, and that long-established means of ensuring a livelihood and supporting the poor remained sufficient. Joseph Cradock commented on the controversy in his letters on a tour through north Wales in 1770. The JPs were reluctant to bring the poor laws into operation, both because of the extra work it would cause them, and due to a belief that 'if the poor were maintained on parochial rates, it would encourage idleness, and that many would throw themselves upon the parish who could maintain themselves by labour'. Furthermore, in Wales there were comparatively few that stood in need of charity and there were untapped opportunities for employment where lands were uncultivated and wool not used in manufacturing. The people were charitable, and most of the poor were able to subsist with the aid of charity, which was seldom solicited in vain. Nevertheless, there were reports that some people perished of want where they were unable, through sickness or age, to solicit relief.<sup>412</sup>

---

<sup>411</sup> TNA T 1/480 fol. 169. (Letter from Judge Daines Barrington to the Lords Commissioners of the Great Seal, 28 Aug. 1770); T 1/515 fol. 193, (Opinion of Attorney General on enforcing the poor laws in the counties of Anglesey and Carnarvon' (28 July 1774); T 1/515 fol. 197-9, 'Letter of Daines Barrington, 4 Dec. 1775); T 29/44 fol. 215, (Minute of meeting of Lords of Treasury, 19 Dec. 1775).

<sup>412</sup> J. Cradock, *Letters from Snowdon* (London, 1770), pp. 126-9.

## The cottager economy

So who were the poor of Nantconwy and how did they make shift before the introduction of poor relief? It was estimated in Chapter 1 that in 1750 over half of Nantconwy families tenanted their own farm and that there were relatively few labourers. Most people remained close to the land and were not yet totally reliant on markets to buy food and the necessities of life. Unlike England, where the number of landless labourers and craftsmen at risk of pauperisation increased rapidly in the second half of the eighteenth century, the cottager economy remained vibrant in Nantconwy, as in much of Wales. There was an expansion of smallholdings on which a family could if necessary support itself by growing oats and potatoes and keeping a pig or cow, especially in the early nineteenth century. In most cases the smallholding was combined with work as a labourer or craftsman and with family earnings from spinning and knitting. Some farmers allowed labourers to keep sheep on the farm or on its share of the common or waste. There was also a widespread practice in north Wales of labourers being permitted to plant potatoes on fallow land, with the farmer preparing and manuring the ground, and carting the crop. Potato growers paid in money or by providing additional harvest labour themselves or via a substitute, though if they kept a pig and were able to manure the ground themselves, there was usually no charge for the use of the land.<sup>413</sup> This system of 'love ploughing' as it was called was still widespread in Caernarvonshire during the First World War.<sup>414</sup>

Many families were also able to supplement their diet by fishing, as the game laws were not put into operation until the nineteenth century.<sup>415</sup> Salmon fisheries, which had been a

---

<sup>413</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 208; *PP 1834*, XXIX (251), 'Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws. Appendix A, Part II: Assistant Commissioners' Reports', p. 187a.

<sup>414</sup> GA XC20/7, (Caernarvonshire War Agricultural Executive Committee correspondence, 1915).

<sup>415</sup> Cradock, *Letters from Snowdon*, p. 176.

prerogative of the Welsh princes, were by the eighteenth century leased to local farmers and fishermen. Trout fishing in the many small lakes and streams was still open to all, and according to William Williams of Llandegai, the natives of Eryri (Snowdonia) were able to eat plenty of excellent trout in summer to supplement their diet of oatmeal, milk, butter, cheese and potatoes.<sup>416</sup>

Peat for fuel was widely available from the mountains, or farm workers were often allowed to dig peat on the farm with the farmer lending a cart to carry it home.<sup>417</sup> The importance of free peat can hardly be overstated. In 1795, the cost of fuel was between 21s and 25s a year in north Wales, equivalent to three weeks' wages for a labourer and more than the cost of housing.<sup>418</sup> When the poor of Llanrwst lost access to their customary peat grounds after the Parliamentary enclosure of the Hiraethog moors in the 1820s, they were said to have been unable to afford to buy coal, and had spent the hard winter without heat or the means of cooking their food.<sup>419</sup> Other resources freely available from the hillsides included rushes used for thatching, making rush lights and as floor covering, bracken used in soap-making, and lichen used as a dye which the poor collected for sale.<sup>420</sup>

Spinning and stocking knitting formed an important part of the economy of makeshifts for the poor of Nantconwy. All members of the family were involved, and children learned to knit as soon as they could talk.<sup>421</sup> Profits to the knitter were meagre if wool had to be purchased, but in Wales, wool gathering was the equivalent of gleaning. The tradition of giving wool to

---

<sup>416</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 7.

<sup>417</sup> Kay, *General View*, p. 21.

<sup>418</sup> D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry* (Bath, 1795), pp. 189-91.

<sup>419</sup> DA DD/WY 6840.

<sup>420</sup> TNA CRES 49/643; Roberts, *Dolwyddelan*, p. 35; Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 33; J. G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973), pp. 55, 161.

<sup>421</sup> Davies, *Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 189.

the poor continued into the nineteenth century, when 'no farmer's wife worthy of the name, with a good flock of sheep on the farm, would neglect to set two or three fleeces on one side until the *gwlanwyr*, the wool gatherers, called'. Wool gathering was well-organised, with workers' wives doing a circuit of farms, led by an older woman who knew the character of each farmer's wife and would introduce any new labourer's wife in the family. In Pentrevoelas, Denbighshire, most wool gatherers had several fixed rounds of three or four miles' radius about their homes, but some women would also walk over the mountains involving round trips of up to sixty miles, also gathering wool left on hedges and in the heather.<sup>422</sup> Poor families were able to make nearly all their own clothes with the wool begged at shearing time, with some left over for knitting stockings for sale.<sup>423</sup>

*Figure 25, 'Interior of a farmhouse nr. Conwy'*<sup>424</sup>



<sup>422</sup> Evans, *Gorse Glen*, pp. 160-61, 164.

<sup>423</sup> Davies, *Labourers in Husbandry*, pp. 189, 191.

<sup>424</sup> Cornelius Varley, (1802, © National Museum of Wales).

Most eighteenth-century Nantconwy cottagers who had access to land, including widows and spinsters, were able to support themselves in old age as long as they remained healthy. Two inventories illustrate the spectrum of cottager lifestyles in Nantconwy. Catherine Davies of Trefriw, who died childless in 1819, possessed a considerable store of potatoes, peas and beans, which she cultivated with a spade, rake and pitchfork, as well as a flax and a wool spinning wheel and stores of linen and wool. Her earnings from spinning and probably also knitting stockings, combined with gardening, enabled her to live in relative comfort in a two room cottage furnished with a clock, dresser and crockery, a traditional Welsh *cwpwrdd tridarn* (three-piece cupboard), press cupboard, wainscot chests, grate and fire things and tea things.<sup>425</sup> (Figure 25 illustrates a similarly-furnished Conwy valley farmhouse.) At the other end of the spectrum, the possessions of Evan Williams of Bryn y garthlwyd in Capel Curig, a single farm labourer described as a pauper, included a small sack of corn, another of wool and a spindle.<sup>426</sup>

*Table 30, Dolwyddelan burials, 1750-84*

Category	Number	Percentage of burials
Poor man	25	15
Poor woman	32	19
Other man	57	34
Other woman	53	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>	

Source: CA CEP 14/1-2.

An insight into the number of people perceived as poor by their contemporaries can be gained from the Dolwyddelan burial register over the period 1750-84, where just over a third of the deceased were categorised as poor ([Error! Reference source not found.](#)). Women were a little more likely to be regarded as poor than men, (19 per cent of burials compared to 15 per cent),

<sup>425</sup> NLW B1819/119 W,I, (Will and inventory of Catherine Davies, Tanrue, Trefriw, 1819).

<sup>426</sup> NLW B/1760/96 W,I, (Will and inventory of Evan Williams, Gwydir, 1760).

but this difference is surprisingly small given the much higher proportion of women on poor relief in England until about the 1780s.<sup>427</sup> Even just before death, when poverty was most likely to be experienced, only half of Dolwyddelan labourers were considered poor: widowers and men with no recorded occupation, perhaps living with relatives, were most likely to constitute the poor (Table 31). It therefore appears that although there was some poverty in Nantconwy, it was either not deemed severe enough to require poor relief, or existing aspects of welfare were sufficient to relieve it.

*Table 31, Occupations of Dolwyddelan men dying 1750-84*

Occupation or status	Male other	Male poor
Freeholder	5	
Yeoman	23	
Labourer	11	11
Widower		2
Single man	6	
Mason	3	
Weaver	2	1
Joiner		1
Other	5	1
Not given	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>25</b>

## The mixed economy of welfare

Before the introduction of poor relief, the poor of Nantconwy had access to a mixed economy of welfare. A number of charities, including four almshouses, were endowed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Jesus Hospital at Llanrwst, founded in 1610 by King James I's goldsmith, John Williams, with Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, provided for twelve elderly men from Llanrwst, Bettws y coed and Dolwyddelan. Almshouses founded in the early eighteenth century in the Tir Ifan (Denbighshire) and Eidda townships of Ysbytty Ifan provided

<sup>427</sup> King, 'Calverly' p. 325; Wales, 'Life-cycle', p. 260; R.M. Smith, 'Aging and well-being in early modern England', in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-modernity* (London, 1998), p. 75.

for six men and six women from both parts of the parish. In Penmachno, an almshouse endowed in 1729 by Roderick Lloyd, Pronotary of north Wales, provided accommodation for 'five poor decayed men and the like number of poor decayed women who were aged and past labour', with clothing and a pension of 5s a month in the 1750s, which rose to 10s by 1834.<sup>428</sup>

In addition to founding the almshouse, Roderick Lloyd left £100 to provide bread to twelve poor people of Penmachno every Sunday and meat at Christmas. The parish also benefited from three smaller charities which gave bread and small cash doles at Christmas and Easter. In Dolwyddelan, interest from an endowment of £60 left in 1735 by Elinor Thomas of Beriw in Montgomeryshire was distributed twice yearly by the churchwardens.<sup>429</sup> The inhabitants of Gwydir Township were covered by the charities of Llanrwst parish. There were no charities in Bettws y coed, Trefriw or Llanrhychwyn at this time, though further bequests of £10-12 were made in the later part of the century in Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Llanrhychwyn, the interest on which was distributed to the poor at Christmas in amounts ranging from 6d to 4s.<sup>430</sup> Money given at the offertory during communion services was distributed among the poor in all Nantconwy parishes, a general practice in the eighteenth-century, and in north Wales the tradition of *cwmortha* was still in use, where briefs were read in church for the relief of specific families in need.<sup>431</sup> In addition, offerings for the clergyman at funeral services were usually given to the family where the family of the deceased was left in distress.<sup>432</sup>

---

<sup>428</sup> BUA Nannau 3524, (Orders for the government of Penmachno almshouse, 1737); *PP 1834*, XXII (606), Further Report of the Commissioners concerning charities in England and Wales, pp. 507-12; *PP 1837-38*, XXVII (144), Report of Commissioners concerning charities in England and Wales, p. 48.

<sup>429</sup> NLW B/QA/2.

<sup>430</sup> *PP 1834*, XXII (606), pp. 507-8.

<sup>431</sup> NLW B/QA/6, (Bishop's visitation returns, 1776). Cradock, *Letters*, p. 84; S.F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor* (London, 1797), p. 368.

<sup>432</sup> NLW B/QA/5, (Bishop's visitation returns, 1774); Evans, *Beauties*, vol. XVII. - Part I (London, 1812), p. 117.

However, informal charity probably formed the largest part of the poor's mixed welfare economy. The tradition of hospitality praised by the medieval bards was still strong in rural Wales and shaded imperceptibly into charity. Although by 1750 few gentry would have given meals to the poor (and gentry had in any case died out in Nantconwy), hospitality on a more limited scale remained common among farming families. In 1763 for example, Hugh Roberts, who tenanted a well-equipped farmhouse in Trefriw, included amongst his possessions a bedstead with two old hemp blankets for the use of the poor.<sup>433</sup> And in the later nineteenth century, the tenant of one of the largest farms in Penmachno, was known for providing lodging for the night and breakfast to poor wanderers, and for feeding and clothing many poor children in the parish.<sup>434</sup>

Medieval Welsh landholding on a kinship basis also left a strong sense of obligation toward even quite remote kin, a commitment which had largely died out in England by this period. Walter Davies thought that most families had been inclined to support their poor relations up to the ninth degree until the late eighteenth century to avoid criticism if their relatives were obliged to seek poor relief.<sup>435</sup> And in early nineteenth-century north Wales, Hugh Evans described how farmers' wives provided hospitality towards the families of their agricultural labourers: 'At Cwm perhaps she [Mari, the farm labourer's wife] may have a meal of bread and cheese and a cup of milk for the baby. The farmwife fills her can with buttermilk and puts the half pound of butter in the can also'.<sup>436</sup> Traditions of hospitality and charity towards kin and dependents, including labourers working on the farm and sub-tenants who were part of

---

<sup>433</sup> NLW B/1763/254 I, (Inventory of Hugh Roberts, Pant y Carw, Trefriw).

<sup>434</sup> Roberts, *Penmachno*, p. 72.

<sup>435</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 419.

<sup>436</sup> Evans, *Gorse Glen*, p. 166.

the farm's potato setting group, remained into the twentieth century, in return for help at harvest or wool combing and other odd jobs around the farm.<sup>437</sup>

Begging also formed an important and accepted part of the mixed economy of welfare in late eighteenth-century Wales both before and after the introduction of poor rates. The Flintshire JP Edward Jones of Wepre Hall could still oppose poor rates in the 1790s on the grounds that in unrated parishes 'the few indigent among them are supported by voluntary contribution' and 'the benevolence of all ranks to the poor is very great'.<sup>438</sup> David Davies collected evidence that begging was long-established in Denbighshire and in neighbouring counties, where the dole received was oats or barley, and wool. A Merioneth correspondent described begging as 'an old-established trade to which men, women and children devote themselves without the least degree of shame', because of the lack of profitable work: in the late 1790s families were not able to fully support themselves by knitting. Widows and their families received some parish relief, but were chiefly supported by begging from door to door.<sup>439</sup>

Begging was certainly a part of everyday life in Nantconwy. When one of Griffith Jones' circulating schools came to Penmachno for three months in 1758, the curate asked for the school to stay longer to enable the children to learn to read better, as 'some of the scholars are so poor, that they are necessitated to go about to beg their bread and cannot constantly attend'.<sup>440</sup> Although the poor normally begged food in their own parish, following the harvest failures of 1816, the 'year with no summer' resulting from the eruption of Mount Tambora in

---

<sup>437</sup> Jenkins, *Agricultural Community*, p. 56.

<sup>438</sup> E. Jones, *The Prevention of Poverty by Beneficial Clubs* (London, 1796), p. 22.

<sup>439</sup> Davies, *Labourers in Husbandry*, pp. 189-191.

<sup>440</sup> *Welch Piety*, (1747-48), p. 13.

Indonesia, poor women from Bettws y coed went begging in Anglesey where the harvest had been better, and each woman returned with a sackful of oatmeal.<sup>441</sup>

### 3. Introduction of the Old Poor Law, 1750 - 1784

The slow introduction of poor relief in Nantconwy largely supports Joseph Cradock's contention that until the 1770s the local economy and extent of formal and informal charity meant there was little need for poor relief (Table 32). A number of factors seem to have brought about the gradual introduction of poor relief, with poor rates being eventually levied in Dolwyddelan in 1774, and in Bettws y coed and Penmachno in 1785. Even then, poor relief costs remained very low as was the case in most parts of Caernarvonshire.

Table 32, Reported poor relief expenditure

	1748-50 £	1776 £	1783-5 £
Bettws y coed		1	25
Dolwyddelan		28	23
Eidda			29
Gwydir			29
Llanrhychwyn		9	44
Penmachno		16	40
Trefriw		10	24
<b>Total Nantconwy</b>	0	64	214
Caernarvonshire	0	472	1,579

Sources: *PP 1821*, IV (748); Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire* p. 128.

Poor law sources for Nantconwy, as in much of north Wales, are rather patchy and even where parish accounts survive they are often very scrappy. Churchwardens' accounts for Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno which include poor relief payments, the

<sup>441</sup> Evans, *Gorse Glen*, p. 157.

accounts of three Penmachno parish charities, rate collection books and Bettws vestry minutes are used to examine the introduction of poor relief (Table 33).

*Table 33, Charity and vestry records, 1750-84*

Parish	1750-4	1755-9	1760-4	1765-9	1770-4	1775-9	1780-4
Bettws y coed							Churchwardens' accounts
Dolwyddelan	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts	Churchwardens' accounts
Penmachno	Churchwardens' accounts	Charity accounts	Charity accounts	Charity accounts	Charity accounts	Charity accounts	Charity accounts

Key:

Churchwardens' accounts	Vestry minutes	Charity accounts
-------------------------	----------------	------------------

Sources: CA CEP11/28, (Bettws y coed vestry account book, 1781-1805); CEP11/26, (Bettws y coed vestry minute book, 1782-1808, 1824-30); CA CEP 14/1-2, (Dolwyddelan parish register, including churchwardens' accounts, 1722-63 & 1764-84); BUA Bangor 558-60, (Penmachno charities' accounts including churchwardens' accounts, 1752-4, Penmachno charities' accounts, 1761-1793, Penmachno vestry book, 1772-85).

From 1750 if not before, occasional poor relief payments were made by the churchwardens out of church rates. In Dolwyddelan, a church rate of 2d in the pound was collected in 1750, which brought in £3 13s 10d, of which £1 10s was spent on maintenance of a poor orphan. By 1753 his maintenance had ceased, presumably because he had reached working age. The following year, Catherine Roberts was paid £2 8s 5d for looking after Jane Jones. There was then no further spending from church rates on the poor for another ten years.

In Penmachno, the vestry usually thought that the parish charities made sufficient provision for the poor. Church rates were employed occasionally for poor relief purposes, as in 1753 when David Morris was paid £2 5s for maintaining Jane verch Rhydderch; 2s were also given to a blind child, and 1s for sending a vagabond. There was then no further poor relief expenditure for several years. By 1773, the churchwardens' accounts included £9 13s spent

on relief to 19 poor people in kind, cash or rent payments, intermixed with parish expenses such as communion wine, a pitch-pipe for the psalm singers, and payments for killing foxes.

As spending on the poor increased, all three parishes sought ways of raising money to avoid increasing the rates. In 1764 the Dolwyddelan vestry used donations from a new alms box to cover the cost of its first settlement case.<sup>442</sup> The following year it raised money from the sale of an ash tree in the churchyard (Figure 26). Bettws y coed cut down and sold an oak and a sycamore tree in 1784, and the Penmachno vestry also raised funds from the sale of two yew trees in 1781, fetching about 7 per cent of the year's income. In this case the extra income appears to have been distributed to deserving cases, mostly people who were not regular poor relief recipients.

*Figure 26, 'Haymaking at Dolwyddelan below Moel Siabod' <sup>443</sup>*



<sup>442</sup> Relieving the poor by a combination of church rates and the poor box was a regular practice in north Wales: Thomas, 'Arduwy-Uwch-Artro', p. 157.

<sup>443</sup> Paul Sandby, (1776, © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

In some cases, a parish's first experience of paying poor relief occurred when a poor person with a settlement in Nantconwy sought relief in another parish which had already introduced poor relief. Dolwyddelan's first poor law case in 1764 concerned the non-resident Catherine Jones, where after spending 10s 6d to establish that her settlement made her a charge on Dolwyddelan, the parish paid an average of 24s a year over the next three years for her maintenance, followed by 8s for her coffin and 8d for pipes and tobacco at her funeral. As it happened, the parish made a handsome profit by raising over £10 from the sale of Catherine's goods after her death.

Another case of imported poor relief occurred two years later. William Lloyd and his wife were living at Dolgellau in Merioneth, but proved to have a settlement in Dolwyddelan. The parish was required to pay relief of £6 a year to Lloyd and his wife, a sum probably fixed by the Merioneth JPs, as it was well above the level of relief voluntarily paid by any Nantconwy parish at this period. The ratepayers must have been relieved when Lloyd and his wife both died after receiving two years' pension. These experiences obviously taught the Dolwyddelan vestry a hard lesson, for in 1771 they paid over £5 to establish the settlement of any poor people in Dolwyddelan who might be chargeable to other parishes.

Dolwyddelan raised a separate poor rate for the first time in 1775 at the rate of 4d in the pound in addition to a church mize of 8d, and poor rates were levied for the first time in Bettws and Penmachno in 1785. Rates were initially charged on the same basis as land tax, which in Nantconwy meant that the ratepayers were typically farmers occupying over eight acres. Over a third of families therefore paid rates and in Bettws the proportion was over 40 per cent.<sup>444</sup> By 1784 poor relief had evolved in different ways in the three neighbouring parishes

---

<sup>444</sup> Eden, *Poor*, p. 368. CA CEP 11/31: CA CEP14/14-5.

(Table 34). Despite being the smallest and poorest parish, Bettws y coed was the most generous with its poor relief, paying regular relief payments or boarding for 15 people.<sup>445</sup> Only a couple of regular payments in Nantconwy could be described as pensions: vestries seem to have voted varying payments over the course of the year, averaging 8d a week in Bettws and Dolwyddelan but just 5d in Penmachno to regular recipients.

*Table 34, Poor relief and charity in 1784*

Parish	No. of families in 1749	Poor relief expenditure 1784	No. regularly relieved	No. only casually relieved	Charity doles
Bettws y coed	40	£25.48	15 people, average 8d per week	6 people, average 7s 10d pa	
Dolwyddelan	90	£20.85	8 people, average 8d per week	8 people, average 5s 4d pa	£3 pa
Penmachno	124	£39.60	10 in almshouse, average 1s 2d per week + free housing  9 by poor relief, average 5d per week	17 people, average 5s 7d pa	49 dole recipients, average 3s 10d pa.  £3 18s bread

Sources: NLW B/QA/2; CA CEP11/26 and 28; CA CEP14/2; BUA Bangor 559-60.

It is clear that during this early phase of poor relief, only the most pressing cases of poverty were relieved from the rates. Average Nantconwy allowances were less than half the typical pension of about 1s 7d paid in south and east England, though similar to pensions paid in the north of England, which averaged about 8d a week in the 1760s.<sup>446</sup> Poor relief was largely

<sup>445</sup> The median value of Bettws y coed farmers' inventories, 1750-74, was £33.41, compared to £110.68 in Dolwyddelan and £82.03 in Penmachno (Table 14); Land tax for Bettws parish was £14 4s in 1776, compared to £29 17s in Dolwyddelan and £50 12s in Penmachno.

<sup>446</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 147, 192.

residual, supplementing earnings, informal charity and other elements of the economy of makeshifts.

In Penmachno, the existence of an almshouse saved the poor rate from the cost of the most expensive elderly poor. Not only did the almsmen and women have free accommodation, their monthly income of 5s was also three times the average regular relief to other longer term poor in Penmachno. Charity doles were used in Penmachno to offset casual payments that might otherwise have been paid as poor relief. Fifty-five per cent of charity went to people receiving some poor relief, though not usually to those in receipt of larger regular payments. For the poor who received both occasional casual relief and a charity dole, the amounts were virtually equal: an average of 4s 11d from poor relief and 5s p.a. from Anwyl & Hughes and/or Price's charity in 1784/5. But the majority of Penmachno charity dole recipients did not receive any poor relief, and their average charity dole of 2s 11d was less than 60 per cent of the amount awarded to the poor who also received casual poor relief payments. These then were the borderline poor, deserving of charity, but not poor enough to be relieved from the rates.

Dolwyddelan had the most tight-fisted approach to poor relief of the three parishes. In the six years for which churchwardens' and poor relief accounts survive during the period 1774-84, only three women, a fifth of the inhabitants classified as poor in the burial register, received regular poor relief from the parish. Casual relief was also paid to Thomas Jones shortly before he and a daughter were buried at parish expense; thereafter his wife and remaining children were removed to Jones' parish of settlement in Denbighshire. A further three poor women buried in Dolwyddelan received relief from another parish where they had a settlement, like Catherine Maurice, a poor widow for whom the parish paid 18s to establish her settlement in

the neighbouring parish of Beddgelert two years before her death. The majority of people described as poor when they died had not received any poor relief.

In addition to the poor who died in Dolwyddelan, two paupers living elsewhere appear to have received out-parish relief. This reflects a wider pattern in north Wales, where most settlement cases were resolved by agreement to keep legal costs to a minimum, and payment of out-parish relief to people who had migrated elsewhere was common. While the poor remained able to at least partially support themselves, their home parish usually preferred to pay out-parish relief and allow them to stay where their work and friends were rather than see them return and become totally dependent on poor relief.<sup>447</sup>

*Table 35, Type of poor relief by gender in Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno, 1784*

	Female					Male			
	Pension or frequent payment	Rent only	Casual	Via carer	Total F	Pension or frequent payment	Casual	Via carer	Total M
Annual spend	£19.81	£1.20	£2.54	£11.66	£35.21	£10.02	£6.65	£8.38	£25.05
Number	13	3	10	8	34	7	21	4	32
Averages per week	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.8	0.3

Women received 58 per cent of relief in the three parishes, and although men constituted nearly half the recipients, they were far more likely to receive casual payments (Table 35). The larger regular payments in this period were overwhelmingly paid to the traditional poor – the infirm elderly, widows and orphaned children. It was common to pay another parishioner to board and lodge elderly neighbours, often for a year or two before death, a cost-effective

<sup>447</sup> J.S. Taylor, 'A different kind of Speenhamland: nonresident relief in the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), p. 188.

solution that avoided the need to cover rent costs. Over the period 1774-84, parishioners were paid to look after the impotent poor on 33 occasions. It was common practice in some English parishes to lodge impotent elderly women with other female paupers who could look after them, or to buttress family support by paying family members to nurse the sick elderly.<sup>448</sup> Only one case of paupers sharing accommodation occurred in Nantconwy before 1794, and parishioners were rarely paid to look after relatives. A Bettws y coed labourer, Maurice Williams of Garth, was paid for the diet of his mother and father, the latter dying after two years. In Dolwyddelan, Elin Williams was paid briefly to look after her son, perhaps during illness, and the tailor John Ellis received £2 to care for his granddaughter. A Penmachno labourer, Jane Thomas, received relief for four years to rear her children, at least one of whom was illegitimate. Most inhabitants were clearly expected to look after their relatives without support from the parish, and it was usually only those without relatives who became a charge on the parish when in need of care. In the main it was the substantial ratepayers who acted as carers, eight of whom had acted in the combined role of churchwarden and overseer of the poor (Table 36).<sup>449</sup> The willingness of farmers to take the poor into their households was in strong contrast to England, and suggests both an element of charity and a lack of stigma towards the poor.

*Table 36, Status of carers, 1774-84*

Parish	Ratepayer	Relative	Pauper	Unknown	Total
Bettws y coed	4	2	2	1	9
Dolwyddelan	11	1		3	15
Penmachno	3	1	2	3	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>33</b>

<sup>448</sup> P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), p. 138; Smith, 'Aging and well-being', p. 83.

<sup>449</sup> CA CEP11/26; CA CEP14/2; BUA Bangor 560. Ratepayers were normally the same farmers as paid land tax: GA XQL/LT 2/1-2 and 5, and CA CEP 11/30, (Bettws y coed assessment book for the relief of the poor, 1805-1808); CA CEP 14/15, (Dolwyddelan poor rate assessments, 1816-21).

Nantconwy parishes also made payments in kind to meet obvious need, such as bed and bedding, food, and occasionally peat for those unable to cut their own. Relief in kind might also be given to the undeserving poor who could not be trusted with money, like Robert Owen the loom, an improvident Penmachno weaver whom the churchwardens regularly sent away with a peck of oatmeal but struck off the charity list. Rent was occasionally paid, but this was not nearly as significant as it was to become over the next fifty years.

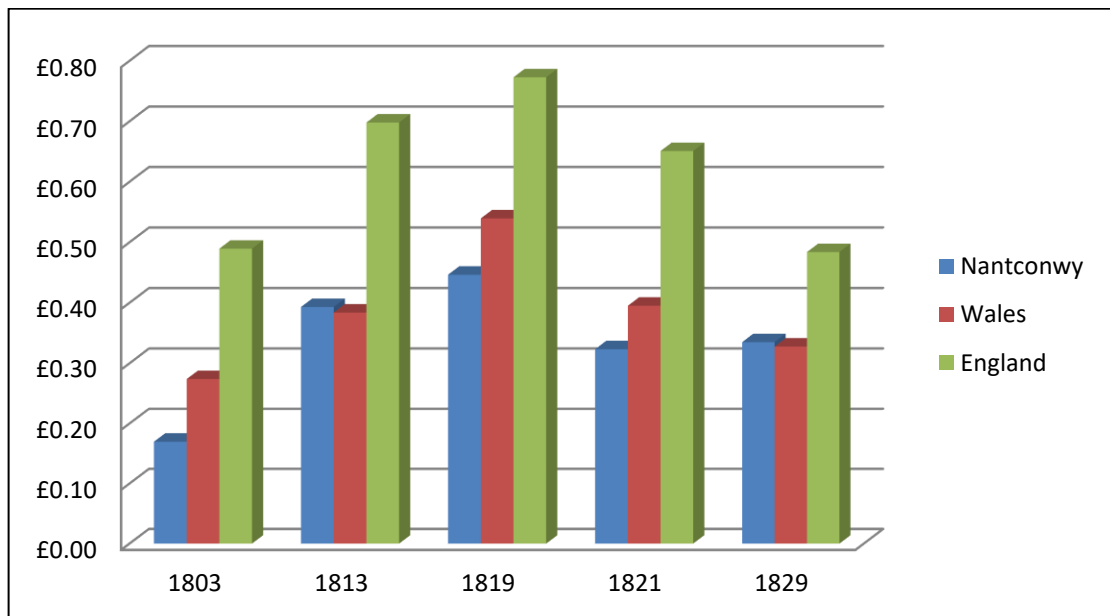
In all three parishes, decisions about all but small casual relief payments were taken by the vestry, which all ratepayers could attend. The Penmachno vestry met three or four times a year, the Bettws vestry more often – six times in 1784. In some cases, a decision to grant relief might require an additional rate to be levied, so there was a very direct relationship between the poor and their neighbours who paid for their relief. Dolwyddelan vestry meetings drew a large attendance to discuss controversial cases, including that of the dying Thomas Jones. No regular tariff seems to have emerged by 1785 and each case was decided on its merits. The highest amount paid to a single elderly pauper was 1s 9d a week but parishes could nevertheless be caring towards a few poor inhabitants at the end of their life. The poor rarely seem to have appealed to a JP for improved relief, and there is little evidence of JP involvement in Nantconwy poor relief apart from taking oaths for settlement and bastardy cases.

#### ***4. Nantconwy poor relief in the 1820s and 1830s***

By the late 1820s, the extent of poverty and scale and cost of poor relief in Nantconwy had undergone considerable change. By 1821 poor relief costs in Nantconwy had stabilised at about six times their 1784 level and then continued virtually unchanged till the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1837 (Figure 24). In 1829, the cost of poor relief had reached 6s 8d per

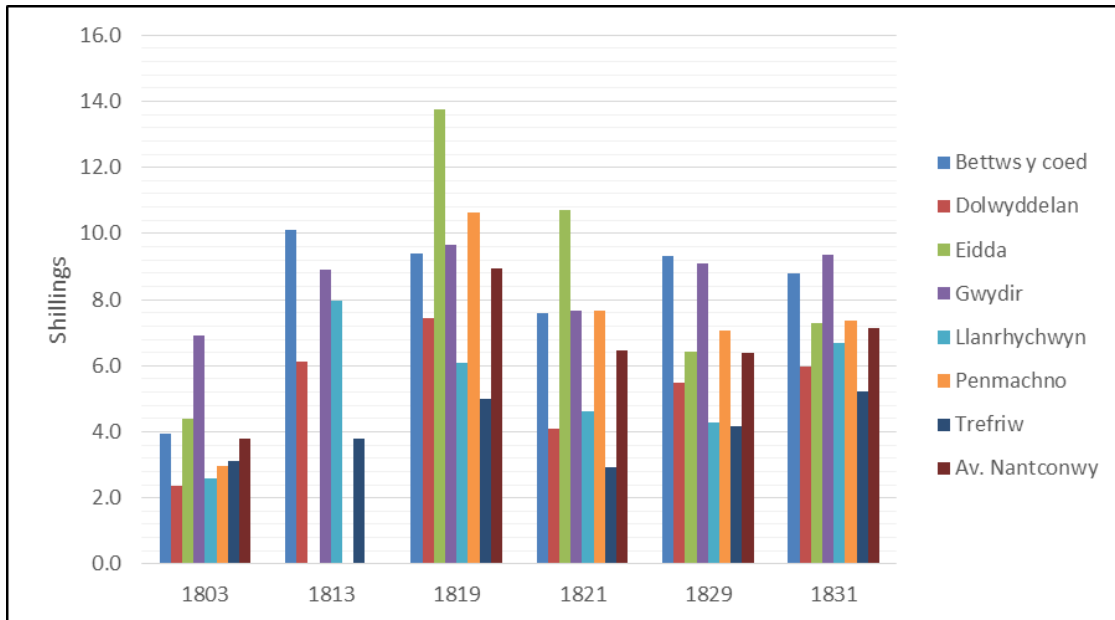
head of population, in line with the average for Wales though this was still only 69 per cent of the English average of 9s 9d per head (Figure 27). Significant differences in expenditure per head between Nantconwy parishes which had started to emerge in the 1780s were still visible, with costs remaining higher than average in Bettws y coed and lower in Dolwyddelan (Figure 28).

Figure 27, Poor relief cost per head, 1803-29



Sources: *PP 1821*, IV (748); *PP 1822*, V (556); *PP 1830-31*, XI (219); *PP 1835*, XLVII (444).

Figure 28, Nantconwy parishes cost of poor relief per head, 1803-31<sup>450</sup>



Increases in population and prices can only account for a small part of this tremendous increase in poor relief costs. From 1750 to 1821, Nantconwy's population grew by an estimated 75 per cent (27 per cent between 1801 and 1821), though it subsequently flat-lined during the 1820s. The Napoleonic Wars brought rapid inflation which caused increasing hardship to poor people dependent on markets for buying food, though in Nantconwy this was to some extent mitigated by the large-scale encroachment of smallholdings from the commons and wastes in Penmachno, Gwydir Township and Llanrhychwyn. During the post-war agricultural slump when oat prices fell to only eight per cent above their pre-war levels, but farm rents remained 36 per cent higher, marginal land brought into cultivation during the war reverted to pasture. Farmers cut costs by laying off labourers and relying more on family members, which probably resulted in less employment for labourers than before the war.<sup>451</sup> Unemployment was exacerbated by the large number of returning servicemen, which

<sup>450</sup> As

Figure 27.

<sup>451</sup> D.W. Howell, 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales', *WHR* 6 (1973), pp. 267, 275.

combined with high food prices during the 1816-17 harvest failures, pushed poor relief up to a peak both in Nantconwy and throughout the country. By 1828-31, the cost of living for an English working family had fallen, but was around 44 per cent above its 1784 level; real male wages had risen marginally, by about eight per cent (see Figure 1).<sup>452</sup> A number of factors might account for this significant increase in poverty, such as the availability of employment, the proportion of families with access to land and commons resources such as grazing and fuel, reduced family earnings from proto-industry especially spinning, and as a consequence of these, a reduced ability of families to support their elderly kin.<sup>453</sup> Examining the pattern of Nantconwy poor relief payments in the late 1820s should throw light on the local reasons for increased poverty and reliance on relief, in comparison to developments nationally.

*Table 37, Nantconwy poor law records, 1815-1837*

Parish	1815-9	1820-4	1825-9	1830-6
Bettws y coed				
Dolwyddelan				
Penmachno	1818-19			

poor accounts      vestry minute books

Sources: CA CEP 11/26, 14/5, 14/7, 14/12-13; BUA Bangor 562.

Nantconwy poor law records are patchier for the post-war period (Table 37). Vestry minutes for Bettws y coed cover the years 1824-30 and provide a valuable picture of parish decision making and practice, though a list of regular allowances confirmed at the annual general meeting was only recorded in the minutes for 1824.<sup>454</sup> Dolwyddelan minutes for the period 1825-36 were also used to reveal parish practice. Accounts covering the period 1831-6 comprised a myriad of individual payments of very small amounts, so expenditure was

<sup>452</sup> Allen, 'Pessimism preserved', pp. 36-7.

<sup>453</sup> Humphries, 'Enclosures, common rights and women'.

<sup>454</sup> CA CEP 11/26, (Bettws y coed vestry minute book, 1824-30).

analysed in detail for the two years 1831-32, to correspond most closely to data available from the other two parishes.<sup>455</sup> The Penmachno accounts for the years 1824-29 were also used to identify general practice and analysed in detail for 1828/9, the only year covering the whole parish.<sup>456</sup> As poor relief expenditure in Nantconwy remained remarkably constant, varying by only three per cent over the period 1825-36, detailed analysis of two years' experience in Dolwyddelan and one for Penmachno provides a reasonably representative picture of poor law practice on the eve of the New Poor Law. Neither accounts nor minutes provide much information on why relief was given.<sup>457</sup> However the pattern of relief in the three Nantconwy parishes can be compared with the general practices in north Wales described in 1834 by Stephen Walcott, the Assistant Commissioner for north Wales appointed by the Commissioners inquiring into the operation of the Poor Laws, and with the more critical report by Williams Day, the Assistant Commissioner responsible for implementing the New Poor Law in the region.<sup>458</sup>

Evidence to the 1832-4 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws requires treating with some caution. It has been alleged that the Commission was appointed to pave the way for a measure which the government already had in mind, rather than to investigate the operation of the Poor Laws with an open mind and propose appropriate remedies. Assistant Commissioners were given a specific set of instructions to guide their inquiries, which indicated

---

<sup>455</sup> Dolwyddelan vestry minutes and accounts are recorded in Welsh: CEP 14/5 & 14/7, (Dolwyddelan, Llyfr cofnodion y festri' [Vestry minute book], 1824-29 & 1831-36); CEP14/12 (Dolwyddelan, Gwarcheidwaid y Tlodion [Overseer of the Poor accounts], 1831-34); CEP 14/13, (Dolwyddelan Llyfr cyfrifon [Account book], 1834-36).

<sup>456</sup> BUA Bangor 562, (Penmachno vestry book, 1824-29).

<sup>457</sup> This was typical in north Wales. William Day complained of 'the absence of all system of accounts, at least in the more remote parishes', and that the Welsh term 'sist' [payment] was used to cover a wide variety of payments, with no explanation of the reason for casual relief: NLW 3141F, (William Day, Report on Wales, 1837), p. 24.

<sup>458</sup> *PP 1834, XXIX (251)*, Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiry into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws. Appendix A Part II: Assistant Commissioners' reports, No. 27, north Wales, [hereafter, 'Walcott's report'].

clear preconceptions about the nature of reform, including looking for evidence of ‘abuses’ such as allowances in aid of wages, the roundsman system, voting in open vestries, and interference by JPs.<sup>459</sup> Despite this, Stephen Walcott’s report was relatively unbiased and paints a useful picture of Poor Law practice in north Wales. He concluded that most of the ‘abuses’ under investigation were not prevalent in the region and acknowledged that the cost of poor relief was generally low. He went on to warn that legislation requiring able-bodied men to be relieved only in workhouses would be unpopular with the great majority of ratepayers, due to the cost being considerably higher per head than the cost of relieving them in their own homes.<sup>460</sup>

It is not possible to identify the age or poor relief careers of most Nantconwy paupers due both to the patchiness of the records and to the impossibility of undertaking the sort of family reconstitution used by some English studies on life-cycle poverty.<sup>461</sup> An attempt was therefore made to estimate the age of Nantconwy paupers from their age at death in parish registers, from the records of the Llanrwst Poor Law Union in 1837-9 and the 1841 census.<sup>462</sup> Identification was somewhat hampered by the increasing frequency of generic addresses such as *Pentref* (village) or *Llan* (near the church), by the poor frequently moving home, and the sizeable proportion (28 per cent) of those receiving out-parish relief. Positive or probable identification was therefore only possible for 48 per cent of regular pensioners in Dolwyddelan and 40 per cent in Penmachno.

---

<sup>459</sup> Brundage, *New Poor Law*, pp. 17-22.

<sup>460</sup> ‘Walcott’s report’, p. 173a.

<sup>461</sup> E.g. Williams, *Poverty*. For method, see S. Ottoway and S. Williams, ‘Reconstructing the life-cycle of poverty in the time of the Old Poor Law’, *Archives* 23 (1998), pp. 19-29. See Chapter 2 Section 1 for difficulties of applying in Wales.

<sup>462</sup> TNA MH 12/16075, (Llanrwst Poor Law Union Correspondence, 1835-46). The 1841 Census rounded adult ages down to the nearest five year point and may therefore under-estimate age: Higgs, *Census Revisited*, p. 83.

## The changing pattern of relief

The six-fold increase in Nantconwy poor relief costs between the 1780s and the late 1820s arose largely as a result of higher regular pensions being paid to an increased number of recipients. The average weekly pension in Bettws, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno rose from 8d a week to 1s 7d, while the number of poor in receipt of regular allowances increased threefold. The vast majority of expenditure now went on regular pensions – 69 per cent in Dolwyddelan and 82 per cent in Penmachno (Figure 29). Bettws y coed paid an average of 18 regular pensions, equivalent to 5.2 per cent of the population, or 24 per cent of families living in the parish at the time of the 1831 census. The numbers in need of relief in Penmachno now far exceeded the almshouse capacity. In addition to the ten almsmen and women, there were 38 families in receipt of regular allowances in 1828 compared to four in 1784 – giving a total of 3.9 per cent of the population receiving poor law allowances, and 22 per cent of families in receipt of either alms or poor relief. The greatest increase occurred in Dolwyddelan, where the number of pensioners rose nearly seven-fold to 40, with 6.7 per cent of the population and 32 per cent of families in receipt of regular allowances.<sup>463</sup> Even so, the proportion of people receiving regular pensions remained modest compared to experience elsewhere: King found that in 1803, Lancashire, the most tight-fisted of English counties, had 6.7 per cent of the population on relief lists, and West Riding and Durham had 9.3 per cent.<sup>464</sup> And taking account of dependents, it was estimated that between a third and a half of the populations of Berkshire and Essex were reliant on the relief system.<sup>465</sup>

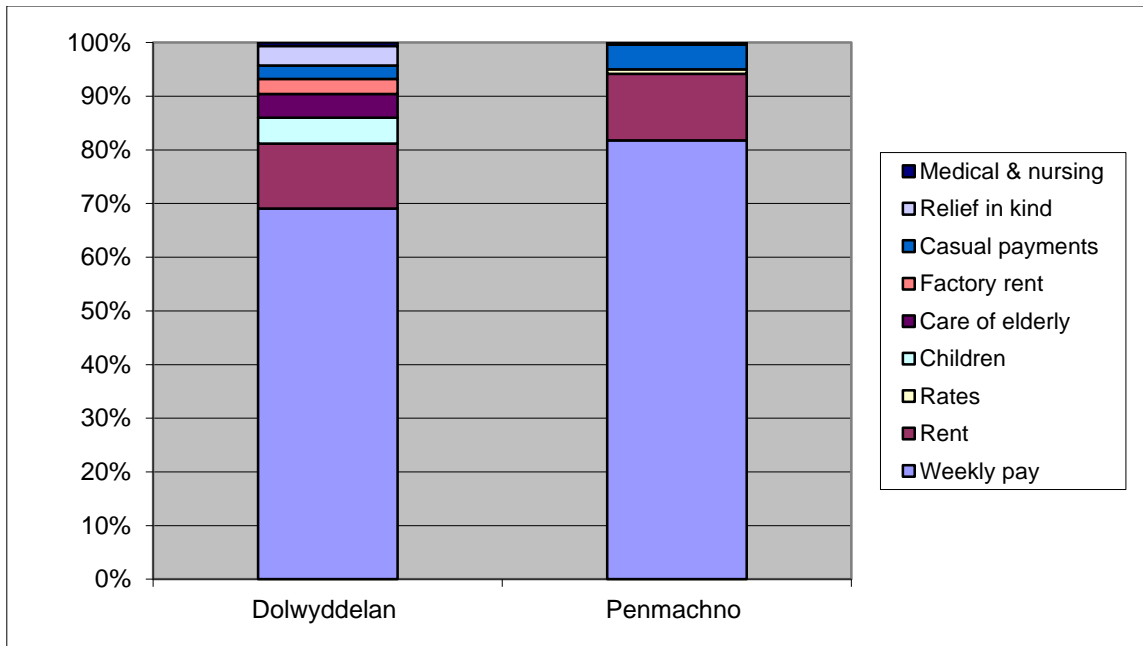
---

<sup>463</sup> Percentage of Nantconwy population on relief counts only the head of household as being on relief, and assumes that the number of paupers residing in the parish receiving out-parish relief from another parish was equivalent to the number of being paid out-parish relief by the three Nantconwy parishes.

<sup>464</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 183.

<sup>465</sup> E.G. Thomas, 'The treatment of poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire 1723-1840' (University of London PhD thesis, 1971), quoted in King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 141.

Figure 29, Types of poor relief expenditure, 1828-31



Sources: as Table 37.

### Regular allowances

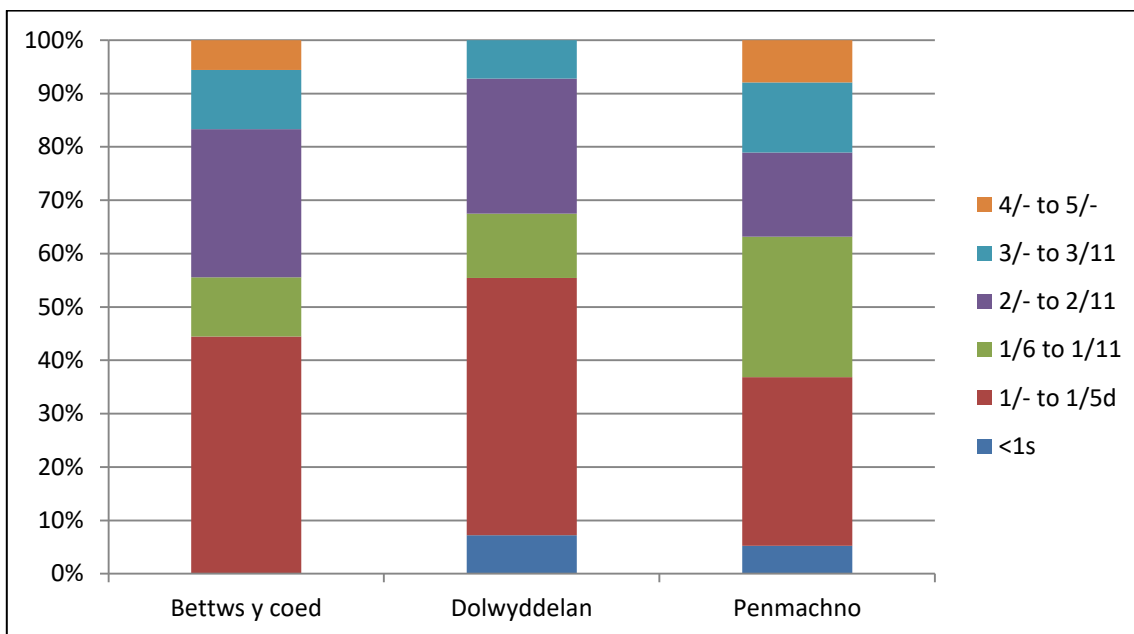
Although a growing proportion of the population were in receipt of regular allowances, the payments remained relatively low. The median weekly allowance was 1s 6d in Bettws and Penmachno, and 1s in Dolwyddelan. Pensions ranged from a few as low as 6d a week to a normal maximum of 3s 6d, though more could be paid during short crises such as illness or approaching death (Figure 30). Allowances were rarely more than half the normal farm labourer's winter wage of 8s a week in 1834.<sup>466</sup> These levels were fairly typical of north Wales, where the weekly allowance for the elderly were typically from 1s to 3s, while allowances for widows and families varied according to the number of children up to a maximum of 5s or very occasionally 6s a week.<sup>467</sup> Regular allowances in Nantconwy therefore remained similar to those in the north of England, where King found that the median pension in 14 communities

<sup>466</sup> 'Walcott's report,' p. 187a.

<sup>467</sup> *ibid.*, p. 175a.

was 4 to 5s a month in 1821. This was well below the level of pensions in the south, where the median pension was 6 to 7s a month.<sup>468</sup>

Figure 30, Level of weekly allowances, 1824-1831



Despite being the poorest parish, the level of allowances paid in Bettws y coed were apparently the most generous, with a higher proportion of regular payments over 2s a week. This may have reflected a larger proportion of impotent elderly people being boarding out. Boarding out remained common in Caernarvonshire where there were no workhouses at this time, indeed there were only four in the whole of north Wales. The impotent elderly were typically 'set' to the lowest bidder amongst vestry members at the annual general meeting. The system came under criticism elsewhere in north Wales, with allegations that poor families took in elderly paupers as a source of additional income and neglected their charges.<sup>469</sup> In some instances adult children who were themselves poor received a small allowance to look after one or both impotent parents, though due to strong social expectation in north Wales

<sup>468</sup> King, *Poverty & Welfare*, pp. 194, 151.

<sup>469</sup> NLW 3141F, (Day, Report on Wales, July 1837, p. 22a).

that children should look after their parents without recompense, they usually received less than the normal cost of boarding out. Although there was no legal obligation to look after siblings, relatives who were not sufficiently well off to pay rates were sometimes paid as carers. Thus in Bettws y coed, the vestry paid William Prichard 2s a week to look after his sister, and a similar amount to William Thomas for looking after his brother.

The amounts paid for board, lodging and clothes for the elderly in Nantconwy varied from 1s a week to 3s 6d, depending on how much attendance and nursing was required, or whether the pauper was able to contribute towards their keep. The elderly were still boarded mainly with local farmers, who may have regarded this as much a Christian duty as a source of profit. This arrangement seems to have been preferred to paying for nursing in the pauper's own home more commonly found in England. Occasionally, a resident without family to care for them might seek vestry assistance during illness in return for leaving their goods and chattels to the parish. For example in Dolwyddelan, Jane Roberts was taken in for a couple of years at 1s 6d a week by a well-to-do widowed neighbour, Jane Jones, who occupied the large farm of Garnedd and had a reputation as a religious and talented lady: several Methodist preachers, including the famous John Jones, Talisarn, had preached their first sermons at her house.<sup>470</sup> An inventory of Jane Roberts' belongings taken at the point where she became in need of care showed that she had a relatively well-furnished cottage. On her death four years later, the sale of her goods and chattels raised £7 7s for the parish and her unsold clothes and bedding were given to the poor.<sup>471</sup>

---

<sup>470</sup> Roberts, *Dolwyddelan*, p. 38.

<sup>471</sup> King found that Essex paupers might make over ownership of their property to the parish in return for being allowed to stay in their own cottage, or if in need of medical care: P. King, 'Pauper inventories and the material lives of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 155 – 191, p. 159.

How boarding out operated is well illustrated in the case of Catherine Owen, described as 'late of Rhiwgri', a small farm in Bettws. Catherine was probably a spinster who was unable to run the farm following her mother's death, perhaps because of disability. In 1824 at the age of 52 she received a small pension of 1s 1d a week, but the following year she was settled to Robert Jones of Diosgau farm for the same amount. In 1827, one of the select vestry members, Roger Prichard of Pyllan farm, took Catherine for 1s per week, which increased to 1s 5d the next year. It is clear that she was expected to contribute towards her keep, for in 1829, John Davies of Pyllan agreed to take her for 1s 8d a week with a proviso that the vestry would review the allowance if she was not able to serve in the same manner as previously. In 1830, Catherine went back to Robert Jones, Diosgau, at whose house she died in 1836. The Joneses of Diosgau were one of several better off Bettws families who took in paupers more than once.

How much can we tell about the people who received regular allowances, given the constraints mentioned earlier? In the south and east of England, there was a marked shift between 1760, when about two thirds of relief recipients were women, and 1820, when nearly two thirds were men. Although women still constituted the majority of regular pensioners at the latter date, the share of pension resources distributed to men had increased from a third to about 60 per cent. After a surge in the proportion of younger pensioners during the Napoleonic Wars, by 1820 the elderly aged 60 and over constituted about half of regular English pensioners.<sup>472</sup> The higher proportion of welfare payments to working age men in the south and east arose from a substantial proportion of the male agricultural labour force being partially dependent on poor relief, due to wages insufficient to keep a large family, seasonal unemployment, declining access to land to grow food and resources from the commons, and

---

<sup>472</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 165-9.

a significant decline in women's earnings especially with the mechanisation of spinning after the 1780s.<sup>473</sup> This trend towards a larger share of poor relief going to men was also evident in Nantconwy, though less pronounced than in England. In the sample years between 1824 and 1831, women constituted 53 per cent of pensioners compared to two thirds in 1784, but 55 per cent of the cost of regular allowances was spent on men. This arose because the average male pension in Nantconwy, 1s 11d a week, was 34 per cent higher than the average female pension of 1s 5d, men being more likely to have a dependent wife, though women paupers were perhaps more likely to have dependent children.

Of the Dolwyddelan and Penmachno pensioners whose age was traced, a majority were elderly: 23 per cent of people receiving a regular allowance were aged 60-69 and 35 per cent 70 and over. In Dolwyddelan, 79 per cent of resident paupers with a regular allowance were either elderly or women of younger or unknown age, probably widows, and only 21 per cent were men under 60 or of unknown age. In Penmachno, a third of regular allowances were paid to men aged under 60 or of unknown age, though here the almshouses had largely become the preserve of older women: of the 19 almshouse residents who died between 1815 and 1834, 13 were women, with a median age at death of 84. It therefore appears that pensions in Nantconwy were still largely reserved for the traditional poor, and that able-bodied men could only have formed a small proportion of the regular relief lists.

Given the longevity of many Nantconwy residents, vestries remained reluctant to grant regular pensions while the elderly remained fit to work or could depend on kin support. A small indication that much poverty was still unrecognised by poor relief is afforded by the annual list of Bettws y coed parishioners who shared the £1 interest arising from a £10

---

<sup>473</sup> Snell, *Annals*, p. 65 and Ch.4; King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 166-9; French, 'Dependent poor', p. 198.

bequest to the poor by Evan Evans of Cwmdreiniog in 1780. This was distributed by the vestry at Christmas to six to nine poor people who typically did not receive poor relief, the majority of whom were men, in amounts ranging from sixpence to half a crown. Where poor relief was granted it remained insufficient to cover the living costs of all but a few totally impotent poor people, and even quite elderly paupers were expected to contribute through earnings, growing food where possible, kin support and begging. All three parishes were therefore willing to help the poor remain at least partly independent and provided their pensioners with seed potatoes for planting, spinning wheels, and in one case buying stockings, presumably to sell as a pedlar. A major expenditure arose in Dolwyddelan when the vestry agreed to pay the rent of a small woollen factory for two years after the death of its owner threatened it with closure and the loss of much-needed employment, and possibly jeopardized the supply of yarn to local knitters and weavers.

Payments in aid of wages for labourers were largely unknown in north Wales, though some parishes paid a shilling a week for the fourth child.<sup>474</sup> Married farm labourers frequently ate their midday dinner on the farm and were often paid at least partly in corn. This helped insulate them from high food prices, but resulted in lower cash wages to support other family needs. There was little work for married women and young children apart from knitting, and with the spread of water-powered woollen mills to card and spin wool in the 1820s, earnings from knitting must have declined. Boys were expected to be self-sufficient working as farm servants by the age of 14, earning from 20-25s a year and in some cases, the parish might pay for a suit of clothes to enable a poor lad to enter service. From the age of eleven or twelve, labourers' children might leave home to work on farms as shepherds or general servants for their keep, though if a farmer took in a parish orphan or bastard, the parish usually

---

<sup>474</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 177a.

paid around £2 10s a year towards keep. Younger children might be apprenticed to farmers or help with the cattle in return for food. The prevalence of farm service therefore enabled children to become economically independent earlier than in southern England, so relatively few labourers had four or more dependent children at any one time.<sup>475</sup>

In general, ownership or tenancy of a smallholding encroached from the Penmachno common was sufficient to keep the occupier independent. Some encroachment owners built additional cottages on their land as an extra source of income.<sup>476</sup> Of the fifty or so Penmachno smallholdings of under eight acres, only one owner and four tenants were known regular pensioners, and they generally occupied holdings of one acre or less. Even then, the smallness of their pensions reflected their ability to grow much of their own food: for example, agricultural labourer Richard Thomas who owned a one acre encroachment started to receive a pension of 1s a week at the age of 57, to help support a wife and three dependent children.

### **Other types of relief**

In some English parishes, regular allowances were supplemented to a considerable extent by additional or casual relief. In six southern parishes, King found that the proportion of relief spent on regular pensions declined from a high point of 64 per cent in 1770, till casual payments in cash and kind made up a majority of expenditure by 1820. Regular pensions were systematically supplemented by help with rent and medical expenses, occasional food and fuel, and new and mended clothing, which added 15-30 per cent to the value of their relief, while cash for urgent necessity remained the major type of casual relief for non-pensioners.<sup>477</sup> In other areas, pensions remained the major item of expenditure but parishes

---

<sup>475</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188a; Evans, *Gorse Glen*, p. 166; Humphreys, *Crisis in Community*, p. 90.

<sup>476</sup> TNA CRES 49/643, (Penmachno wastes, 1858).

<sup>477</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 155-9.

also provided a more widely encompassing welfare system, paying for childbirth, christenings, weddings and funerals.<sup>478</sup> Although pensions were generally low and largely confined to the traditional groups, all three Nantconwy parishes also paid some pauper rents, which formed the second largest element of relief. This was standard practice in north Wales, and the 'nearly universal' payment of rent out of rates was regarded by Stephen Walcott as one of the chief 'abuses' of the administration of the Old Poor Law in the region. Though the main beneficiaries were the aged, the married, and widows with children, in some parishes nearly all married labourers had their rents paid, as their earnings were barely enough to feed their family. Walcott implied a strong element of 'jobbery' in the payment of rent from rates because pauper cottages were usually rented from farmers or town landlords active on the vestry.<sup>479</sup> William Day went further, arguing that rent payments were a form of hidden wage supplement to married labourers, and that if the cost of rents were added to weekly allowances, the latter would not be as modest as claimed.<sup>480</sup>

In contrast to these allegations, the rent bill in both Dolwyddelan and Penmachno amounted to just 12 per cent of total relief costs.<sup>481</sup> The Dolwyddelan vestry paid for at least 36 cottages and Penmachno at least 26.<sup>482</sup> In Dolwyddelan, just under two thirds of paupers with regular allowances also had their rents paid. On the other hand, a small number of rents were paid in both parishes for people who were not in receipt of regular allowances (Table 38). This reflects the difficulty that many poor people experienced in finding a large sum to meet their annual rent payment, and some parishioners were forced to turn to the vestry at short notice

---

<sup>478</sup> Williams, *Poverty*, p. 40-1.

<sup>479</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 174a.

<sup>480</sup> NLW 3141F, (Day, Report on Wales, July 1837, p. 15).

<sup>481</sup> Thomas also concluded that Walcott had over-estimated the significance of rent payments in rural areas. He estimated that rent might account for up to 25% of total relief costs: Thomas, 'Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro', p. 164.

<sup>482</sup> Nearly a quarter of rent payments in Dolwyddelan and over half in Penmachno were made direct to a farmer or shopkeeper without naming the occupiers.

when they found themselves unable to pay their rent at the due date. In arable parts of England, farm labourers were often able to pay their rents out of harvest earnings, but in pastoral areas there was less opportunity to save for annual or quarterly rent payments. Payment of pauper rents separately from regular allowances therefore made perfect sense, and this was to become one of several sources of conflict between local guardians and the Poor Law Commission when the latter attempted to abolish the practice after 1837.

*Table 38, Recipients of pauper rents*

	<b>Regular pensioner</b>	<b>Not regular pensioner</b>	<b>Unknown recipient</b>
Dolwyddelan	22	5	9
Penmachno	9	5	12

The average rent paid out of rates was 18s 10d per annum in Dolwyddelan and 18s in Penmachno - well below the £1 10s to £3 which Steven Walcott suggested was the usual level of pauper rents in north Wales. The average rent paid for male paupers in both parishes was nearly twice the amount paid for women: 24s 6d compared to 13s 6d, again reflecting the greater likelihood of men having a dependent wife if elderly, or a large family if younger. Nantconwy parishes attempted on several occasions to economise on their pauper rent bill. Single women were required to share a cottage, with the added advantage of the younger pauper being able to look after the elder. In Bettws, the vestry gave notice in 1828 to the landlords of several houses taken for paupers in order to find cheaper accommodation. Around 1834, the Dolwyddelan vestry took an alternative approach by building six parish poor houses on land made available by the Gwydir estate on the outskirts of the village.

By the late 1820s, other forms of casual relief formed only a small proportion of the total Nantconwy relief bill, amounting to 10 per cent in Dolwyddelan and five per cent in Penmachno. Casual relief in north Wales was mainly paid in cash but articles of clothing,

medicines and medical attendance, were also supplied.<sup>483</sup> While all these ingredients of casual relief occurred in Nantconwy, the makeup of casual relief varied considerably between parishes, in particular with a greater emphasis in relief in kind in Dolwyddelan, while in Penmachno nearly all casual relief was paid as cash ( Table 39).

*Table 39, Type of relief expenditure, 1828-31*

Type of relief	Dolwyddelan	Penmachno
Weekly pay	69.1%	81.7%
Rent	12.1%	12.4%
Rates	0.0%	0.8%
Boarding children	4.8%	
Care of elderly	4.4%	
Factory rent	2.8%	
Casual payments	2.5%	4.6%
Relief in kind	3.6%	0.4%
Medical & nursing	0.7%	

Who received casual relief also differed. In Penmachno, only 24 per cent of pensioners received casual relief in addition to their regular allowance. These payments were made to nine people not on the pension list and the amounts they received were almost twice those paid to regular pensioners. In Dolwyddelan on the other hand, 70 per cent of regular pensioners also received casual relief in cash or kind and payments to the poor not in receipt of regular pensions were not significantly higher than those to pensioners. It therefore appears that Dolwyddelan supplemented its very low regular pensions with additional relief to meet specific needs though the amounts involved were small – an average of 5s 8d a year in addition to the regular pension (Table 40).

---

<sup>483</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 175a.

*Table 40, Who received casual relief, excluding rent*

	No. pensioners	Sum to pensioners £	No. non-pensioners	Sum to non-pensioners £	Casual relief to pensioners	Pensioners receiving casual relief
Dolwyddelan	31	12.53	11	5.61	69%	70%
Penmachno	9	2.25	9	4.33	34%	24%

The most common item of relief in kind in Dolwyddelan was peat. Most of the poor in Nantconwy were able to cut their own peat, either on the farms where they rented a cottage or on common land. The Dolwyddelan vestry paid for cutting and carrying turves to 13 of its regular pensioners, perhaps because they were too frail to gather their own fuel. In both parishes, casual relief to people not in receipt of regular allowances was overwhelmingly paid to men – 97 per cent in Dolwyddelan and 84 per cent in Penmachno. Such payments were usually agreed to meet urgent necessities for families who were normally self-sufficient, such as a child’s coffin, mending the house, and especially during periods of illness. There were also occasional grants of clothing, mainly shoes, the cost of which often overstretched the meagre budgets of many poor people. Amounts of casual relief granted by the overseers were generally very small, sometimes as little as 6d, and larger grants had to be considered by the vestry – a procedure that may well have deterred more frequent applications. The overseers sometimes responded to their poor neighbours’ hardship by giving them a meal. This was apparently open to some abuse, because the Bettws vestry was obliged to give notice that the overseer should not be expected to provide more than three meals on the same day.

Unlike southern England, where there was a significant increase in poor law spending on medical care over the period 1760-1830, the proportion casual relief spent on medical costs

in Nantconwy was tiny.<sup>484</sup> This was also typical of north Wales where William Day regarded the provision of medical relief as 'shamefully deficient'. Medical contracts were unknown except in the largest towns, and in many parishes the only form of relief was a pecuniary sum spent at the druggists.<sup>485</sup> In Dolwyddelan, a doctor from Llanberis was called on several occasions to treat parishioners, travelling ten miles each way by tracks crossing two mountain passes. Small payments were also made for medicines and nursing. If any payments were made in Bettws and Penmachno towards medical costs, they were not recorded as such.

Funeral costs also formed a surprisingly low proportion of occasional relief in Nantconwy. In England parishes, elderly paupers who had been on the pension roll for several years were likely to have their funeral costs paid by the poor rate.<sup>486</sup> Over the period 1824-29, Bettws and Penmachno only paid for one funeral apiece, in both cases for a pauper or dependent receiving out-parish relief. Dolwyddelan vestry contributed towards the cost of four funerals over a four year period, although the only case where the full cost was met was also for a non-resident pensioner. Even so, two thirds of paupers with regular allowances who died over the same period were *not* buried at parish expense. Funerals of the poor who died within the parish were clearly regarded as a family and community responsibility, as described in 1802 by William Williams of Llandegai: 'Every one of the congregation presents the officiating minister with a piece of money; the deceased's next relations usually drop a shilling each, others sixpence, and the poorer sort a penny apiece . . . The parish clerk has also his offering at the grave.' Funerals were usually attended by the whole community, drawing gatherings of up to three or four hundred people.<sup>487</sup> In some cases, paupers receiving out-parish relief were brought back to their home parish for burial in this way.

---

<sup>484</sup> Williams, *Poverty*, p. 45.

<sup>485</sup> NLW 3141F, (Day, Report on Wales, July 1837, p. 25).

<sup>486</sup> D. Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1926), p. 92.

<sup>487</sup> Williams, *Observations*, pp. 14-15.

Cases where Nantconwy vestries rejected relief applications or granted payment only for a limited period, demonstrate that they were wary of paying any form of unemployment benefit, perhaps because so many residents operated in the informal economy without waged employment. After initially rejecting a relief application from a lead miner, David Jones, the Bettws vestry later agreed to pay him 2s a week 'till he was able to obtain employment in the Gwydir mines or elsewhere'. His allowance was then regularly reduced and eventually cut off. In Dolwyddelan, men were sometimes given work on the roads rather than relief, and the vestry decided to take John Williams to the Justice of the Peace 'because he was unfaithful to do labouring work'. Able-bodied men out of work were expected to migrate, as indeed many did in the 1820s. Migration was sometimes facilitated by the parish, as when Dolwyddelan contributed £5 towards the cost of the brothers Edward and John Lloyd emigrating to America. This again followed the example of other north Wales parishes, which appear to have been particularly willing to fund emigration for families with young children who might otherwise be chargeable to the poor rates, before the big expansion of slate quarrying provided more local employment opportunities.<sup>488</sup>

In only one instance did any of the parishes pay for an apprenticeship. The circumstances in which Bettws y coed agreed to pay £7 to apprentice Sam Owens to a tailor were rather unusual: Sam's father Ellis Owen was a long-standing out-parish pauper living in the Flintshire coal-mining village of Bagillt, and his family had already cost the parish more than any other.

---

<sup>488</sup> E.g. Llanllyfni paid £24 for a family to emigrate in 1832, and Maentwrog, Merioneth £30 in 1828; see Dodd, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 307 and Thomas, 'Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro' pp. 170-171 for a range of Old Poor Law examples.

Overall, it is clear that Nantconwy parishes not only provided very small pensions to a lower proportion of their poor, but also spent much less on casual relief than most English parishes. Nevertheless, vestries remained remarkably sensitive to the needs of their neighbours, especially those obviously nearing their life's end. For example the Dolwyddelan vestry appears to have given unusually sympathetic treatment to William Griffith, a 78 year old ratepayer who shared part of Brynmoel farm and was a prominent local worthy who had acted as clerk of works in building the first Independent chapel in the parish.<sup>489</sup> During his final illness, the parish paid him an unusually high pension of 3s 6d a week, provided nursing care, a bed, peat, food, medicine, and paid his rates for the chapel house. This relative generosity suggests that the vestry members had in mind how they would hope to be treated if they fell on hard times in their own old age.

### **Illegitimate children and their mothers**

The treatment of illegitimate children and their mothers in Nantconwy during this period is of particular interest, as unmarried mothers were one of the main groups significantly affected by the changing relief regime introduced by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, explored further in Chapter 5. Under the Old Poor Law, an Act of 1576 empowered two justices to examine the cause and circumstances of illegitimate pregnancy, and to place an order on the father and mother for the payment of money weekly or other sustenance for the bastard child. By the eighteenth century, it was usual in England for the mother, as the expected primary carer, to receive the allowance on behalf of the child. As a result of rising bastardy rates and a determination to enforce paternal responsibility, a further Act of 1809 provided that the costs of awarding a filiation order could be awarded against the putative father and that

---

<sup>489</sup> Roberts, *Dolwyddelan*, p. 11.

punishment for non-payment was three months' imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>490</sup> By the early nineteenth century, typical payments from English fathers varied from 1s 6d to 2s 6d a week in Essex, where farm labourers' wages were low, to 3- 5s a week in Lancashire, where bastardy payments to mothers were relatively generous compared to the low level of pensions in the county.<sup>491</sup>

Illegitimacy does not appear to have occurred often in Nantconwy. In the years 1824-34, the Anglican parish registers recorded 3.4 per cent of illegitimate births in Dolwyddelan and 3.9 per cent in Penmachno. The father's name was recorded in the baptismal register in nine out of ten cases. The tradition of 'courting on the bed' or bundling, where acknowledged courting couples conversed in bed under a blanket in the woman's home, was widespread and tolerated in eighteenth-century Wales. Writing in 1802, William Williams of Llandegai thought the tradition largely innocent: 'the Welsh girls to this day do not think it anything immodest in adhering to the custom practiced by their mothers before them, as long as nothing is meant but innocence and purity'. He admitted that 'now and then a pregnancy precedes marriage, but very seldom, or never, before a mutual promise of entering into a married state is made'.<sup>492</sup>

A few years later, the English topographer Hyde Hall thought that bundling was less innocent than previously and somewhat in decline, with some masters and mistresses discouraging their female servants from allowing their suitors to visit them at night. 'The custom of the parties continuing clothed in this situation is still retained, but the innocency of it, however it

---

<sup>490</sup> T. Nutt, 'The paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in Old Poor Law Essex', in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 103-4.

<sup>491</sup> *ibid.*, p. 104; S. King, 'The bastardy prone sub-society again: bastards and their fathers and mothers and mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840', in Levene, Nutt & Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy*, p. 84.

<sup>492</sup> Williams, *Observations*, p. 12.

may be retained in the more secluded and mountainous parts of the country, has certainly been somewhat broken in upon nearer the coast and where a freer communication prevails', although bundling 'has yet proceeded no further than concubinage guarded with the conditions of marriage in case of pregnancy'.<sup>493</sup>

By 1834, Assistant Commissioner Stephen Walcott considered bundling as a powerful cause of bastardy in north Wales. It remained an accepted practice, not considered either immoral or indecent. Indeed, most masters and mistresses allowed their female servants to court in bed, and the man was expected to marry the woman if she became pregnant. Most cases of bastardy arose where he failed to do so. In these circumstances, the woman did not lose her reputation at least for a first offence, which was regarded by most of the community as an accident or misfortune, and most mothers were able to marry as easily or almost so as before.<sup>494</sup> Angela Muir's recent research on illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Wales adds weight to the view that bearing children out of wedlock as a result of acknowledged courting or common law marriages was widely accepted, though bastardy resulting from illicit relationships was not.<sup>495</sup> The tolerant attitude of ordinary people in Nantconwy towards illegitimacy is well illustrated by the early nineteenth-century case of 'Mary of the White Cloak', the leader of a religious cult which occupied several houses in Penmachno and Ffestiniog. When Mary 'slipped' and subsequently gave birth to a dead child, her followers called a council to consider the matter. But she obtained their forgiveness by quoting a familiar saying from their religious meetings: 'the sack is none the worse for having poured out its oats'.<sup>496</sup>

---

<sup>493</sup> Hyde-Hall, *Caernarvonshire*, p. 323.

<sup>494</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 180a.

<sup>495</sup> A. Muir, 'Illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Wales', *WHR* 26 (2013), p. 351.

<sup>496</sup> Jones, *Gweithiau Gethin*, p. 31.

There was on the other hand strong community disapproval in north Wales of fathers who did not marry the mother, and even before poor rates were introduced, parishes sought bastardy orders at Quarter Sessions to defray the cost of caring for the child. Eight bastardy cases concerning women from Llanrwst came before the Denbighshire Quarter Session in the eighteenth century, half of which arose before the introduction of poor rates in 1752.<sup>497</sup> By the 1830s, a few north Wales parishes were concerned about the growing number of men absconding when their sweethearts became pregnant, perhaps resulting from greater geographical mobility and an influx into quarrying and mining areas of young men who were less concerned about community disapproval and sanctions.<sup>498</sup>

The proportion of Nantconwy poor relief spent on illegitimate children was relatively low, just 5 per cent in Dolwyddelan, and apparently none in Penmachno. The handful of obvious cases of bastardy provide a useful indication of how the community dealt with the issue.<sup>499</sup> The influx of young men into the Bettws y coed lead mines during the 1820s appears to have disrupted conventional social expectations. There was a palpable sense of community outrage in 1827 when Roger Parry left Jane Owens pregnant, and returned home to the Anglesey copper mining parish of Amlwch. A special vestry meeting resolved 'to go to look for Robert Parry, and that the vestry intended to take him, whatever the expenses'. Parry was served with a filiation order at a cost of £4, meanwhile the parish paid 5s a week to care for Jane till her child was four weeks old. The vestry then made arrangements for the child's paternal grandmother in Anglesey to look after the child for 6d a week: this was considerably

---

<sup>497</sup> DA QSD/SR/22/52, 69/22, 73/32, 171/3, 231/22, 300/29, 324/54, 350/26. It was not possible to trace cases from Nantconwy as Caernarvonshire Quarter Session records have not been fully catalogued for this period.

<sup>498</sup> *PP 1834*, XXX (44), Appendix B1, Answers to Rural Queries, pp. 645a, 653e.

<sup>499</sup> Bastardy cases are usually evident when the parish paid for the mother's lying in.

less than the normal rate, suggesting that the father's family was expected to bear the majority of the cost.

Several other Bettws unmarried mothers were cared for by respectable parishioners during their lying-in period around this time, often at considerable expense. In 1827, Matthew Roberts took Margaret Williams at 2s 10d a week. There must have been complications, for the overseer, Robert Jones of Ty Mawr, then agreed to take Margaret and her child at 3s a week for some time to come. Another vestry member, Robert Jones of Diosgau, took in Anne Roberts during her lying in at 5s 10d a week. Anne was subsequently taken to Conwy 'to be sworn with the child belonging to Charles Edwards', whom the parish had recently removed to Wrexham. She was granted 2s 6d a week allowance for her child. This was unusual, as most illegitimate children in Nantconwy were 'set' to foster parents at four weeks old. Placing bastards or orphaned children with a grandparent was another expedient, as when Mary Davies took in her daughter's child for 2s a week in 1828. Single mothers in Nantconwy, whether bastard bearers or widowed, were generally expected to work.

Anne Roberts was the only unmarried Bettws mother during the period 1824-9 who can be clearly identified as receiving an allowance to look after her own child. A series of eleven agreements from the 1790s do however provide an insight into how children were cared for at parish expense. The agreements concerned eight children, 'set' for amounts ranging from 6d to 1s 9d a week. The agreements do not state whether the children were orphans, bastards or parish apprentices but it seems likely that the three infants set to a small Llanrhychwyn farmer and his son until they reached fourteen years of age were in the latter category. Payments decreased as the child grew older and could contribute at least partially to their keep. One mother was paid to look after her own child and one grandmother. The remaining three children were fostered for up to four years at a time with families of varying

social status: a former churchwarden, a small farmer, and several poorer families not paying rates.<sup>500</sup>

In Dolwyddelan too, fostering illegitimate children was a regular practice. This was another area where the overseer might take personal responsibility for emergencies, as in looking after the unmarried Mary Jones for 14 weeks at the time of her son's birth, before fostering him out to another parishioner, enabling Mary to go back to work in the nearby parish of Llanberis. Another unmarried mother worked in Anglesey while her child lived with foster parents in Dolwyddelan. By no means all illegitimate children became a burden on the rates: in Dolwyddelan, a freeholder's daughter was able to provide for her own child, while in Penmachno, no poor relief was paid for the three children born out of wedlock during the five year period 1824-9.

The treatment of illegitimate children and their mothers in Nantconwy was typical of north Wales more generally. Although only 20 parishes in the region answering the Rural Queries provided information on the cost of bastardy, the picture that emerges is sufficiently uniform to delineate a general practice, which differed markedly from that in England. Question 47 - 'What is the allowance received by a woman for a bastard?' - clearly assumed that mothers were normally paid to look after their illegitimate children. The replies from north Wales made it clear that fostering out was in fact the norm. Llanerfyl in Montgomeryshire reported that 'it seldom happens a woman nurses her own bastard, and the parish considers it more advantageous to it for the woman to go into service, to enable her to contribute her quota of 6d to 8d per week to the child's maintenance, than for her to nurse it herself.'<sup>501</sup> Half the north Wales parishes answering this question volunteered information that the mother was also

---

<sup>500</sup> CA CEP11/26, (Bettws y coed vestry minute book, 1782-1808).

<sup>501</sup> *PP 1834*, XXX (44), Appendix B1, p. 653e.

expected to pay. In these circumstances the woman generally contributed a quarter to a third of the cost. The Caernarvonshire parish of Llangian for example recovered about 60 per cent of the cost of maintaining its bastards, a third coming from mothers.<sup>502</sup>

The average charge imposed on fathers of illegitimate children in north Wales was 1s 8d a week. Where unusually the mother looked after the child, this was paid directly to her, as Llanfyllin parish, Montgomeryshire explained: 'the woman generally gives up the child to the parish, on which the magistrates order her to pay 6d a week, and the father 1s 6d towards its support; but if she prefers nursing the child herself, she receives the 1s 6d paid by the father.' The reason why most north Wales parishes preferred to foster illegitimate children was put bluntly by the curate of Forden in Montgomeryshire: parish authorities had no difficulty in finding foster parents prepared to take in a child for 2s a week.<sup>503</sup>

The expectation of a contribution from the mother was strong enough for Nantconwy parishes to take action if a mother failed to make regular payments, as in 1832 when the Dolwyddelan vestry took Catherine Williams before the magistrates because of irregular payments in support of her child boarded out with a family in Anglesey. The boarding out of illegitimate children while the mother returned to work clearly reflected both local economic circumstances and moral attitudes in Nantconwy and other rural areas of north Wales. There was still a considerable demand for single women as farm servants and having borne one illegitimate child was not a significant bar to further hiring or marriage. It was therefore in the vestry's interests to facilitate a return to work which avoided the mother becoming dependent on relief, unless she was able to maintain the child on only the father's contribution. This was in marked contrast with the treatment of unmarried mothers in many parts of England, where

---

<sup>502</sup> *ibid.*, p. 642e.

<sup>503</sup> *ibid.*, p. 651e.

mothers usually kept their illegitimate children. They received a similar median allowance to north Wales mothers, of 1s 6d a week, though over a third of English parishes paid 2s 6d or more.<sup>504</sup> Much depended on whether mothers could combine work and childcare. Those in rural Hertfordshire for example were able to maintain themselves through lace-making or straw-plaiting, and typically received a weekly allowance of around 2s to look after their child.<sup>505</sup> It was also common practice in England for parishes to assist or even force parents of illegitimate children to marry, as a means of ensuring paternal responsibility and avoiding the mother becoming a burden on the rates.<sup>506</sup> There is no evidence of such a practice in Nantconwy.

## **Out-parish relief**

The Poor Laws assumed that paupers would be relieved in their parish of settlement, and many parishes in England went to considerable lengths to rid themselves of poor people likely to become chargeable to the poor rate, and to prevent incomers from gaining a settlement. A new settlement could be gained in a number of main ways: by paying parish rates, serving a year in public office, renting a property at £10 or more a year, completing an indentured apprenticeship, or an annual hiring if the individual was unmarried and without children. Those who did not gain a settlement in their own right derived one through their father or grandfather, and wives took their husband's settlement, even if they had never lived in the parish concerned.<sup>507</sup> But with the decline in farm service in many parts of England and growing concern by overseers to prevent new settlements being gained, proving where an

---

<sup>504</sup> Lyle, 'Regionality', p. 148.

<sup>505</sup> Williams, *Poverty*, p. 108.

<sup>506</sup> Marshall, *English Poor*, p. 220.

<sup>507</sup> J.S. Taylor, 'The impact of pauper settlement, 1691-1834', *Past and Present* 73 (1976), p. 51.

individual's settlement lay led to an increasing number of disputes and attendant legal costs.<sup>508</sup>

To encourage mobility of labour, some parishes granted certificates acknowledging an individual's right to poor relief if they fell on hard times in their new parish of residence.<sup>509</sup> People residing in a parish where they did not have a settlement were known as 'sojourners' and after 1795, they could only be removed to their parish of settlement when they were actually chargeable.<sup>510</sup> However, in industrialising areas, parish authorities did not always wish to remove sojourners who were temporarily in need of relief, due perhaps to illness or to unemployment during periodic trade depressions. The sojourners themselves usually wished to stay on where they had prospects of future employment, or had developed support networks. Home parishes also had an interest in enabling their non-resident poor to remain in a place where they might again find employment, rather than have them return home to long term unemployment and dependency, with the attendant cost of removal. A solution was for the parish of settlement to pay out-parish relief. This system was common but not pervasive in the south of England, but was more widespread in the industrializing north west, where out-parish relief could amount to half the regular pension bill, though legal bills for settlement disputes and removal costs were correspondingly lower.<sup>511</sup>

North Wales resembled the north-west of England in its widespread payment of out-parish relief. Steven Walcott concluded in 1834 that 'relief to out-resident paupers, as well able-bodied as impotent, is very generally granted, sometimes at great distances'. In these cases

---

<sup>508</sup> S. and B. Webb, *Old Poor Law*, p. 347.

<sup>509</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging; Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 98-99.

<sup>510</sup> Snell, *Annals*, p. 18.

<sup>511</sup> Taylor, 'Nonresident relief', pp. 188, 194.

the pauper had some bargaining power by threatening to return; the home parish usually preferred to subsidize wages or rent for the pauper to remain where they had a greater prospect of obtaining employment, and connections to partially support them.<sup>512</sup> Nantconwy parishes appear to have resolved most settlement cases by agreement, the overseers making visits across a wide area of north-west Wales to find evidence of place of settlement. If the overseers of the parishes concerned were unable to reach agreement, the matter was referred to the nearest Justice. If his award was contested, the Quarter Sessions normally deferred the case to allow parishes more time to reach agreement, thus keeping legal costs to a minimum.<sup>513</sup> Although records of settlement examinations do not survive for Nantconwy, those available for Bangor and the surrounding area of Caernarvonshire at this period demonstrate that farm and domestic servants were mobile over quite wide areas. Some parishes, especially in the rapidly expanding slate quarrying districts, attempted to prevent incomers from gaining a new settlement by requiring farmers to hire on contracts of less than a year and avoid renting out properties at over £10 a year to incomers, but there is no evidence that this happened in Nantconwy.<sup>514</sup> JPs only became involved with more complex cases such as those involving broken periods of service, or where a widow's settlement was inherited from her deceased husband's family.<sup>515</sup>

Nantconwy vestries were willing in most cases to pay out-parish relief, and 28 per cent of regular allowances were paid to out-parish paupers (Table 41). These were typically migrants who had left their parish to find work elsewhere, people whose final year of service took place in Nantconwy before they settled down outside the hundred, or widows whose husbands came from Nantconwy. Although the sample size is small, the proportion of paupers on out-

---

<sup>512</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 178a.

<sup>513</sup> Thomas, 'Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro', p. 172.

<sup>514</sup> *ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>515</sup> GA XPE63/54, (Bangor settlement examinations, 1818-30).

parish relief in Bettws (41 per cent), was much higher than in Penmachno (16 per cent), perhaps reflecting the latter's superior charitable endowment and greater opportunity to earn a livelihood on smallholdings encroached from the commons and using commons resources.

*Table 41, Out-parish relief, 1824-30*

	<b>Number pa</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average weekly pay s</b>
Female out-parish pensions	14	13	1.4
Male out-parish pensions	15	14	2.3
Female parish pensions	40	38	1.6
Male parish pensions	35	34	1.9
<b>All</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>28%</b>	

In a single year, Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno paid regular allowances to paupers in 19 different parishes in Caernarvonshire, Denbighshire, Merioneth and Flintshire. Men were marginally more likely to receive out-parish pensions than women – 30 per cent of male pensioners in were non-resident compared to 26 per cent of women, who took their husband's parish of settlement. There was little difference in the pensions received by women on out-parish relief compared to those resident in the parish: Nantconwy vestries clearly believed that most female pensioners could earn part of their living costs better by remaining in their place of residence. For women, this was more likely to be a town: half lived in Llanrwst, Conway, Caernarvon or Denbigh. Men receiving out-parish relief were more likely to live in rural north Wales; a few had migrated to emerging industrial areas such as Bagillt on the Flintshire coalfield or slate quarrying districts like Ffestiniog. Pensions for male out-parish paupers were higher than for resident male paupers, averaging 2s 4d per week compared to 1s 11d, suggesting that younger men with dependents were more likely to have migrated and be in receipt of out-parish relief.

While in England, out-parish pensions might be paid by carrier, or by repaying the overseers in the receiving parish, neither method was possible in Nantconwy, as there was no bank in the hundred or in Llanrwst at this period, and carrier services did not run to the widely scattered parishes concerned.<sup>516</sup> In most cases, out-parish paupers travelled on foot to collect their pension either monthly or quarterly, and in Bettws and Dolwyddelan, the overseers usually provided them with a meal before their return journey.

### **The place of poor relief in the local economy**

Although some 40 per cent of families paid rates in Dolwyddelan and 47 per cent in Bettws y coed, many ratepayers were themselves relatively poor. As Walter Davies described: 'Several of the lower kind of farmers and their dependents have their tables as scantily supplied with the luxuries of salted bacon, butter and cheese, as even those of the paupers they are forced to relieve'.<sup>517</sup> The farmers who formed the overwhelming majority of rural ratepayers in north Wales were unable to afford a generous system of poor relief, in contrast to ratepayers in the north west of England, who were not willing, or in southern England, where more generous levels of relief were paid to a wider proportion of the population.

The relatively low proportion of Nantconwy families receiving regular allowances reflected an economy where over half of households still had access to land. Occupying a smallholding or large garden, renting meadow or cow-keep usually enabled inhabitants to remain independent, while most residents could gather peat for fuel and rushes for light from the farm from which they rented a cottage or from the commons. Before the slate quarries started to take off in the 1830s, few opportunities existed for waged employment except as farm or

---

<sup>516</sup> J.S. Taylor, 'Voices in the crowd: the Kirby Lonsdale Township letters, 1809-36', in Hitchcock, King and Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty*, p. 113.

<sup>517</sup> Davies, *General View*, p. 357.

domestic servants and regular farm labourers, and traditions of cooperation meant there was little demand for additional harvest labour. With expanding employment opportunities in the north Wales slate quarrying districts and towns, Nantconwy parishes were unwilling to pay poor relief to younger men and women out of work: they were expected to find employment elsewhere and the stable population during the 1820s is evidence that many did indeed migrate. Total earnings from stocking knitting may have declined in the face of mechanisation of carding and spinning, as in Bala, where the establishment of two carding factories was said to have thrown many old people out of work, leading during the 1820s to a significant increase in the poor rates.<sup>518</sup> However women and children's earnings from knitting still made a useful addition to family budgets and single women might just be able to support themselves largely from knitting.

Poor relief therefore remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the traditional poor - widows with children, orphans and the infirm elderly - though the number of elderly men receiving allowances increased in the face of declining work for agricultural labourers and a higher proportion of households without land, and widows with children became more likely to be partially reliant on poor relief. The number of regular pensions was further increased by payment of allowances to married labourers to top up inadequate family earnings, though on a very minor scale compared to southern England. Nantconwy parishes normally paid small allowances only to labourers with four or more dependent children – a relatively infrequent situation as children were generally able earn their keep by the age of twelve. There was widespread acceptance that labourers' wages were insufficient to provide for a large family, especially when farmers provided board, as was usually the case. Rents might also be paid in addition, especially to labourers and the elderly living in the developing villages, in

---

<sup>518</sup> *PP 1837-38, XXXV (686)*, p. 5.

recognition that the poor might be able to sustain themselves from day to day but not earn enough to cover this major expenditure.

Regular allowances remained small and residual, and the amount of relief given as casual payments was low in comparison to southern England. The elderly and widows were expected to work and grow their own food where possible. Above all, there was an expectation that poor relief would be supplemented by family support and informal charity: the higher allowances were paid only to the impotent who lacked family support and were unable to go from farm to farm seeking oatmeal or wool. And children from poor families in north Wales still had their begging rounds, like the girls of Bala who were encouraged by the parish overseers to go about knitting and begging from house to house till the age of 12 or 13, carrying a tin can for milk and a little bag for oatmeal.<sup>519</sup>

The system of relief that developed in Nantconwy and in north Wales more generally seems to have been designed to support labour mobility. Migration between parishes remained crucial for hiring servants, for finding farm tenancies, or moving to areas of expanding employment. Where migrants fell on hard times, settlement was usually resolved by agreement between the overseers of the respective parishes, and out-parish relief was normally paid in the belief that it was more cost-effective to partially maintain the poor person in their parish of residence, where they had more opportunity of working or where their support networks were.

---

<sup>519</sup> *PP 1837-38, XXXV (686)*, p. 4.

## ***Conclusions***

For the period up to 1784, when poor rates were levied in Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno, there was a vibrant economy of makeshifts in Nantconwy, where access to land, resources from the commons and earnings from stocking knitting, supplemented by formal and informal charity, enabled most people to get by without the need for parish relief. In a largely agricultural economy where most farms grew their own food but cash was in short supply, ratepayers preferred to maintain the traditions of informal charity in kind, rather than pay poor relief in cash. The absence of poor rates and overseers of the poor did not mean that the impotent were neglected however. Church rates were levied as and when needed to provide for the few without access to land and who were unable to earn a living or seek alms, especially orphans and the infirm elderly, the latter usually for a brief period before death.

Poor relief spread gradually in the 1770s and 80s under the influence of settlement cases and obvious need. In a generally poor economy, there was an expectation that the elderly would continue to work, and where the parish did assume some responsibility, pensions were generally low and residual, on a par with those paid in the north of England but not significantly supplemented by casual relief. Costs were kept down by farming the elderly out to better-off parishioners, and by paying out-parish relief to enable the poor to remain where they had friends or a greater chance of earning part of their living. The number of casual relief payments grew over time, but the amounts remained very small. Individual relief decisions often necessitated raising an additional rate, so there remained a close relationship between the ratepayers and the poor, with vestries showing particular sensitivity towards dying parishioners.

By the 1820s Nantconwy poor relief costs had increased six-fold, largely as a result of higher regular pensions being paid to an increased number of recipients. In Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno the average weekly pension rose by 250 per cent while the number of poor in receipt of regular allowances trebled. This rapid expansion of poor relief after 1785 mirrored the trend of England and Wales more generally, although starting from a lower base. Nevertheless, allowances remained low and residual, designed to supplement growing one's own food, resources from the commons and wastes, paid employment and family earnings from stocking knitting, as well as the continuing traditions of begging and informal charity. The low cost system of poor relief that evolved in Nantconwy by the end of the Old Poor Law era followed the example of other north Wales parishes and was well attuned to the local economy. It recognised the needs of the poor who were no longer able to quite make ends meet from the economy of makeshifts, as more families lacked access to land and earnings from knitting declined. There was widespread acceptance that labourers' wages alone were insufficient to provide for a large family, and small family allowances were paid to those without additional sources of livelihood. Rents might also be paid in addition. At the same time, the system encouraged labour mobility, which prevented levels of reliance on poor relief increasing further.

One particularly striking aspect is the lack of stigma attached to the poor in Nantconwy, evidenced by the willingness of farmers and their wives to give informal charity, to take the impotent poor, unmarried mothers and children into their homes, or of overseers to provide meals to paupers who had travelled long distances on foot to collect their quarterly allowance. This reflected a lack of class division within Welsh rural society, a perception of the poor as kin or neighbours under-pinned by strong religious values, and above all a view of poverty as a natural condition and that those the parish chose to relieve were deserving of community support.

The pattern of poor relief in Nantconwy in the period 1750-1837 and the phases involved in its gradual development mirrored the experience of parishes in northern Merioneth which had introduced the Old Poor Law a little earlier.<sup>520</sup> There is clear evidence of a distinctively Welsh pattern to the introduction and evolution of the Old Poor Law, which merits further research on a wider basis to fill the gap in our knowledge of the reasons why the laws were not originally implemented in much of Wales, and how and why they were eventually adopted.

---

<sup>520</sup> Thomas, 'Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro'.

## Chapter 5. Impact of the New Poor Law

### *1. Aims and introduction*

This chapter examines the impact on the livelihoods of the poor of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, after Nantconwy became part of the Llanrwst Poor Law Union in 1837. The new regime aimed particularly to curtail poor relief to able-bodied males except through a workhouse, and introduced major changes to the bastardy and settlement laws. Ratepayers in north-west Wales were overwhelmingly opposed to the New Poor Law, especially the building of workhouses, and the Llanrwst workhouse did not open till 1848. Key questions are whether the way the New Poor Law was implemented significantly reduced relief to particular groups in Nantconwy, and the extent to which poor relief continued to supplement inadequate earnings and charity. How did different agents – the Poor Law Commission and its Assistant Commissioners, the Llanrwst Board of Guardians, and the poor themselves shape new patterns of relief that emerged after 1837? Was there an expansion of charity for the deserving poor, and to what extent did new mechanisms of self-help amongst working people and the poor develop in response to any curtailment of former patterns of poor relief?

Analysing the impact of the New Poor Law is often hampered by a lack of detailed sources about the individual poor. For the Llanrwst Poor Law Union, minutes, correspondence and accounts survive for most of the period 1837-60. Although no outdoor relief lists survive, Board minutes recorded decisions on all Nantconwy relief applications for 1837-8, with details of the applicant's age, occupation, family, allowance already being paid, and reason for the application.<sup>521</sup> Around 460 applications for relief were made by 260 Nantconwy poor people during the first year following the formation of the Llanrwst Union, representing over half of

---

<sup>521</sup> DA GD/A/84/1, (Minute book Llanrwst Union, 1837-38).

the 487 Nantconwy paupers receiving out-relief in the third quarter of 1838. These are analysed in detail to provide a profile of poor relief practice in early 1837 and how it changed as a result of implementation of the New Poor Law. A further 1,000 applications from other parishes in the Union provided additional information on the circumstances in which the poor applied for relief, and the policy response of the guardians.

Data from Llanrwst Union parochial ledgers and the annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners are used for the period 1835-1860 to obtain an overview of the number, cost and type of Nantconwy paupers receiving out-relief, the usage of the workhouse from 1848, and the continuance of non-resident relief to paupers living outside the union. The reports and correspondence of the Assistant Commissioners charged with implementing the 1834 Act are used to put events in the Llanrwst Union in the wider context of developments in north-west Wales.<sup>522</sup> Quarter session and petty session records are used to investigate the impact of legal changes on unmarried mothers. Local sources concerning charities, friendly societies and other self-help organisations in Nantconwy are limited: an overview is therefore based largely on information from official reports and returns and on the rulebooks of nine local societies.

The three broad themes that characterise Old Poor Law studies – legal and administrative developments, social history and economic history - are also evident in research on the New Poor Law, though economic considerations become increasingly enmeshed in policy and implementation. The Poor Law Amendment Act created new governmental machinery, including the establishment of Poor Law unions, to introduce a programme of radical reform

---

<sup>522</sup> TNA MH 32/59, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, R. Digby Neave, 1836-48); TNA MH32/16, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, W. Day, 1839-44); NLW 3141-8F, (William Day Manuscripts, 1836-44).

and cost-cutting. Implementation was overseen by a new institution, the Poor Law Commission, whose regulations shaped reforms in relief practice over time, tailored to some extent to conditions in different parts of the country.<sup>523</sup>

How far the implementation of reforms achieved the aims of the central Poor Law authorities has been hotly debated. Revisionist studies have suggested a substantial degree of continuity in relief practice between the Old and New Poor Laws, especially where the economic interests of the ratepayers were not well served by the reforms, and the ability of central authorities to enforce orders when faced with lack of cooperation from boards of guardians has been questioned.<sup>524</sup> In the north of England, where there was significant opposition to the new law, many Boards objected to the use of the workhouse or labour test due to professed humanity for the deserving poor and from motives of economy when maintenance in the workhouse cost twice as much as outdoor relief.<sup>525</sup> Guardians used a variety of tactics to apply central regulations more humanely and cheaply. In Cumbria for example, guardians complemented official poor relief by relief from private rates, philanthropic relief committees and township resources.<sup>526</sup>

The revisionist reading was robustly challenged by Williams, who argued that the central poor law authorities were successful in their major initial aim of kerbing outdoor relief for able-bodied males: in the twenty years after 1834, a line of exclusion was drawn against able-

---

<sup>523</sup> S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History: the Last Hundred Years. Vol. 1* (London, 1929); Brundage, *New Poor Law*, D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914: From Chadwick to Booth* (Harlow, 1998); Snell, *Parish and Belonging*.

<sup>524</sup> E.g. A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978); idem., 'The local state', in E.J.T. Collins (ed.), *AHEW*, Vol. VII, 1850-1914, Part II (2000), pp. 1425-64; M.E. Rose, 'The allowance system under the New Poor Law', *EcHR* Vol. 19 (1966), pp. 607-620.

<sup>525</sup> N.C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1835-44* (Manchester, 1971).

<sup>526</sup> R.N. Thompson, 'The working of the Poor Law Amendment Act in Cumbria, 1836-1871', *Northern History* 15 (1979), pp. 117-137.

bodied men, and relief to unemployed or under-employed men was effectively abolished. By 1854, only 13 unions did not have a workhouse, and these were marginal to the system as over half were concentrated in Wales.<sup>527</sup> Driver on the other hand argued that the 1834 Act did not pre-determine the form and outcome of subsequent official policy, and that regional variations in subsequent relief policy reflected the outcome of struggles between central and local authorities. The role of the Assistant Commissioners was central to a process of central inspection, inquiry and reform that gradually brought local poor relief practice more into line with central aims.<sup>528</sup> Much therefore depended on the attitude of local elites: in Bedfordshire for instance the new regime provided the propertied with means to break down the last rampart of a vestigial 'moral economy'.<sup>529</sup>

On the social aspects of the New Poor Law, there has been a strong emphasis on the role of the workhouse, but less analysis of outdoor relief although this remained the major form of poor relief. Although there is evidence to suggest that regional differences in Old Poor Law practice between the more generous south and east of England and the more parsimonious north west carried over to shape practice under the New Poor Law, this has yet to be fully investigated, as the detailed deconstruction of New Poor Law welfare practice and the experiences of the poor in individual unions has remained relatively uncommon.<sup>530</sup>

The relief of poverty for specific social groups has been investigated in a number of studies. Thane and Levene-Clark drew attention to the treatment of women, arguing that despite women and children always forming the majority of relief recipients, their problems were

---

<sup>527</sup> Williams, *Pauperism*, pp. 75-78.

<sup>528</sup> F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>529</sup> W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History* 10 (1985), pp. 37-68.

<sup>530</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 233.

ignored in the 1834 Act, which assumed the universality of the male breadwinner family. The Poor Law's ambivalence as to whether the role of the unsupported working-class mother was motherhood or work therefore led to a wide variation in local practice.<sup>531</sup> Goose drew attention to the difference in treatment of elderly men and women in Hertfordshire, where elderly male labourers who found it increasingly difficult to get employment in an overstocked labour market were more liable than women to be relieved in the workhouse. Elderly women were more likely to become almshouse residents, receive out-relief, or live with kin where they could contribute to the household through childcare and household duties or by their earnings from the straw plait or hat trades.<sup>532</sup> Illegitimate children and their mothers were one of the groups most adversely affected by the 1834 Act, which introduced a major shift in the bastardy laws.<sup>533</sup> It is now evident that the 1834 Poor Law Report underestimated the effectiveness of the old system of paternal maintenance payments, and the difficulty of obtaining an affiliation order for paternal maintenance under the New Poor Law probably forced many mothers and their illegitimate children into the union workhouse, where they were subject to disapproval and stigma.<sup>534</sup>

The final strand of poverty literature particularly relevant to this study concerns the increasing role of organised philanthropy and self-help institutions in the economy of the poor. As the role of poor relief diminished, voluntary societies expanded in the mid-nineteenth century to provide a range of medical, educational and other welfare services, especially in urban areas,

---

<sup>531</sup> P. Thane, 'Women and the poor law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop Journal* 6 (1978), pp. 29-51; M. Levine-Clark, 'Engendering relief: women, ablebodiedness, and the New Poor Law in early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History* 11 (2000), pp. 107-30.

<sup>532</sup> N. Goose, 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the case of Hertfordshire', *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005), pp. 351-84.

<sup>533</sup> U.R.Q. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past & Present* 37 (1967), pp. 103-29.

<sup>534</sup> T. Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *EcHR* 63 (2010), pp. 335-61; S. Williams, 'Unmarried mothers and the new poor law in Hertfordshire', *LPS* 91 (2013), pp. 27-43.

with a growing emphasis on promoting self-help.<sup>535</sup> However voluntary income was variable and the causes supported often reflected the enthusiasms of the givers more than the practical needs of the poor. This contributed to a growth of self-help and mutual aid amongst the working class, ranging from friendly societies, savings and burial clubs to the credit and pawn economy. Alternative welfare provision probably benefited a greater proportion of the population than either outdoor or indoor relief in the Victorian era.<sup>536</sup> Membership of friendly societies grew rapidly after the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act and they became the largest working-class movement in the nineteenth century, though the role of their welfare payments in the economy of working people and the poor has been little explored.<sup>537</sup> The literature on women's friendly societies remains slim, perhaps because by mid-century they were in decline, influenced by stagnating female wages and Victorian disapproval of women engaging in societies outside the home.<sup>538</sup>

Despite a number of studies of individual Poor Law unions, the literature on the New Poor Law in Wales leaves many gaps. Most local studies focus on administrative machinery and conditions in the workhouse, shedding little light on outdoor relief practice. No overall synthesis has been attempted, and most works of poverty and welfare in Britain make scant reference to Wales. A notable exception was Snell, who identified from official statistics that

---

<sup>535</sup> E.g. N. McCord, 'The Poor Law and philanthropy', in Fraser (ed.), *New Poor Law* (1976), pp. 87-110; Kidd, *State, Society and Poor*.

<sup>536</sup> S.P. Morley, 'Community, self-help and mutual aid: friendly societies and the parish welfare system in rural Oxfordshire, 1834-1918' (University of Oxford DPhil thesis 2012).

<sup>537</sup> Kidd, *State, Society and Poor*, pp. 110-14; P. Gosden, *Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in the 19th Century* (London, 1973); M. Gorsky, 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *ECHR* Vol. 51 (1998), pp. 489-511; Morley, 'Friendly societies', pp. 16-28.

<sup>538</sup> E. Lord, "'Weighed in the balance and found wanting': female friendly societies, self-help and economic virtue in the east Midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries", *Midland History* 22 (1997), pp. 100-112.

outdoor relief remained more prevalent in Wales than any other region throughout the nineteenth century, to the extent that Wales was 'almost a different welfare country'.<sup>539</sup>

Opposition to the introduction of the New Poor Law in Wales has been mentioned by several authors, but little explored.<sup>540</sup> Brundage ascribed the sullen but dogged opposition to Poor Law Commission directives kept up by Welsh boards of guardians to factors similar to the north of England: historic regional antipathy to central government and a view that the region's economic structure and poor relief system were markedly different from those of the rural south and Midlands.<sup>541</sup> Evans and Jones challenged this view and argued, from a rather slim body of evidence mainly concerning the Rebecca Riots in south Wales, that the long-running resistance to building workhouses in Wales was founded on a long-standing and coherent antipathy to the punitive nature of the workhouse, rather than simply being founded on short-term financial considerations.<sup>542</sup> A clear impression of the gulf between central and local Poor Law authorities emerges from the career of William Day, the first Assistant Commissioner for north Wales.<sup>543</sup>

Two Welsh-language theses also touch on the complexities of implementing the New Poor Law in north-west Wales. Jones' study of the administration of the Bangor and Beaumaris Union, with a major emphasis on the workhouse, identified a strong element of 'localism' in tensions between the guardians and central authorities attempting to impose standard

---

<sup>539</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 230.

<sup>540</sup> D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1950); Williams, *Rebecca Riots*.

<sup>541</sup> Brundage, *New Poor Law*, p. 147.

<sup>542</sup> M. Evans and P. Jones, 'A stubborn, intractable body': resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877', *Family and Community History* 17 (2014), pp. 99-121.

<sup>543</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* IX (1964), pp. 163-196.

policies throughout the country.<sup>544</sup> Parry's investigation of the Dolgelly and Ffestiniog Unions is rooted in the area's Old Poor Law practice and provides a wide-ranging description of outdoor relief and the operation of the settlement and bastardy laws.<sup>545</sup> Hooker's study of the Llandilofawr Union in south Wales and its cultural environment, focuses on the people who ran it. He concludes that the gentry and JPs remained largely apart from administration of the union, allowing an elite group of elected guardians to provide a generally benign level of care as close to the Old Poor Law ways as possible and in tune with the needs of Carmarthenshire society.<sup>546</sup> There remain few other rigorous local studies of the New Poor Law in Wales, and only one other relating to north Wales.<sup>547</sup> One popular study of particular interest is Draper's account of the Conwy Union workhouse, describing events in a neighbouring union which influenced developments in Llanrwst.<sup>548</sup>

In drawing attention to the paucity of foundation studies on which to construct an overall history of the Poor Law in Wales, Stewart and King suggested an agenda for future research on the New Poor Law, including an evaluation of how far implementation in Wales differed from English regions, the extent of local variation, and the character of the relationship between the centre and the regions. To what extent was there continuity between the Old

---

<sup>544</sup> D.L. Jones, 'Gweithrediad Deddf y Tlodion 1834 yn Udeb Bangor a Biwmares rhwng 1837 a 1871, [Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union between 1837 and 1871]' (University of Wales, Bangor PhD thesis, 1994).

<sup>545</sup> G. Parry, 'Gweinyddiaeth Deddf y Tlodion yng ngorllewin Meirionnydd c. 1800 – 1894, [Administration of the Poor Law in west Merioneth, 1800-1894]' (University of Wales, Bangor PhD thesis, 1995).

<sup>546</sup> G.F. Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union 1836-1886: 'the most difficult union in Wales'', (University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2013).

<sup>547</sup> B. Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union workhouse, Caersws, 1837-1847', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 78 (1990), pp. 115-160. For scholarly articles on south and mid-Wales, see also A.E. Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a rural area, 1834-1850', *Ceredigion* 8 (1978), pp. 245-290; I.S. Dewar, 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in south Glamorgan, 1836-38', *Morganwg* 11 (1967), pp. 46-70; K. Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society* 74 (2004), pp. 169-98; T. Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times* (Bridgend, 1992).

<sup>548</sup> C. Draper, *Paupers, Bastards and Lunatics: The Story of the Conwy Union Workhouse* (Llanrwst, 2005).

and New Poor Laws, and how did Welsh communities reconcile the relief of extensive poverty with the limited resources available? Were there any distinctively Welsh issues, based on a different set of social traditions or attitudes to the poor and were Welsh guardians swayed by popular opposition to the New Poor Law, for example as manifested during the Rebecca Riots? What part did poor relief play in the economy of makeshifts and did the poor themselves have a degree of agency?<sup>549</sup> Griffith proposed some additional dimensions including the role played by various actors – the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners, local elites and opinion formers - and suggested that there might be a marked Welsh dimension to the treatment of bastardy, which hardened following stinging criticism in the 1847 Report into the State of Education in Wales.<sup>550</sup>

A couple of studies have looked at the growth of friendly societies in Wales, though Jones' impressive study of Friendly Societies in industrial Glamorgan is in a very different context to rural north Wales. Her study of female societies demonstrates their importance in Wales, where an estimated one in ten Welshwomen became members at their high point in the 1840s and 1850s. As there was little change in the level of women's employment, she attributed the decline of women's societies to the spread of the 'separate spheres' ideology which encouraged women to see themselves as dependent on a male breadwinner, and to the reluctance of the male-dominated national affiliated orders which began to penetrate Wales more rapidly after mid-century, to promote female lodges.<sup>551</sup>

---

<sup>549</sup> King and Stewart, 'Poor Law in Wales'; J. Stewart and S. King, 'Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales', *Rural History* 15 (2004), pp. 69-87.

<sup>550</sup> W.P. Griffith, 'Poor Law in Wales: Some random thoughts', <https://wiki.brookes.ac.uk/download/attachments/16614522/Griffith+OXFBROOKES.pdf>, (accessed 19 Jan. 2015).

<sup>551</sup> D. Jones, 'Did friendly societies matter? A study of friendly society membership in Glamorgan, 1794-1910', *WHR* Vol. 12, (1984-85), pp. 324-349; D. Jones, 'Self-help in nineteenth century Wales: the rise and fall of the female friendly society', *Llafur* IV (1984), pp. 14-26.

## **2. Implementation of the New Poor Law in Nantconwy**

The development of poor relief practices in Nantconwy after 1837 was influenced by a number of key legal, administrative and regulatory changes. Principal among these were the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, the formation of the Llanrwst Poor Law Union in April 1837, the imposition of the Outdoor Labour Test Order in 1844, the 1846 Act relating to the Removal of the Poor, and the opening of the Llanrwst workhouse in September 1848.

The major aims of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act were to promote independence among the able-bodied capable of working and to reduce the cost of poor relief. The Act established the principle of 'less eligibility', which stipulated that the situation of the able-bodied paupers should be inferior to that of the poorest independent worker, in order to draw a clear distinction between the independent poor and paupers receiving poor relief. Less eligibility was to be achieved through a self-acting workhouse test, which offered admission to a 'well-regulated workhouse' instead of outdoor relief to able-bodied men. For this class of paupers, and for vagrants and unmarried mothers, the workhouse was designed as a place to be avoided, with its sufficient but monotonous food and regime of hard labour where the able-bodied would be 'subjected to such courses of labour and discipline as will repel the indolent and vicious'. Families entering the workhouse were to be separated in order to prevent parents acting as a bad influence on their children over the age of two.<sup>552</sup>

The Act did not adopt a specific scheme for relief, but set up the machinery to enable its general principles to be introduced. Three Poor Law Commissioners were appointed, who were empowered to appoint Assistant Commissioners, unite parishes into unions for all Poor

---

<sup>552</sup> S. and B. Webb, *Last Hundred Years*. pp. 100-102; S.G. Checkland and E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 430.

Law purposes, and to issue mandatory rules, orders and regulations to local poor law authorities. Local decision-making passed from parish vestries to a board of guardians elected by a weighted voting system, while administration of relief became professionalized through the appointment of paid officials including a Clerk, Medical Officers and Relieving Officers (ROs). As workhouses were built and economic conditions allowed, the Commissioners issued orders to specific unions prohibiting regular outdoor relief to the able-bodied with the exception of widows with dependent children. Where there was no workhouse or where workhouse accommodation was insufficient during economic crises, outdoor relief was made conditional on performing hard labour through the Outdoor Labour Test Order.

The Poor Law Amendment Act also made changes to the bastardy laws which had an immediate impact on unmarried mothers. The Commissioners believed that the bastardy laws had increased illegitimacy and encouraged improvident marriages, while proving expensive to Poor Law authorities because less than half the cost of maintaining bastard children was recouped from fathers. The government accepted the arguments that putative fathers should no longer be liable for maintenance, and proposed to leave the burden of supporting illegitimate children where 'Providence appears to have ordained it should be', on the mother. In the face of opposition from the House of Lords, a compromise was struck that enabled parishes to continue to seek bastardy orders against putative father, but only through application to Quarter Sessions rather than petty sessions, and requiring some corroboration by a witness other than the mother. Any maintenance payments were to go to the union rather than the mother. This made bastardy orders far more costly and difficult for parishes to obtain; coupled with an amendment that fathers could no longer be imprisoned for non-payment, the number of bastardy orders fell rapidly in most parts of England and Wales.<sup>553</sup> The bastardy

---

<sup>553</sup> S. and B. Webb, *Last Hundred Years*, pp. 96-98.

clauses proved one of the most unpopular parts of the Poor Law Amendment Act, and in 1838, affiliation cases were returned to petty sessions. In 1844, a further amendment allowed mothers (rather than the parish) to bring an action against the father at petty sessions, though corroborative evidence was still required.<sup>554</sup>

The New Poor Law retained the previous system of funding poor relief through local rates, with each parish still responsible for the cost of paupers with a settlement there. The grounds on which a settlement could be gained became more restricted in 1834, with the abolition of annual service as a way of gaining a settlement. An 1846 Act brought about more significant change, enabling a settlement to be gained by five years' residency except for paupers granted non-resident relief in future.<sup>555</sup>

Wales was not high on the Poor Law Commissioners' priority list for introducing the New Poor Law, both due to its sparse population and because it was seen as largely free from the 'abuses' more prevalent in arable areas of England. The Assistant Commissioner responsible for implementing the new law in Shropshire and the north Wales counties of Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, Merioneth and Montgomeryshire was William Day, a country gentleman and JP from Sussex, where he had played a leading role in reducing poor law expenditure in a heavily-pauperised area. He came particularly to the notice of the Commissioners through his proposals advocating the use of a self-regulating workhouse test and for a system of electing guardians by weighted votes according to rated property, with the aim of ensuring their respectability. Although half-Welsh himself, his contempt for Welsh guardians is manifest from his private correspondence. He complained of 'the paucity of country gentlemen to take a lead, and a strong indisposition towards the measure amongst the few

---

<sup>554</sup> Henriques, 'Bastardy', pp. 117-19.

<sup>555</sup> Webbs, *Last Hundred Years*, pp. 423-30.

who are to be found', resulting in most guardians being small farmers whose condition for the most part was little above that of the paupers. Nor did Welsh boards look up to him as a figure of authority: 'You cannot know the miseries of thirty or forty Welsh guardians who *won't* build a workhouse, and consequently meet in the parlour of a pot-house twelve feet by fourteen and keep all the windows shut and spit tobacco on your shoes – to say nothing of understanding not a word they are talking of in an unknown tongue'. These cultural differences clearly inhibited Day's ability to convince Welsh guardians on a broad range of issues, and he was eventually forced to resign in 1844 after being made a partial scape-goat for the Rebecca Riots in south Wales.<sup>556</sup>

Richard Digby Neave, the Assistant Commissioner for Cheshire, Flintshire and Denbighshire, also found doing business with Welsh Boards difficult. He complained that when a motion was carried in England it would be acted on, but in Wales, 'a point carried often has no permanent consequences being rescinded by notice in the absence of its supporters'.<sup>557</sup> This may reflect some difference of view between elected guardians and ex-officio JPs who often attended only for key votes. Guardians who had been persuaded that the law required a particular course of action might also have second thoughts when they discovered that other unions had refused to adopt a similar approach. Neave preferred to tackle Cheshire and Flintshire before turning his attention to Denbighshire, where he foresaw a greater likelihood of opposition because of Welsh parishes' 'perfect self-satisfaction in their own management'.<sup>558</sup> Another Assistant Commissioner, Edmund Head, sought to neutralise opposition in Radnorshire, where the inhabitants were 'exceedingly indisposed' to the New Poor Law, by grouping Welsh border parishes into English unions wherever possible.<sup>559</sup> And

---

<sup>556</sup> Brundage, *New Poor Law*, pp. 30-31; Lewis, 'William Day'.

<sup>557</sup> TNA MH 32/59, (Neave, report to Poor Law Commissioners, June 1839).

<sup>558</sup> *ibid.*, (5 April 1836).

<sup>559</sup> Parker, 'Radnorshire', p. 172.

in Bala, the local gentry told William Day that ‘they knew perfectly well how to manage their own poor and the less they saw of an Assistant Commissioner the better’.<sup>560</sup>

*Map 11, Llanrwst Poor Law Union*<sup>561</sup>



In the event, the first six north Wales unions formed in Flintshire and Denbighshire agreed to build workhouses without too much argument. In 1837, Day and Neave turned their attention to forming Caernarvonshire and western Denbighshire into unions. They originally proposed a large union centred on Llanrwst, embracing the Denbighshire and Caernarvonshire parishes in the Conwy valley, but owing to opposition from the lower Conwy parishes they

<sup>560</sup> Day to Poor Law Commissioners, 11 Jan. 1837, quoted by Parry, ‘Meirionnydd’, p. 66.

<sup>561</sup> [www.data-archive.ac.uk](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk)

agreed to form two separate small unions based on Conway and Llanrwst. These were assigned to Neave's district till 1838, when they transferred to Day.<sup>562</sup> Nantconwy, together with the Caernarvonshire parish of Maenan and seven Denbighshire parishes, became part of the Llanrwst Union which had a total population of 11,290 in 1831 (Map 11).

When the newly-elected Llanrwst Board of Guardians met in May 1837, the majority of its members were farmers, sometimes tenating fairly small farms. Four JPs attended the first meeting and a couple of others attended occasionally for key votes.<sup>563</sup> William Hanmer Esq. of Bodnod Hall, Eglwysfach, was elected as chairman and another Denbighshire JP, the Rev. Thomas Roberts became vice-chairman. Surprisingly, in view of the widespread opposition to the New Poor Law in north-west Wales, the Board agreed to build of workhouse for 100 persons. However difficulties in obtaining a site delayed its building. The Gwydir estate declined to sell any land, and Neave recommended to the Poor Law Commissioners the purchase a three acre field offered by a small Llanrwst landowner, Owen Owens, at the exorbitant price of £800, because 'the guardians do not enter the market with favour'. Owens subsequently withdrew his offer and the Hon. M. Lloyd Mostyn, who was chairman of the St. Asaph Board, was persuaded to sell land for the Llanrwst workhouse at £100 an acre.

By the time the architect's plans were received, the Llanrwst Board was having second thoughts about the need for a workhouse, influenced by events elsewhere in north Wales, especially in the neighbouring Conway Union where the board had refused to build a workhouse. This caused Neave to advise the Poor Law Commission that 'the example has placed Llanrwst in peril'.<sup>564</sup> The Anglesey, Dolgelly and Machynlleth Unions also refused

---

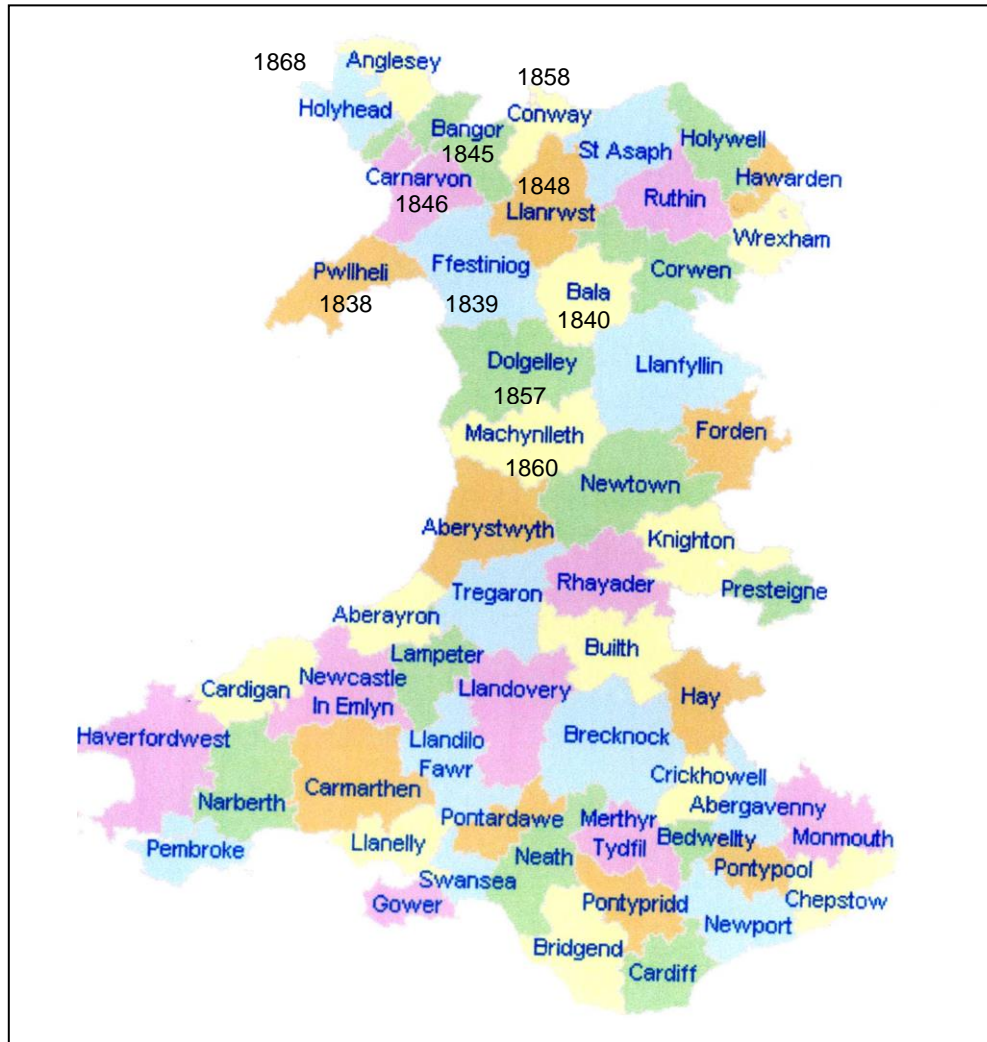
<sup>562</sup> NLW 3142F, Day to Poor Law Commissioners, Feb. 1837.

<sup>563</sup> TNA MH 12/16075.

<sup>564</sup> TNA MH 32/59, (Neave quarterly report, March 1838).

outright to build a workhouse, while other Boards including Bangor and Beaumaris and Caernarvon which had initially agreed to erect a workhouse now dragged their feet. In the event, only three of the ten unions in north-west Wales built a workhouse before 1845, while the Conway workhouse did not open till 1858 and Anglesey/Holyhead till 1868 (Map 12).<sup>565</sup>

*Map 12, Welsh Poor Law unions with date of workhouse opening in north-west Wales*



Source: <http://www.workhouses.org.uk>.

<sup>565</sup> <http://www.workhouses.org.uk>, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

William Day was forced to admit that, 'the present state of public opinion in Wales is still far from friends to the new Poor Law'. Ratepayers and guardians voiced a variety of reasons for opposing workhouses. They believed that poverty should not be punished as a crime and that the poor had a natural and indefensible right to relief. Ratepayers regarded workhouses as more expensive than outdoor relief and many parishes had already built parish houses which would become redundant. It was against the law of God to separate man and wife in the workhouse. Farmers could not afford to pay higher wages, and most guardians supported the continuation of allowances for large families and payment of pauper rents, recognizing that farm labourers' wages were insufficient to support a large family. If as was often the case the labourer was boarded, his wages were 5s a week in summer and four in winter, compared to 8 or 9s without board. In some parts of north Wales, the higher demand for farm servants resulted in married men living in the farmhouse during the week, but spending Sunday with their families. In particular, ratepayers argued it was their rates, and they should be allowed to spend them as they saw fit, to relieve poverty in a cost-effective way.<sup>566</sup>

Although elections were rarely contested, guardians in many north-west Wales unions were nominated by parish vestries on a 'no workhouse' platform and felt democratically bound to represent the views of their ratepayers. In the 1838 elections for the Llanrwst Board, only three of the 17 original guardians were re-elected. Alarmed at the increase in expenditure, the new Board reduced Medical Officers' salaries and halved the auditor's fee. The Chairman and vice-chairman headed off a threatened revolt about the 100 person workhouse previously agreed by proposing that only part should be built initially, but that it should be designed so that it could be expanded later. This was agreed by the board but rejected by the Poor Law

---

<sup>566</sup> NLW 3141F, Day to Poor Law Commissioners September 1837 and January 1839; TNA MH 32/59, Neave to Poor Law Commissioners, 1 Nov. 1837.

Commissioners. The resulting stalemate was not resolved and consequently Mostyn withdrew his offer of a site.

When Neave left to become Assistant Commissioner for the Home Counties in 1838, William Day's district was expanded to include the Llanrwst and Conway Unions and subsequently south Wales as well. He initially had more pressing issues to resolve in north Wales and later became embroiled in the fallout from the Rebecca Riots in south Wales, so took no further steps about a Llanrwst workhouse.<sup>567</sup> Day's successor as Assistant Commissioner for Wales in 1844, Col. Wade, was concerned that the seven north-west Wales unions with no workhouse were in effect thumbing their noses at the Poor Law Commissioners, having realised that without one they could not be forced to implement the full rigours of the New Poor Law, including the abolition of allowances for large families and payment of rents, or the withdrawal of outdoor relief for unmarried mothers and their children. His solution was to pressurize the recalcitrant unions by imposing the Outdoor Labour Test Order, which withdrew outdoor relief from able-bodied men unless they were prepared to undertake hard labour. The Llanrwst guardians decided that the only form of labour possible was breaking stones and mending roads in each of the parishes in the union, but organizing this work would require the appointment of a Superintendent and six assistants. The Outdoor Labour Test was clearly impractical, not only because of administration costs, but also because many of the able-bodied paupers were employed but in receipt of insufficient wages, and the Llanrwst Board decided that building a workhouse was the lesser evil. They may also have been swayed by the decisions of the Caernarvon and Bangor and Beaumaris Boards to press ahead with building workhouses, although the Anglesey, Conwy, Dolgelly and Machynlleth Unions decided to introduce the Outdoor Labour Test instead. An additional consideration

---

<sup>567</sup> NLW 3148F, (William Day Union correspondence, 1836-44).

may have been that neighbouring unions such as Ffestiniog and Bala which had built workhouses made very little use of them, and continued most of their outdoor relief practices, including in Ffestiniog's case payment of allowances to unmarried mothers. 'First fruits!' Col. Wade exulted on hearing that the Llanrwst Board had succumbed, though as it turned out, its example was not followed by the other refractory north Wales unions, some of which made only the barest pretence at implementing the Outdoor Labour Test.<sup>568</sup>

Having agreed to build a workhouse, the Llanrwst guardians put implementation of the outdoor works programme on hold. A decision on salaries for the outdoor labour superintendent and his assistants was deferred from meeting to meeting for six months until the whole question was quietly dropped. As the workhouse did not open until September 1848, the Board managed to evade the Poor Law Commissioners' orders restricting the payment of outdoor relief for a further three years. The Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order was imposed on other north Wales unions with workhouses in 1845.<sup>569</sup> It appears that the Order was extended to Llanrwst after its workhouse opened, though any impact on the poor is difficult to assess owing to the paucity of detailed statistics at local or national level after 1847, when the Poor Law Board replaced the Poor Law Commission. The Order prohibited relief to able-bodied men outside the workhouse, but allowed exceptions to be made subject to the case being reported within fifteen days to the Poor Law Board. There are no such reports in the Llanrwst file, but given the Welsh unions' propensity to flout regulations, this is not necessarily evidence that all such relief was stopped. The number of inmates in the Llanrwst workhouse was always very small, and there appears to have been no attempt to apply a workhouse test except in the case of unmarried mothers, as explored below.

---

<sup>568</sup> TNA MH32/75, (Correspondence of Assistant Commissioners, Col Wade), Wade quarterly reports, March and June 1846.

<sup>569</sup> Snell, *Parish & Belonging*, p. 241.

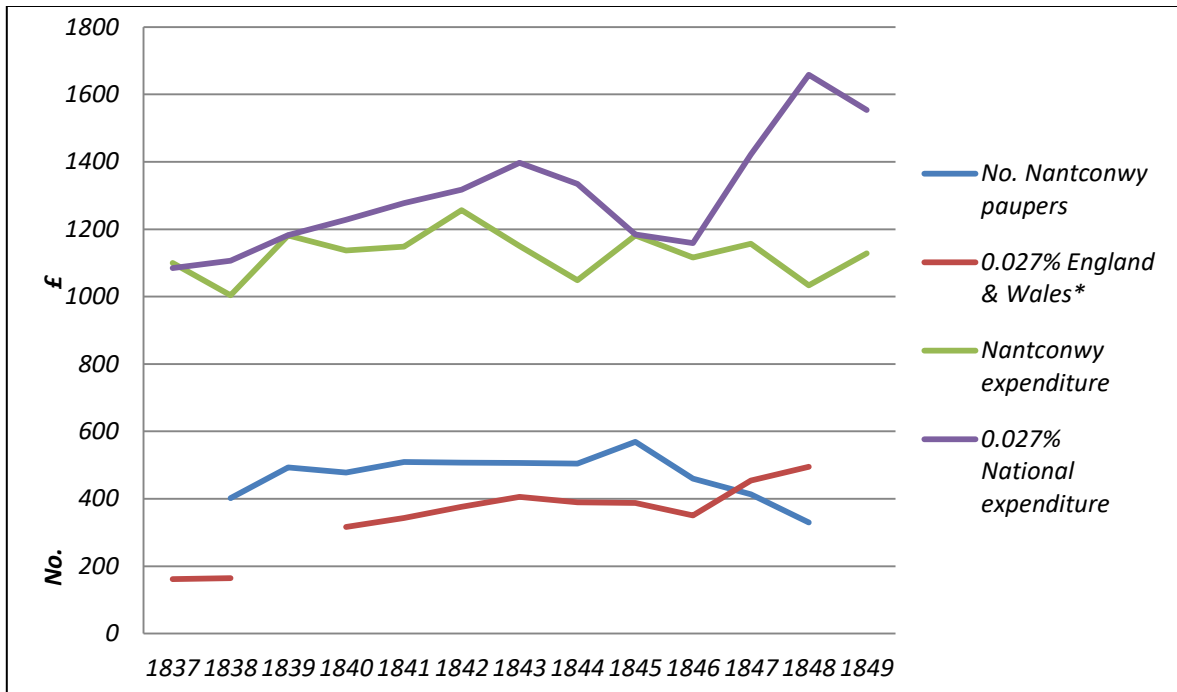
### **3. Impact on the poor of Nantconwy**

During the three years between the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act and its implementation in Llanrwst, improving economic conditions meant that poor relief costs fell rapidly in Nantconwy, mirroring national trends. After 1837, the number of paupers receiving outdoor relief stayed relatively constant, peaking in 1845 but then reducing significantly. Costs rose steadily till 1842, falling thereafter, though not paralleling the change in pauper numbers. The number of people receiving poor relief in Nantconwy in the first decade of the New Poor Law was higher pro-rata to 1841 population than in England and Wales as a whole, though the cost remained a little lower. However the number of Nantconwy paupers reduced after 1845, while national numbers were rising. (The jump in national poor relief costs in 1847-8 was attributed to a large influx of destitute people from Ireland coupled with depression in manufacturing districts.<sup>570</sup>) For most of the period up to 1847 then, Nantconwy relieved a higher than average proportion of its population at a lower per capita cost. After the opening of the Llanrwst workhouse in 1848, the cost of indoor poor relief in the workhouse remained well below national levels, while outdoor relief costs for poor relief outside the workhouse reduced significantly but remained above national average (Figure 31).

---

<sup>570</sup> *PP 1849, XXV (1024)*, Report of the Commissioners for Administering the Laws for Relief of the Poor in England. 1848, p. 4.

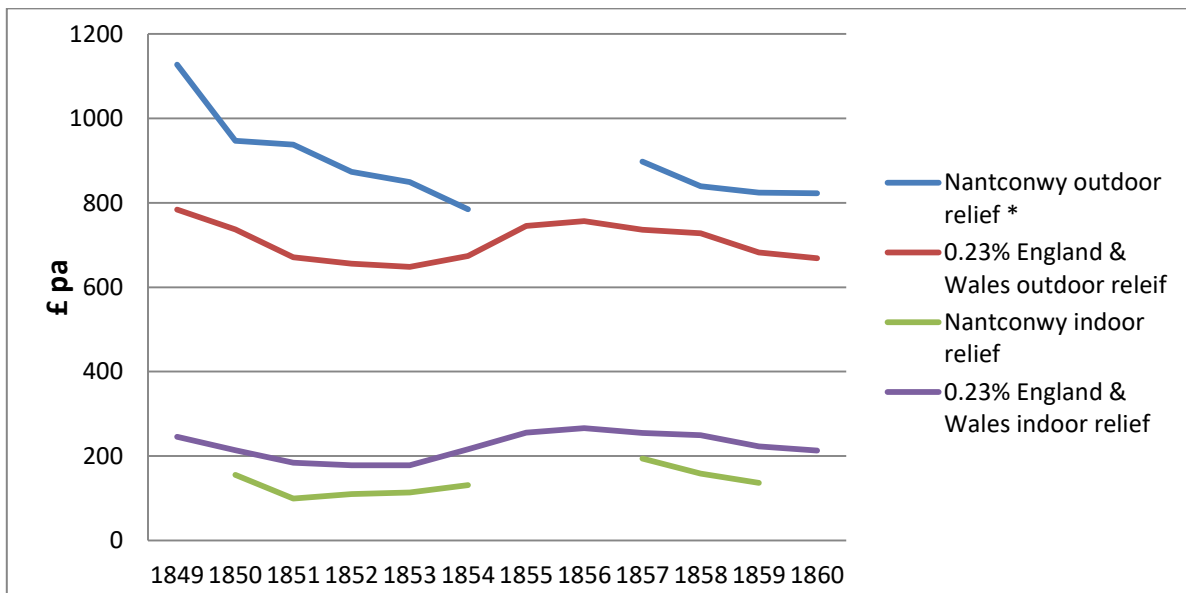
Figure 31, Cost of poor relief in Nantconwy pro-rata to England and Wales, 1837-49



\*Weights based on 1841 population, when Nantconwy population was 0.027% of England and Wales.

Sources: DA GD/A/9c/1-3 (Llanrwst Union parochial ledgers, 1837-48); Annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1837-48.

Figure 32, Nantconwy poor relief cost pro-rata to England and Wales, 1849-60



\*Weights based on 1851 population, when Nantconwy population was 0.023% of England and Wales. Excludes Llanrwst Union cost of non-resident relief.

Sources: DA GD/A/9e/1, 3 & 4, (General, parochial and non-settled poor ledgers, 1848-1853, 1856-7 & 1858-60); Williams, *Pauperism*, p. 170.

Comparable statistics on pauper numbers and relief costs are not available for the period 1848-60. By this time, the cost of outdoor relief in Nantconwy had become more expensive pro-rata to population than England and Wales as a whole, largely because Nantconwy population was stationary in the 1840s whereas national population increased by 13 per cent. Even so, the cost of indoor relief in Nantconwy remained less than two thirds of the national average due to the very low occupancy of the Llanrwst workhouse: over the period 1849-60, the average number of paupers from Nantconwy in the workhouse was only 4.6 a year. Overall, the trend in Nantconwy relief costs followed a similar pattern to the national figures, reflecting wider economic pressures, albeit with a steeper decline in the five years 1849-54 (Figure 32).

### **Changes to outdoor relief in 1837-8**

One of the first tasks of the new boards of guardians in 1837 was to review the list of paupers granted regular allowances by their parishes, with a view to ceasing or reducing any not justified according to the letter or philosophy of the new law. In most cases, north Wales boards ceased allowances not so much as a result of the new law, but because they felt that some paupers (including widows and unmarried mothers) were either able to support themselves or had relatives able to support them. Usually, a son was expected to support elderly parents, but in some cases a grandfather was held liable. The outcome of the review in the Corwen, Caernarvon, and Bangor and Beaumaris Unions was that just 47 poor relief allowances were ceased (Table 42).<sup>571</sup> In the Llanrwst Union, eleven existing allowances were ceased, though the reasons were not recorded.

---

<sup>571</sup> TNA MH 32/15, (Correspondence of Assistant Commissioners, William Day, 1835-7), Day to Poor Law Commissioners, May 1838.

*Table 42, Reasons for ceasing allowances in three north Wales unions, 1837*

<b>Reason</b>	<b>No.</b>
Men able to support themselves	11
Women able to support themselves	10
Relative able to support	19
Step-father now liable	7

Source: TNA MH 32/15.

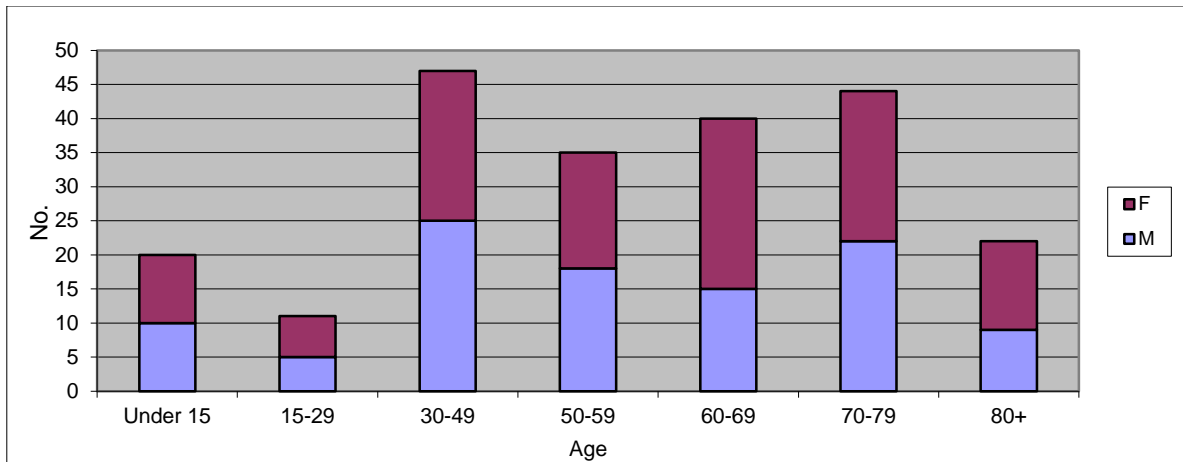
The profile of the 260 Nantconwy paupers whose cases were decided by the Llanrwst guardians between September 1837 and September 1838 was a largely traditional one. Of those for whom ages were given, nine per cent were orphans or bastard children, and 48 per cent were the elderly aged 60 and over. Women still formed a small majority of relief recipients (52 per cent); these were mainly widows, though some able-bodied spinsters also received allowances (Figures 33 and 34).<sup>572</sup>

A third of paupers were men for whom an occupation was recorded, predominantly labourers who constituted 26 per cent of all Nantconwy paupers; three per cent were quarrymen and four per cent had other occupations, including the usual tailors and shoemakers. As we shall see, many of these were elderly, and could be categorized as semi-able bodied. Most of the paupers already received a regular allowance - 63 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women – though new and increased allowances were often agreed on a temporary basis at least initially. The level of regular allowances remained low: the median level for both men and women was between 1s 6d and 2s a week (Figure 35).

---

<sup>572</sup> DA GD/A/84/1, (Minute book Llanrwst Union, May 1837-Sept 1838).

Figure 33, Age and sex of Nantconwy paupers, 1837-8



Source: DA GD/A/84/1, (Minute book Llanrwst Union, 1837- 8).

Figure 34, Status of Nantconwy paupers 1837-8

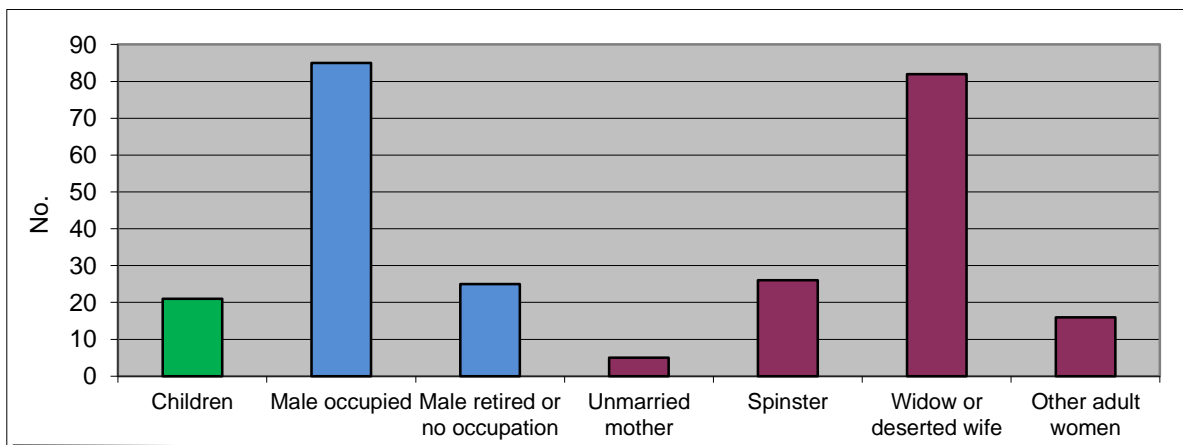
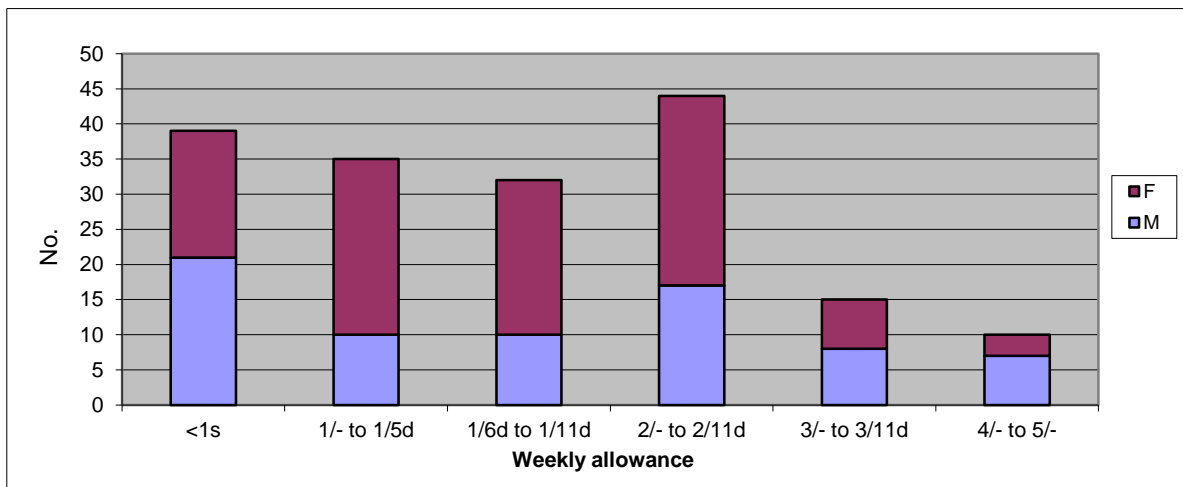


Figure 35, Distribution of regular allowances, 1837-8



Nantconwy pensions were therefore lower than regular allowances in Bolton and the New Forest, which King investigated as representative unions in the north-west and south of England; in particular, the proportion of pensions under 4s a month was over twice as high as in parsimonious Bolton. Nantconwy did have a higher proportion of pensions over 12s a month, though this may have been due to more expensive paupers being accommodated in the workhouse in New Forest and Bolton (Figure 36). This pattern of Nantconwy relief payments in 1837-8 supports King's hypothesis that pre-1834 regional differences in the generosity of poor relief carried over to shape practices under the New Poor Law, with north-west Wales continuing to pay lower allowances than any English region.<sup>573</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of the Llanrwst Board's relief decisions concerned temporary relief which often supplemented regular allowances and was the typical response to short term crises especially illness, or granted for specific purposes such as fuel, burial and clothing. Women were more likely to receive a weekly pension and men temporary relief (and Table 43 and Figure 37).

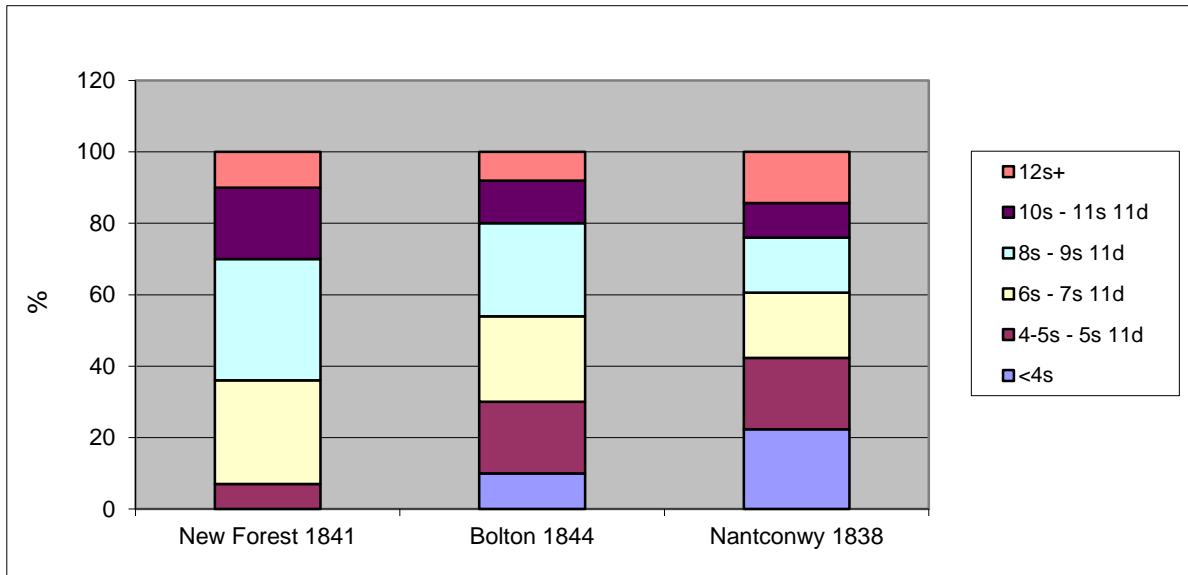
*Table 43, Reason for temporary relief or allowance 1837-8*

<b>Reason</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>
Illness or infirmity	47	43
Wife or children's illness	7	4
Lodgings	8	9
Out of work	22	2
Other	13	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>76</b>

Source: DA GD/A/84/1.

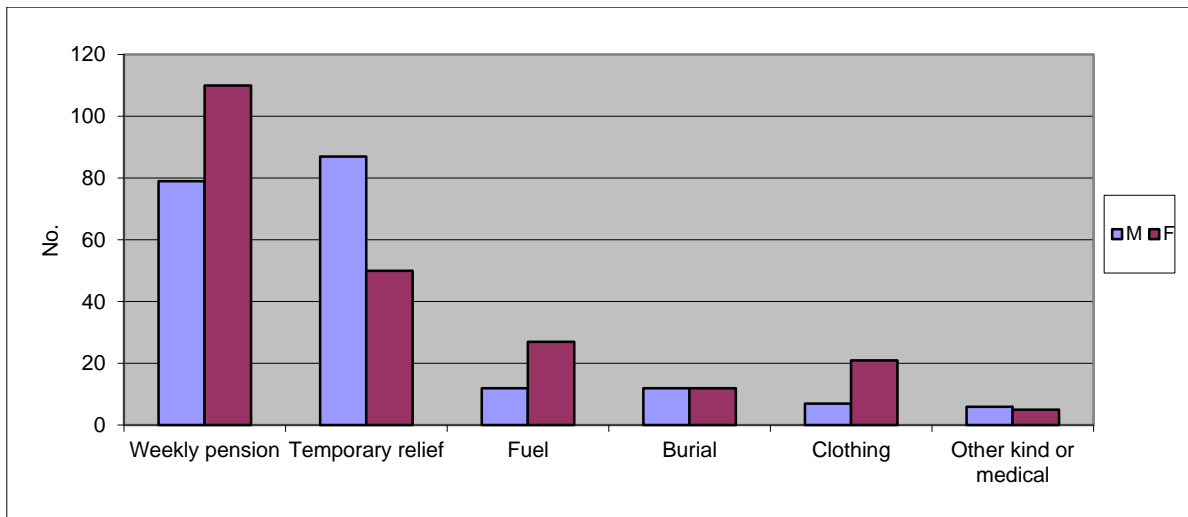
<sup>573</sup> King, *Poverty & Welfare*, p. 247.

Figure 36, Regional variation in monthly pensions



Sources: King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 241-3; DA GD/A/84/1.

Figure 37, Type of relief in Nantconwy, 1837-8



## Rents

The first major decision of the Llanrwst Board which revised former Nantconwy relief practices was to cease the payment of pauper rents. The guardians' preference had been to continue paying rents much as before, fearing that many paupers would have difficulty in saving up to meet quarterly rent demands. In this instance, Neave managed to persuade the

Board that it was now illegal to pay rents directly to the landlord, though the practice continued in other parts of north Wales and became a key area of controversy between local and central authorities. The Assistant Commissioners regarded payment of rents, especially to able-bodied men, as one of the worst 'abuses' of the old regime, with 'the pernicious tendency of making the labouring class lean more or less upon the rates and helps to break down the broad line of distinction between the labourer and the pauper'.<sup>574</sup>

The Board proposed an alternative procedure where the paupers would be granted an increase in their weekly allowance, with the Relieving Officer retaining a proportion of the allowance to pay rent due quarterly to the landlord. This solution was vetoed by the Poor Law Commissioners. Neave sought to broker a compromise, recognising the sensitivity of the issue; much of the rent was paid for the elderly whom landlords had allowed to continue in their old homes on condition that the parish guaranteed the rent. Neave and Day could not afford any scandal of elderly paupers being turned out into the streets at a time when they were attempting to convince other unions to cease payment of rents. The Poor Law Commissioners therefore acknowledged that in fixing the level of relief payments, the Llanrwst Board could take account of the need of the destitute to pay rent until an efficient workhouse was in operation.<sup>575</sup>

In spite of this concession, the Llanrwst Board did not systematically review allowances to take account of the loss of rent payments, and rejected all new applications for rent subsidies. Instead, they waited for paupers to apply for an increased weekly allowance or temporary relief after they had become destitute and were threatened with eviction. Compensation was usually only partial, for example a Llanrwst labourer with a wife and five children was given

---

<sup>574</sup> TNA MH 32/59, Neave to Poor Law Commissioners, 8 July 1836.

<sup>575</sup> TNA MH 12/16075, Poor Law Commissioners to Llanrwst Board, 15 May 1837.

10s temporary relief to provide lodgings in consideration that the parish had discontinued paying his rent of £3 10s. Seventeen Nantconwy paupers were granted temporary relief for lodgings, the median amount for eight men being 10s, and for nine women 15s. Payment for lodgings was therefore on a much more limited scale than under the Old Poor Law and did not cover the full cost which averaged 20-25s a year for the type of cottage occupied by the poorest – often a single room or with one bedroom.<sup>576</sup> Dolwyddelan and Trefriw did however retain their parish poor houses where a small number of paupers could live rent-free.

The guardians' policy of withdrawing rent payments appears to have significantly affected the relationship between the poor and the union, especially as a number of other north Wales unions took a more lenient line, either continuing to pay rents or increasing allowances to help with payment. The poor quickly got the message and started to frame their relief applications in a form likely to be more acceptable to the new regime. Indeed, the standard phrases used in presenting relief applications to the Board suggest that ROs may well have helped the poor to frame their applications using an acceptable rationale. Whereas regular poor relief allowances had been fairly stable under the Old Poor Law and the poor had very rarely appealed to the Justices of the Peace, once the old 'moral economy' between the poor and the Llanrwst Union was broken, the poor of Nantconwy lost no opportunity in putting forward any plausible case for increased allowances or temporary relief.<sup>577</sup>

The New Poor Law machinery made it much easier for paupers to seek relief or an increased allowance when their circumstances changed, and those not satisfied with the Board's initial decision often came back after a few months with a strengthened case. Under the Old Poor Law, it had been a general rule for vestries to meet as seldom as possible, to avoid the

---

<sup>576</sup> NLW 3141F, Day to Poor Law Commissioners, 5 Jan. 1840.

<sup>577</sup> DA GD/A/84/1.

importunities of paupers: select vestries met no more than once a month, and open vestries three or four times a year.<sup>578</sup> Now, ROs visited each parish or township weekly to pay benefits, and this afforded a channel for the poor to put forward claims. ROs also used their own initiative to put forward cases for relief to the destitute who were unable to claim for themselves or whose carers were unsure of their ground, notably in the cases of idiots and orphans. The guardians initially met weekly and later fortnightly to consider claims from groups of parishes in rotation, resulting in claims from each parish being considered every month.

### **Able-bodied men**

Most north Wales guardians did not share the New Poor Law's preoccupation with eliminating relief to able-bodied males, and William Day found himself unable to persuade boards to abolish payments to men with large families before workhouses were built. Indeed, he anticipated that even then, it would be difficult to induce employers to raise wages to the level necessary for supporting a large family, especially as this would require a change from the system of providing board to one where the labourer worked solely for money.<sup>579</sup>

Regular allowances had typically been restricted to labourers with large families of four or more children. As farm service remained prevalent in north Wales, early marriage was less common than in south and east England; children were able to start earning their keep by the age of ten, and received remuneration in addition to their food at the ages of 11, 12 or 13 according to their size and forwardness.<sup>580</sup> As a result, large dependent families were relatively infrequent. Of the 260 Nantconwy paupers involved in the Llanrwst guardians' relief

---

<sup>578</sup> 'Walcott's report', p. 183a.

<sup>579</sup> TNA MH 32/15, Day to Poor Law Commissioners, 21 April 1838.

<sup>580</sup> TNA MH 32/59, Neave to Poor Law Commissioners, 1 Nov. 1837.

decisions for 1837-8, only 19 men aged under 60 received a regular allowance. Seven were clearly for a large family of four to six children; five were disabled or idiots, and the family circumstances of the remaining seven were not given. The typical allowance for a labourer with four or five children was very small – between 6d and 9d a week, though this would have made a crucial difference to a large family. The Llanrwst Board allowed existing allowances to continue till children came of working age, but did not increase them or grant any new family allowances. Coupled with the withdrawal of rent payments after the transitional arrangements, this policy appears to have resulted in a drop in benefits to existing pauper families, and the gradual phasing out of relief for large families over the ensuing decade. The Board also granted one-off temporary relief payments for large families in exceptional circumstances, for example to a Llanrwst labourer whose wife died giving birth to their seventh child: though not prepared to increase the family's allowance of 2s a week, the guardians granted an unusually large sum of £2 4s as temporary relief. Family size was also taken into account in determining the level of temporary relief payments during illness or lack of work.

Although recession was beginning to reduce employment in manufacturing districts of England and north-east Wales by late 1837, Neave was of the opinion that employment was to be found at fair wages in the rural districts of north Wales, if there was a willingness to beat wide for it. Demand for slate was on the increase, as slate replaced thatch in the countryside and was in demand for roofing the growing metropolises of north-west England. There were also growing opportunities for maid-servants in urban areas.<sup>581</sup> Like the previous vestries, the Llanrwst Board expected the unemployed to migrate in search of work, but did authorise a small number of payments for men temporarily out of work in the winter months

---

<sup>581</sup> *ibid.*

of 1838, when a prolonged spell of severe weather stopped work on farms and in the slate quarries. This forced some men not previously paupers to seek relief, though the majority of those out of work were over 65.

## Younger widows and spinsters

The Llanrwst Union expected widows to work, but recognised the need to supplement earnings with poor relief for some widows and spinsters. A newly widowed woman might typically receive 6d or 1s a week relief, though the median pension for a Nantconwy widow under 60 was 1s 7d. Allowances reduced when children were old enough to work or left home. With the loss of spinning and the decline in the stocking industry, a number of spinsters now found it hard to earn sufficient to keep themselves, particularly after the withdrawal of rent payments, and received an allowance in aid of wages averaging 1s 5d a week (Table 44).

*Table 44, Allowances to women under 60, 1837-8*

	No. with regular allowance	No. with temporary allowance or relief only	Median regular allowances
Unmarried mother	6	0	1
Widow	26	6	1.6
Spinster	8	3	1.4
Deserted wife	2	2	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>11</b>	

The New Poor Law seems to have triggered an increase in the number of deserted wives. No instances had occurred in the three Nantconwy parishes surveyed during the Old Poor Law period, but four husbands absconded in 1837-8. The Poor Law Commission recommended a less sympathetic response to deserted wives than to widows, concerned that men struggling to support a family might be tempted to abscond in the hopes that their

family would be granted outdoor relief rather than being sent to the workhouse. Indeed they suspected that some wives were colluding in their own desertion.<sup>582</sup> The Llanrwst guardians were clearly ambivalent towards deserted wives, initially granting temporary relief and only agreeing an allowance after a period. In fact, two of the husbands did return once it became clear that the union had not discontinued all outdoor relief to able-bodied men.

## The elderly

The New Poor Law envisaged a clear distinction between able-bodied men and the elderly and impotent deserving poor, who should not be subject to the workhouse test. In reality, the end of working life came gradually, as physical and mental powers failed. Where the labour market for male labourers was over-supplied, employers were also likely to give preference to employing younger family men. Edwin Chadwick, the Secretary to the Poor Law Commission, believed that for men in strenuous occupations, failing health might seriously reduce capacity for work after age 50, while data from friendly societies suggested that men expected to retire around the ages of 60 or 65. The 1837-8 Select Committee reviewing the operation of the Poor Law Amendment Act saw 60 as the lower boundary for old age relief, though it has been suggested that most unions regarded men between the ages of 16 and 70 as able-bodied unless permanently incapacitated. The Select Committee also debated whether 2s 6d a week was an adequate level of allowance for the elderly. Witnesses involved in Poor Law administration argued that 2s 6d was not adequate and would need to be supplemented by additional relief in cash or kind, living with relatives, working a little, taking in lodgers, or money from a sick club or friendly society.<sup>583</sup>

---

<sup>582</sup> *PP 1840*, XVII (167), 'Report of the Poor Law Commission on the continuance of the Poor Law Commission', p. 61.

<sup>583</sup> N.L. Tranter, 'The labour supply 1780-1860', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700, Vol. 1: 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 221-2; M.E. Rose, *The Relief of Poverty, 1834-1914* (London, 1972), p. 16; Thane, *Old Age*, pp. 166-7.

In the Llanrwst Union, men were still expected to continue work for as long as possible, often to an advanced age, and only a few of the most elderly and infirm might hope for an allowance of 2s 6d a week. Later Poor Law statistics demonstrate that the union had a considerably higher than average proportion of non-able bodied men partially able to work, and a low proportion of aged and infirm considered wholly unable to work. Where poor relief was granted for old age and infirmity, this started late and was rarely adequate for total maintenance; it was clearly designed to supplement some continued earnings, formal and informal charity, and help from kin. A number of factors may have enabled men to continue work till older ages in this part of Wales. Despite the often harsh climate, the work of agricultural labourers on the area's largely pastoral farms was less backbreaking than on arable farms. Welsh labourers were probably better nourished than many of their counterparts in south and east England due to the provision of board, the availability of milk and butter from their employers, and the widespread opportunity to grow potatoes and perhaps keep a pig.

Over three quarters of elderly men receiving a regular allowance were labourers. Those following an indoor trade – shoemaker, tailor, weaver – were more likely to be still working but were granted casual relief when short of work. A small number of craftsmen such as blacksmiths, stonemasons or slaters also came to rely on poor relief when disabled from work by infirmity. Partial relief sometimes started in a labourer's 60s due to infirmity, though nearly a half received only a temporary allowance or relief during illness and when out of work. Men in their early 70s were more likely to receive a regular allowance, though the median level was still less than a shilling a week for those under 75. The majority of men in this age-group received additional amounts when ill or out of work, suggesting that most were still working when possible. Men became more likely to receive a pension in their late 70s, and at a higher

level, though a third still received temporary relief when out of work or ill. An example was a 79 year-old Dolwyddelan joiner, William Griffith, whose regular pension of a shilling a week was topped up by a temporary relief payment of 5s when he was out of work due to the hard winter. Men in their 80s received the highest pensions which increased as they became more infirm, the median level being 4s a week and the highest allowance 5s a week for a married man (Table 45).

*Table 45, Relief of the Nantconwy elderly, 1837-8*

Age	Men			Women		
	No. with regular allowance	No. with temporary allowance or relief only	Median regular allowances	No. with regular allowance	No. with temporary allowance or relief only	Median regular allowances
60-69	9	7	0.9	13	9	1.4
70-74	9	1	0.8	12	0	1.6
75-79	11	3	2.3	9	0	2.3
80+	7	0	4	13	0	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>11</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>9</b>	

Elderly single women over age 60 formed the biggest group of Nantconwy paupers, though the board was cautious about granting regular allowances if women were still able-bodied. New allowances often started at only 6-9d a week for those in their 60s, and increased with infirmity. The median allowances of 1s 5d for women in their 60s, and 1s 7d for those in their early 70s, suggests that these groups were also expected to supplement poor relief from other sources. Allowances for elderly women below age 75 were generally higher than men's, reflecting their lower earning potential, and women were also more likely to receive additional relief in the form of fuel and clothing. Stocking knitting remained a way for widows and spinsters too old for service to at least partially maintain themselves: in the 1851 census, nine Nantconwy women household heads gave their occupation as stocking knitter, and 13 as pauper/stocking knitter, though it is likely that women recorded simply as paupers in other

parishes also knitted. Allowances tended to increase with advancing age, but were again linked to infirmity. Older infirm women might receive 3s a week, or 3s 6d as the maximum for a small number of the very elderly. The guardians on one occasion increased the allowance of a 102 year-old Penmachno widow to 4s 6d a week, but this was reduced to 3s 6d at the next meeting, presumably due to objections from ratepayers that they had gone too far.

The Elizabethan Poor Laws required people with sufficient means to support their parents, children, and grandchildren. In England, action was rarely taken to enforce family support, partly because many sons and daughters were themselves too poor to support elderly parents. The Llanrwst Board clearly did expect citizens to take responsibility for their elderly relatives, and were prepared to take action to enforce this liability. Thus the clerk was instructed to obtain an order on a Penmachno farmer when it was discovered that his father had been receiving poor relief. The Board also rejected a relief application from an 83 year-old Llanrwst carpenter and his 87 year-old wife because the couple had two sons thought capable of supporting their parents, and the RO was sent to warn the sons that legal action would be taken if they did not allow their parents a sufficiency to keep them. Thirty-six per cent of the Nantconwy elderly recorded as paupers in the 1851 census lived with kin, most often a son or daughter and son-in-law, compared to 40 per cent who lived alone; married couples lived together, and a small number of single elderly lived as lodgers or took in lodgers.

## **Unmarried mothers**

Though their number was small, the group most adversely affected by the implementation of the New Poor Law in Nantconwy was unmarried mothers. The new bastardy laws were particularly unpopular in Wales, where public opinion was strongly of the view that fathers should be held equally liable with mothers for the maintenance of illegitimate children. While

Stephen Walcott had recommended that in north Wales, in view of the national custom of courting on the bed, women should not be penalised at least for a first illegitimate child, the Assistant Commissioners charged with implementing the New Poor Law regarded mothers of bastards as little better than prostitutes, and recommended harsh treatment.

With the increased difficulty in obtaining bastardy orders under the New Poor Law, the proportion of affiliation orders obtained for bastards chargeable to the parish fell to 12 per cent for England and Wales in 1836. Many fathers stopped paying maintenance when they realised that they could no longer be imprisoned for non-payment. In Caernarvonshire however, parishes continued to obtain affiliation orders in spite of the obstacles, with affiliation orders being obtained for a third of illegitimate children chargeable to the parish. This provoked condemnation from the Poor Law Commissioners, who entertained 'a confident expectation that guardians will soon see that the workhouse is the proper place for the mothers of bastard children who fail to support their own offspring'.<sup>584</sup> William Day condemned the previous practice of fostering out illegitimate children so that the mother could return to work, and recommended that 'the unnatural abandonment of these children can only be prevented by providing for both the mother and the child within a healthy, well-regulated and commodious workhouse'.<sup>585</sup> He advised his unions that as action to enforce bastardy orders was no longer possible, there was little point in seeking new ones. Thereafter the number of bastardy orders fell by about 18 per cent a year in Caernarvonshire, though the number obtained remained higher than elsewhere.<sup>586</sup>

---

<sup>584</sup> *PP 1836, XXIX (595)*, Second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, pp. 15, 506.

<sup>585</sup> *PP 1837, XXXI (546)*, Third annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, p. 23.

<sup>586</sup> *PP 1837-8, XXXVIII (449)*, Return of the number of orders of affiliation.

In Nantconwy, fostering continued for orphans and illegitimate children born before the formation of the Llanrwst Union: illegitimate children constituted five per cent of pauper numbers and orphans three per cent. Foster payments ranged from 1s 6d a week for young children to 6d or 1s a week for children aged 10 and over, who were expected to contribute to their keep in the same way as other poor children. Allowances ceased by the age of 14, or earlier if the child found a place in service, when a suit of clothes was normally provided. The New Poor Law made the mother responsible for looking after a bastard child, with support from her family where possible. The practice of fostering therefore ceased for children born after 1837, except where a mother was clearly unable to look after them. The median allowance paid to new unmarried mothers in Nantconwy declined to 1s a week, about half the cost of keeping a young child. The mother was further penalised both by finding it difficult to return to farm or domestic service, and because men were less willing to marry unmarried mothers now that the New Poor Law made them liable for supporting her child.

### **Casual relief**

Although regular allowances were generally very low in the Llanrwst Union, the guardians topped these up by additional payments in cash or kind as the parish vestries had done under the Old Poor Law, to the dismay of Assistant Commissioner Neave. He warned in early 1838 that 'the winter season has made the guardians more lax in their practice and the departure from the old modes of relief is gradual. I have had occasion to require an explanation for many of their decisions. They do effect beneficial changes, but require much of my attention.' He was concerned about setting precedents, fearing that combination amongst the north Wales poor made a single case of relief given indiscriminately the forerunner of numerous applications.<sup>587</sup> Neave particularly objected to payments for fuel, clothing and shoes, which

---

<sup>587</sup> TNA MH 32/59, Neave to Poor Law Commissioners, 17 Aug. 1837.

continued much as under previous parish practice. In fact, although the board approved 252 temporary relief payments for Nantconwy paupers in 1837-8, relief in kind only constituted 7 per cent of the total expenditure on outdoor relief, a much lower proportion than in many other unions.

*Table 46, Relief for illness, 1837-8*

<b>Relief</b>	<b>No. men</b>	<b>No. women</b>	<b>Typical relief</b>
Attendant during illness	1	3	1s 6d weekly
Temporary allowance	4	2	2s weekly
Temporary increase	8	12	up to 5s weekly
Temporary relief	22	15	3s weekly
Wife or adult daughter's illness	10	0	5s temporary relief
Children's illness	6	4	5s TR
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>36</b>	

The major additions to regular pensions were due to illness (Table 46). The situation in 1837-8 was somewhat abnormal owing to an outbreak of smallpox in Llanrwst which spread gradually to some Nantconwy parishes. The guardians' most common response, whether or not the claimant was already in receipt of poor relief, was a one-off temporary relief cash payment of around 3s. For those already receiving an allowance, a temporary increase was granted if the illness or injury was expected to last some time. The amount varied according to the loss of earnings involved and the number of dependents, but a family man might receive up to 5s a week, suggesting that this was the minimum amount needed for day to day family living expenses. Where the pauper had no nearby kin to look after them, the union paid 1s 6d a week for an attendant. Interestingly, nearly a quarter of payments related to a wife or children's illness, presumably in recognition of the wife's loss of earnings. Indeed, 60 per cent of payments for illness were to or in respect of women, underlining the impact of women's loss of earnings on the family economy.

The smallpox outbreak also resulted in an unusually high number of unanticipated deaths, with more applications for the union to pay burial costs than had been the norm under the Old Poor Law. Pauper burials in England were often a source of shame and fear; relatives were not given a say in the arrangements and less eligibility applied even in death.<sup>588</sup> This appears to have been less the case in Llanrwst. Occasionally a Nantconwy pauper was buried by their parish because there were no kin to arrange a funeral, but more usually, a relative was granted relief towards the costs of burial, ranging from 8s to 22s.

### **Non-resident relief**

Another area of contention between Assistant Commissioners and their Welsh boards was the payment of non-resident relief to paupers not living in the union. The Poor Law Commissioners' view was that non-resident relief should only be granted in cases of urgent necessity until the pauper could be removed back to their home parish, because it was more difficult to apply the workhouse test to non-resident paupers. The home union could not properly investigate the case, creating a risk of fraud, while the host union could not take relief decisions on behalf of the home union. Welsh guardians on the other hand were keen to continue the previous practice of granting non-resident relief to migrants in order to avoid removing them home where they might become a greater burden on the parish.

The Llanrwst guardians were not prepared to cease all non-resident relief, but agreed at their first meeting that all paupers not living in their parish of settlement should nominate a person in the parish to receive payment quarterly from the RO. They were also required to furnish the RO with a certificate of their health and circumstances every three months, signed by the minister or churchwarden of the parish where they were living. A system soon emerged of

---

<sup>588</sup> Kidd, *State, Society and Poor*, p. 118.

asking the RO of the host union to investigate doubtful cases: this effectively overcame the Assistant Commissioners' objections about potential fraud. The threat of removal could be used by both home and host union, the host union threatening removal unless the Llanrwst Board agreed to grant relief, while Llanrwst might warn a non-resident pauper that they would be removed to their home parish if they were dissatisfied with their allowance. Only 13 non-resident paupers with a settlement in a Nantconwy parish applied for relief in 1837-8. These were mainly labourers already receiving a small allowance who appealed for relief due to illness, and were granted small amounts of temporary relief. As during the Old Poor Law era, the payment of non-resident relief appears to have been a cost-effective way of supporting migrants to remain in their new home where they had better support networks or prospects of employment.

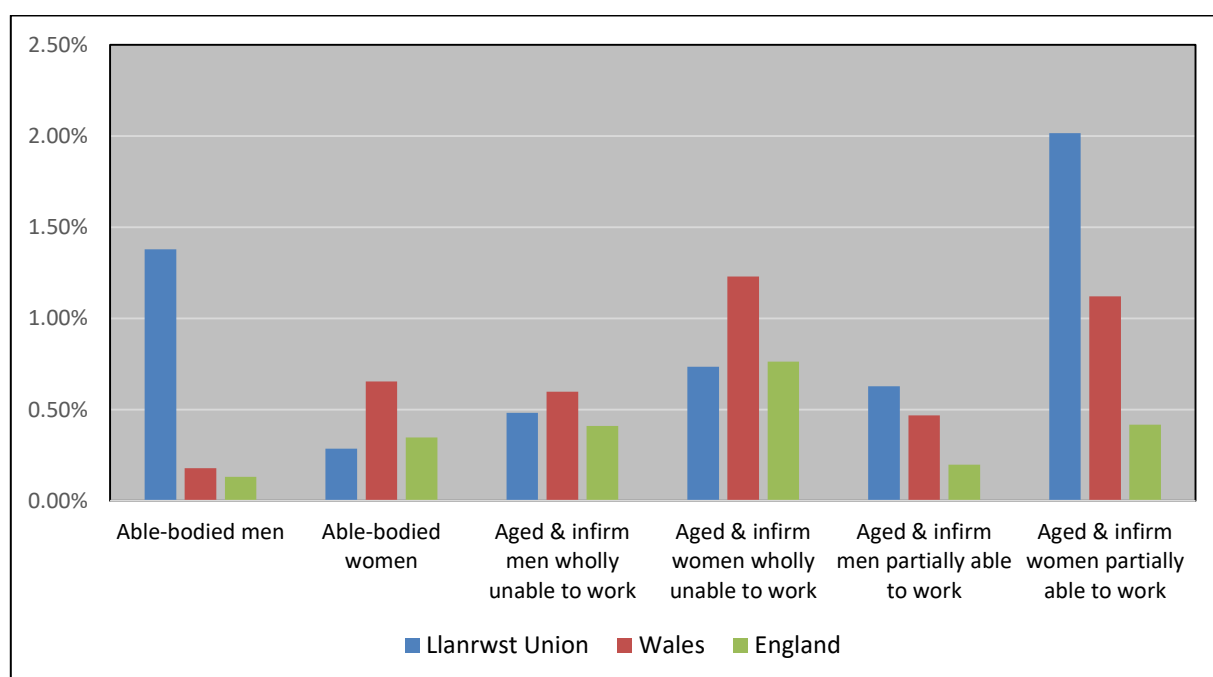
The New Poor Law as initially implemented by the Llanrwst Board therefore had a different impact on different groups, with able-bodied men and mothers of illegitimate children left worse off, but the elderly possibly making slight gains due to some levelling up of small allowances and greater opportunities for a regular review. In their first year, the guardians approved 129 new or increased allowances for the poor of Nantconwy, whereas only 56 were ceased or reduced. There was a marginal increase in the median value of regular allowances, from 1s 7d a week to 1s 8d. Small additional payments for fuel, clothing and necessity continued much as under the Old Poor Law. The overall impact was a higher relief bill.

#### ***4. Poor relief after 1838***

Despite the abnormal conditions created by the smallpox outbreak and the hard winter of 1837-8, the number of Nantconwy paupers receiving outdoor relief continued to rise till 1842, though expenditure peaked in 1845. Individual relief decisions were no longer recorded after

September 1838, but it does not appear that relief practice in the Llanrwst Union changed significantly for some years. When Col. Wade took over as Assistant Commissioner for Wales in 1844, his assessment was that practice in Llanrwst was in every respect as bad as possible. Weekly relief was very low, but all sorts of allowances - turf, potatoes, clothing - were granted in addition to it.<sup>589</sup> A snapshot of later relief practice is afforded by a partial 1846 Llanrwst Union return on the number of paupers in different categories (Figure 38).<sup>590</sup>

Figure 38, Paupers on outdoor relief as percentage of population, 1846



Sources: TNA MH12/16076; *PP 1847*, XXVIII (816).

## The able-bodied

Two differences in the proportion of population receiving relief in the Llanrwst Union compared to the English average are immediately obvious: the high proportions of able-

<sup>589</sup> TNA MH32/75. Wade quarterly report, June 1844.

<sup>590</sup> TNA MH12/16076, (Llanrwst Union correspondence, 1846-52), Return of paupers for quarter ended Lady Day 1846; *PP 1847*, XXVIII (816), Thirteenth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners. The return did not contain data on widows, who are therefore assumed to be an equivalent number to able-bodied males, as in 1837-8.

bodied men and of aged and infirm women partially able to work. Llanrwst claimed to be relieving 140 able-bodied men with children and 29 without children due to insufficiency of earnings. The returns were intended to exclude sickness, and do not differentiate between regular allowances and casual relief. If true, these figures demonstrate that a similar proportion of able-bodied men were still receiving relief due to insufficiency of earnings in 1846 as in 1837-8. If the board had phased out regular allowances for large families, family men were still receiving outdoor relief in one form or another.

Despite the strictures of Assistant Commissioners, many Welsh Unions including Llanrwst appear to have extended the Old Poor Law practice of granting paupers potatoes to plant in allotments made available by the farmers.<sup>591</sup> Two to six bushels might be granted according to the size of the family. The potato blight went down in popular memory as bringing great hardship to Wales in 1846-7, and must have dealt a severe blow to the economy of makeshifts of those smallholders and labourers who relied on their potato crop to supplement low wages.<sup>592</sup> The Poor Law Commission made no enquiry about the impact of the potato crop failure in Wales, but it was probably at least as bad as the situation in the west of England, where magistrates and clergymen reported that since the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act, labourers increasingly relied on potato allotments to feed a large family. When the price of wheat and barley increased by 55 per cent and oats by 44 per cent as a result of the blight, Unions in Somerset and Devon appealed to be allowed to reinstate outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers unable to feed a large family.<sup>593</sup> In Caernarvonshire and Merioneth, the situation was compounded by a slump in the slate industry. But as the Llanrwst Union had never abolished outdoor relief to able-bodied men, it was probably able

---

<sup>591</sup> Davies, 'New Poor Law', p. 267; TNA MH32/75, Wade quarterly report, June 1844.

<sup>592</sup> Williams, *Hanes Plwyf Ffestiniog*, p. 112.

<sup>593</sup> *PP 1846*, XIX (709), Appendices to the twelfth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners; *PP 1847*, XXVIII (816).

to respond more flexibly to the hardship the blight caused to those unable to pay high market prices for the available corn.

It is uncertain what impact the opening of the Llanrwst workhouse in September 1848 had on relief to able-bodied men. When the Bangor workhouse opened in September 1845, it was offered to 479 people, including 205 able-bodied men, 113 illegitimate children and their mothers and 164 other able-bodied women, only 25 of whom entered the workhouse. Within six months, no able-bodied men or unmarried mothers and their children were receiving poor relief in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union, an apparent vindication of the efficacy of the workhouse test in terms of cost reduction.<sup>594</sup> But with the opening the Llanrwst workhouse, Assistant Commissioner Doyle only mentioned the impact of withdrawing relief to unmarried mothers and their children. (See below.) The Poor Law Board ceased to produce statistics on an individual Union basis, but in its figures for 1850, the three Denbighshire Unions including Llanrwst recorded that there were no able-bodied men receiving outdoor relief on 1<sup>st</sup> January except for sickness, and only four men with families in a workhouse.<sup>595</sup> On the face of it, this appears to support Williams' contention that by 1850, a line of exclusion had been drawn against granting poor relief to able-bodied men.

### **Paupers partially able to work**

The 1846 return confirms that a significant proportion of Nantconwy paupers receiving regular relief were the elderly and widows with children, who were able to earn part but not all of their living. When the Poor Law Commissioners discovered in 1840 that over a third of aged and infirm persons receiving outdoor relief were considered partially able to work, (87,000 out of 236,000 nationally), they were critical that this type of relief constituted allowances in aid of

---

<sup>594</sup> Jones, 'Bangor a Biwmares', p. 499.

<sup>595</sup> *PP 1851*, XXVI (1340), Third annual report of the Poor Law Board, 1850, pp. 122-4.

wages which could undercut the wages of independent labourers. Indeed the existence of this large group of semi-able bodied paupers challenged the fundamental distinction between the able-bodied and the non-able-bodied which was at the heart of the Poor Law Amendment Act. The Commissioners strongly recommended that the elderly, infirm and widows who were partially able to work should be given the workhouse test, and anticipated that a large proportion would then be found capable of supporting themselves. People remaining on relief should then be required to abstain from all employment. Yet the Commissioners obviously appreciated the sensitivity of this question, and held back from issuing regulations to enforce their recommendations. Their desire to fit the semi-able bodied into either the able-bodied or the non-able-bodied categories envisaged by the New Poor Law clearly ignored the realities that ageing was a gradual process, that widowed mothers might be able to work part-time, and that guardians preferred to encourage partial self-reliance for as long as possible to keep down the rates, especially in impoverished Welsh Unions.<sup>596</sup> The Llanrwst Board accordingly continued to pay small allowances to those considered partially able to work.

Figure 38 underlines the significance of partial relief in the Llanrwst Union, where the largest group of paupers in 1846 was the aged and infirm judged partially able to work. The proportion of aged and infirm wholly unable to work was similar to the English average, but three times as many men and five times as many women were classed as partially able to work in the Llanrwst Union compared to England. It is therefore not surprising that the guardians in Llanrwst and other north Wales Unions were reluctant to implement the Outdoor Labour Test, since most of the men receiving outdoor relief were either labourers in receipt of inadequate earnings, or aged and infirm men who were partially able to work. For both

---

<sup>596</sup> *PP 1840*, XVII (226), p. 43.

groups, their ability to partially support themselves would have been undermined by a requirement to perform stone breaking for the Union in return for relief.

## **Unmarried mothers**

By 1844, the government was forced to partially reverse the bastardy laws in the face of critical public opinion and mounting evidence that far from curtailing illegitimacy, levels had soared following the changes introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act. In Anglesey, one of the most vociferous areas of opposition to the New Poor Law, five per cent of births were illegitimate in 1830, but there was a 26 per cent increase in the first three years of the New Poor Law. Opposition to the new bastardy laws was cited as one of the grievances underlying the 1843 Rebecca Riots in south Wales. The government *Report on South Wales* concluded that the change to the law had been more acutely felt in south Wales because of the continued custom of bundling, which was still tolerated by farmers who constituted the majority of Poor Law guardians. Welsh guardians were closer to the women who would reap the benefits of affiliation and tended to share Welsh public opinion that the New Poor Law's lack of check on the putative father was largely responsible for increased bastardy levels and the plight of unmarried mothers.<sup>597</sup>

Unlike the previous statutes whose purpose had been to indemnify the parish against the cost of supporting poor bastards, the 1844 law allowed mothers to seek maintenance for the child from the father, unconnected to the Poor Law. Redress was now available cheaply through petty sessions. Mothers and illegitimate children were still entitled to poor relief when destitute, but in deciding relief, the union took into account any payment being received from

---

<sup>597</sup> NLW 3145F, Day to Poor Law Commissioners, June 1839; *PP 1844*, XIX (560), Tenth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, p. 22.

the father.<sup>598</sup> This enabled more women in north Wales to obtain bastardy orders against the putative father and accordingly reduced the number of unmarried mothers receiving poor relief. The requirement for corroborating evidence was more easily obtained in Wales because the practice of courting on the bed was still openly practised by most farm servants and some farmers' daughters. One Caernarvonshire magistrate and Anglican clergyman complained about having to listen in court to witnesses to the act, often the girls' parents, or friends and children: 'This evidence is given . . . without reluctance or modesty, and with a levity and confidence of manner which prove the parties to be quite callous and lost to all sense of shame . . . The guardians, who are almost all country farmers, are so familiarized to this practice . . . they absolutely encourage it; they hire their servants agreeing to their stipulation for freedom of access for this purpose at stated times'.<sup>599</sup>

Records of affiliation orders made at petty sessions for the Denbighshire hundred of Isdulas, which included Llanrwst and two other parishes in the Llanrwst Union, show that most applications for affiliation orders after 1844 were successful. Over two thirds of the 113 affiliation cases heard between 1844 and 1860 resulted in an order for maintenance of the child, typically for 1s 8d a week in 1845, but declining to 1s 6d from 1848, plus 5s towards midwife costs. A quarter of cases were dismissed, usually for lack of corroborating evidence, and six per cent were abandoned, probably for the same reason or because the parents had married. In only one instance was a case abandoned due to the father absconding.<sup>600</sup>

---

<sup>598</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>599</sup> *PP 1847*, XXVII (870), Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, pp. 535-6.

<sup>600</sup> DA QSD/DN/4/6, (Return of bastardy orders for Isdulas Hundred, 1844-60). Petty session records for Nantconwy do not survive for this period.

By 1846, 23 single women with illegitimate children were receiving relief in the Llanrwst Union. Elsewhere in north Wales, attitudes and practice towards unmarried mothers varied. The two Denbighshire Unions which had built workhouses, St Asaph and Wrexham, took a hard line, allowing relief outside the workhouse to only three mothers, whereas in Caernarvonshire which still had only one workhouse, 263 unmarried mothers received outdoor relief. On the other hand, some unions that had built a workhouse, including Aberystwyth and Ffestiniog, continued to pay outdoor relief to unmarried mothers, to the dismay of Col. Wade. He was determined to improve the moral tone of his area and set out to convince Welsh boards of the need to take a more punitive line towards unmarried mothers. An example was set with the opening of the Bangor and Beaumaris Union workhouse in September 1845: the workhouse was immediately offered to 95 mothers of illegitimate children, and when all but two declined, their outdoor relief was withdrawn.<sup>601</sup>

It has been suggested that the controversy surrounding the 1847 Report into the State of Education in Wales may have hardened guardians' attitude towards unmarried mothers.<sup>602</sup> The report outraged a wide range of public opinion in Wales by its criticism of the high level of illegitimacy in Wales, said to spring from a lack of morality and the tradition of courting on the bed. The Education Commissioner for north Wales complained of 'one vice which is flagrant throughout north Wales, and remains unchecked by any instruments of civilization . . . the custom of Wales is said to justify the barbarous practices which precede the rite of marriage.'<sup>603</sup> Although Welsh commentators were quick to point out that recorded illegitimacy levels were no higher in Wales than in many parts of England (and that in English cities, many illegitimate births probably went unrecorded), the attack on the purity of Wales was a

---

<sup>601</sup> TNA MH 32/75, Wade to Poor Law Commissioners, 25 Sept. 1845.

<sup>602</sup> Griffith, 'Poor Law in Wales', p. 4.

<sup>603</sup> *PP 1847*, XXVII (870), p. 534.

particularly heavy blow for a community which had felt that in comparison with the English it occupied the moral high ground.<sup>604</sup>

Whether the Llanrwst guardians were influenced by the Blue Books or by the recent example of the Bangor and Beaumaris Union, the Assistant Commissioner was able to report with satisfaction that when the Llanrwst workhouse opened in 1848, 40 to 50 unmarried mothers refused to come into the workhouse and were taken off the relief list. (As only 23 women received outdoor relief for illegitimate children in 1846, this appears somewhat of an exaggeration.)<sup>605</sup> After this, unmarried mothers often used the workhouse as a lying-in hospital but left soon after birth. The withdrawal of outdoor relief probably led to an increase in mothers abandoning their children if they had not been able to obtain a bastardy order. The 21 occupants of the workhouse on census day 1851 (only two of whom were from Nantconwy) comprised four unmarried mothers with their seven children, eight orphans or abandoned children, and two others. The picture in 1861 was very similar, with 21 inmates comprising five unmarried women, eleven children, three patients and one other. More usually, the burden of caring for illegitimate children seems to have fallen on grandparents. In the 1851 census, only one unmarried mother in Nantconwy was living independently with her child; eight lived with their parent and child, usually earning a living as a servant or dressmaker, while young children lived with their grandparents in 15 families, suggesting that it remained common for the mother to return to work elsewhere.

## **Overall impact**

Apart from the withdrawal of outdoor relief for unmarried mothers, it seems unlikely that the opening of the Llanrwst Union workhouse in September 1848 had much impact on the

---

<sup>604</sup> G.T. Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books* (Cardiff, 1998), p. 218.

<sup>605</sup> TNA MH 12/16076, (Llanrwst Union correspondence 1846-52), A. Doyle's report, March 1849.

number or cost of the poor on outdoor relief. The number of workhouse inmates was always very small. Over the period 1848-60, the average full-time equivalent number of Nantconwy inmates in the workhouse was just 4.6 a year, with most paupers staying for only a few days. The board saw no need to apply the workhouse test in other cases, indeed, it was much cheaper to pay small allowances as part of an economy of makeshifts in which partial employment, family support, and charity remained key components. Only towards the end of the period may other elements of working-class self-help, such as benefit clubs and Friendly Societies, have started to assume greater significance.

Ironically, the Act Relating to the Removal of the Poor which became law August 1846, probably did more to reduce the Llanrwst Union relief bill than the opening of the workhouse. The Act made paupers irremovable after five years' residence in a parish, so the host parish now became responsible for relieving them. As Llanrwst paid non-resident relief to more paupers living in other unions than other unions paid to their poor living in Llanrwst, the Llanrwst Union was a net gainer.<sup>606</sup>

The cost of outdoor relief in the Llanrwst Union fell by 27 per cent between 1849 and 1860 – significantly more than the national reduction of 15 per cent - though relief practices do not appear to have significantly changed. The cost of relief in the workhouse remained broadly constant. Only 14 people, 1.3 per cent of the paupers in the Llanrwst Union receiving relief on 1 January 1861, were relieved in the workhouse, compared to 4.8 per cent throughout Wales and 15.6 per cent in England (Table 47). This certainly supports Snell's characterisation of Wales as 'almost a different welfare country', though by 1861 only five per

---

<sup>606</sup> In 1850, 287 paupers from other unions had become chargeable to the Llanrwst Union as a result of the 1846 Poor Removal Act. This was about half the average number (651) who became chargeable in other north-west Wales unions: *PP 1852-53*, LXXXIV (991), Poor removal.

cent of adults on outdoor relief were able-bodied men, including those temporarily relieved on account of sickness (Table 48). Much of the reduction in Nantconwy poor relief costs may have been due less to Poor Law policy than to an improvement in the economy and greater opportunities for better-paid employment notably in the slate quarries. Nevertheless, the virtual elimination of poor relief for able-bodied men may well have played an important part in inducing men in Nantconwy to leave agricultural labouring, which in turn reinforced the prevalence of family farms.

*Table 47, Indoor and outdoor relief, 1861*

Type of pauper	Llanrwst	Wales	England
Indoor	1.3%	4.8%	15.6%
Outdoor	98.7%	95.2%	84.4%

Source: *PP 1860*, (383B.I).

*Table 48, Llanrwst Union paupers, 1861*

Type of pauper	Men	Women	Children under 10	Total
Indoor able-bodied	2	3	5	10
Indoor non-able-bodied	1	0	1	2
Lunatics		1	1	2
<i>Total indoor</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>14</i>
Outdoor able-bodied	35	90	223	348
Outdoor non-able-bodied	151	396	165	712
Lunatics	13	11	1	25
<i>Total outdoor</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>389</i>	<i>1085</i>
<b>All</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>1099</b>

Source: *PP 1860*, (383B.I).

## **5. Charity and self-help**

Social provision became more diversified in the nineteenth century with the rise of voluntary societies and subscriber institutions, mutual aid, and commercial insurance supplementing

welfare from the Poor Law and endowed charities.<sup>607</sup> Voluntary charity and working-class self-help played an increasingly important part in the economy of the English poor after the introduction of the New Poor Law. There are no national statistics for the total volume of charity because much charitable giving went unrecorded, but some historians have suggested that the receipts of charities exceeded the national cost of poor relief, as the latter came to play an increasingly residual role. There was a growth in organised societies aimed at specific causes, especially medical, educational and evangelical, and the direct relief of poverty in cash or kind became less popular among the middle classes than provision of institutions such as schools and hospitals, and the work of visiting societies and religious missions. These societies were probably more prevalent in urban areas, with a larger middle class, and where it was more difficult to distinguish the deserving poor through personal contact. Charitable giving frequently became more conditional, with donors being more willing to provide incentives to self-help than unconditional alms which they feared might demoralise the poor in the same way as poor relief.<sup>608</sup>

In response both to the more residual and punitive nature of the New Poor Law and the increasingly conditional nature of charity, the period after 1834 witnessed a major growth in self-help institutions, leading in rural England to the development of an integrated system parish welfare including friendly societies, coal and clothing clubs and penny savings banks.<sup>609</sup> The friendly society movement was the largest and most successful example of working-class mutual aid, although many local societies were supported by a degree of philanthropy, with middle-class patrons and honorary members often playing a key role in their establishment and providing financial and organisational support. The key self-help

---

<sup>607</sup> M. Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>608</sup> McCord, 'Poor Law and philanthropy', pp. 89-90.

<sup>609</sup> Morley, 'Friendly Societies', p. ix.

benefits provided by most societies were insurance for sickness, burial, and sometimes old age as members became unfit to work. Some also provided medical attendance, especially the compulsory clubs organised by an employer, while women's societies might provide maternity benefits to cover the cost of a midwife and loss of earnings during the lying-in period. These benefits undoubtedly reduced recourse to poor relief, especially on a casual basis, though apart from assistance with the burial cost of a husband, friendly societies gave no support to widows and children or to the unemployed. Contemporaries were convinced about their positive impact, the 1871-4 Parliamentary Commission on Friendly Societies concluding for example that 'there can be no doubt ... of the beneficial influence exercised upon Poor Law expenditure by Friendly Societies'.<sup>610</sup>

## Charitable giving

Most of the endowed charities which had supported the poor of Nantconwy in the eighteenth century continued to do so, though some had lapsed and no new charities for the poor were established after 1800. The Penmachno and Eidda almshouses continued to provide a refuge for a number of elderly people. By 1851 all were occupied by elderly women; four supplemented their alms by stocking knitting, but five had given up the stocking trade. The Ysbytty Ifan men's almshouses founded in 1700 for six almsmen had ceased to operate, and the Charity Commission was doubtful whether the capital could be recovered.<sup>611</sup> The Llanrwst almshouses had been let out by the Gwydir estate and were no longer occupied by almspeople, but a High Court action brought by the Charity Commissioners in 1851 against the estate's owner, Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, succeeded in enforcing a new scheme

---

<sup>610</sup> *PP 1874*, XXIII (C.961, 995-8), Fourth report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into friendly and benefit building societies, p. clxxxix

<sup>611</sup> *PP 1843*, XVII (434), Analytical digest of the reports made by the Commissioners inquiring into charities, p. 758.

for their maintenance and management. Twelve almspeople were henceforth to be chosen from the poor natives or long-time residents of Llanrwst, Dolwyddelan, Bettws y coed and Egwylsfach, receiving a stipend of £13 a year.

If some of the old endowed charities were lost and the remainder declined in value, there was no growth in Nantconwy of the newer type of organised charity to fill the gap or the declining role of poor relief in the welfare of the poor. This may have been partly due to the lack of a significant Welsh middle class to organise and fund charitable activity. Landowners, even absentees like the owners of the Gwydir estate, did begin to play a much more significant role in the welfare of their tenants and sub-tenants, but this was predominantly in the spheres of religion and education. The estate provided land for schools for the poor in Capel Curig, Dolwyddelan, Bettws y coed and Trefriw, and paid the schoolmasters' salaries in the last two.<sup>612</sup> A school in Capel Curig was one of many founded in the 1830s and 1840s by the Dean of Bangor. The Gwydir estate was also prepared to make a small contribution to initiatives established by the local Anglican clergy, such as a clothing club in Trefriw, but in general its poor tenants and sub-tenants received considerably less support than those of resident large landowners. The newspapers regularly eulogised the Christmas doles of blankets, flannels and warm clothing distributed by the Bishop of Bangor, or by the Hon. Col. Pennant to 600 families near his seat at Penrhyn Castle.<sup>613</sup>

Informal charity undoubtedly remained important in Nantconwy, with farmers, neighbours and fellow-chapel members giving alms in money and kind. The practice of wool gathering continued in some districts till the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>614</sup> At the end of the century,

---

<sup>612</sup> LA ANC18/5/5, (Gwydir estate voluntary subscriptions and payments, 1865).

<sup>613</sup> *Pembroke Herald* (3 January 1845).

<sup>614</sup> Tibbott, 'Stockings', p. 62.

Charles Booth found that in almost every Welsh parish, some help came from church and chapel, though the amounts were small and generally given in cases of sickness and temporary necessity.<sup>615</sup> The Clerk of the Caernarvon Poor Law Union estimated in the 1890s that the cost of living for the poor was about 4s 6d a week; typically 2s 6d might be met by outdoor poor relief; a healthy old person aged 70-75 could earn an average of 2s 6d a week and received about 1s from church or chapel charity, and 1s from occasional charity. Those unable to work still often supplemented the deficiency in poor relief by begging. In town, crowds of aged poor still went from door to door on Monday morning, and in country districts the poor called often at farm houses and seldom left without taking with them some produce in the shape of potatoes, milk or oatmeal.<sup>616</sup>

### **Friendly societies**

While there was no great change in the level of charitable giving in Nantconwy during the New Poor Law era, there was a significant growth in working-class self-help organisations, notably friendly societies or benefit clubs. There are well-known problems in identifying how many friendly societies existed and their membership numbers: although registration with the Clerk of the Peace (from 1793) or the Registrar of Friendly Societies (from 1846) brought some advantages, societies were not obliged to register nor to notify when they were dissolved, and this led to both under- and over-counting.<sup>617</sup> Nevertheless it is apparent that friendly societies were slow to get off the ground in rural areas of north-west Wales, and no societies were reported in the parliamentary poor relief returns for Nantconwy of 1803 and 1818.<sup>618</sup> Only three of the 260 Nantconwy paupers who sought relief in the first year of the Llanrwst Poor Law Union were in receipt of benefits from a friendly society. This was taken

---

<sup>615</sup> C. Booth, *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (London, 1894), p. 256.

<sup>616</sup> *PP 1895*, XIV (C.7684), Report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor, pp. 373-5.

<sup>617</sup> Jones, 'Friendly Societies', p. 331.

<sup>618</sup> *PP 1803-4*, XIII (175); *PP 1818*, XIX (82).

into account in setting the level of poor relief. A Llanrhychwyn labourer drawing 3s 6d a week from a benefit club was afforded the services of the Union Medical Officer but no monetary relief, while the Board rejected any increase for a 56 year-old Trefriw labourer totally disabled by the palsey, because he was receiving 3s a week from a benefit club in addition to 2s 6d poor relief. A 77 year-old Eidda labourer clearly experiencing difficulty in managing on his 6d a week from a benefit club plus 1s 3d poor relief, was granted 5s for shoes.

There was a significant growth in friendly society membership in Nantconwy after the Poor Law Amendment Act became law. Of the twelve societies known to have existed in the neighbourhood between 1834 and 1860, only three in Llanrwst had been established before the passage of the Act. Societies were established in Capel Curig and Dolwyddelan in 1837, and in Ysbytty Ifan/Eidda in 1839. Five further societies opened in Llanrwst and Nantconwy in the 1840s, including two female societies in Llanrwst and Ysbytty Ifan, and two further societies were operating in Penmachno by the 1860s. It is uncertain when some ceased to exist, but at least ten were still extant in 1860 (Table 49). Llanrwst societies were also open to membership in surrounding parishes; for example, committee members of the Brodorion Dyffryn Conwy based in Llanrwst were expected to attend funerals of members from Bettws y coed, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn. It is estimated that by 1850, around half of the occupied male population of Nantconwy were friendly society members, and membership continued to grow thereafter. These were mainly local societies; later in the century the movement in north Wales came to be penetrated more by the national affiliated orders, most notably the Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity (IOOFMU).

Table 49, Registered friendly society membership in Nantconwy<sup>619</sup>

Parish	Society	Date founded	Membership				Last mention
			1845	1850	1860	1865-6*	
Bettws y Coed	Brodorion Godre Eryri Friendly	1845		36		128	1865
Capel Curig	Caredigion Glannau Llugwy	1837	91	108	129	114	Dissolved 1888
Dolwyddelan	Gwyr & Llanciau Glannau Lledr	1837		112	192	208	1866
Llanrwst	Cymdeithas Gyfeillgar Caredigion Nant Conwy	1822	290	347			1850
Llanrwst	Brodorion Dyffryn Conwy	1824					1846
Llanrwst	?					119	
Llanrwst	Cymdeithas Merched (female)	1840	30	71			
Llanrwst	IOOFMU Loyal Gwydir Lodge	1841		60?			1976
Llanrwst	Star of Hope	1845				50	Dissolved 1883
Penmachno	Penmachno Friendly					117	1865
Penmachno	IOOFMU Machno Lodge	Before 1867					1981
Ysbytty Ifan	Ysbytty Ifan Friendly or Men's club	1838	79		118		Dissolved 1881
Ysbytty Ifan	Friendly Sisters' Benefit Society	1846			82		1870

\*Note less than half of Caernarvonshire registered friendly societies submitted returns in 1865. Sources: *PP 1852-53*, C (31); *PP 1880*, LXVIII (365), TNA FS 1/884-5, 1/897 and 1/899B; CULSC&A 466128, 466624 and 466680; [www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives](http://www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives).

Nantconwy male friendly society members typically paid contributions of a shilling a month, and female society members around 8d. People from a range of occupations became

<sup>619</sup> *PP 1852-53*, C (31), Abstract of returns respecting friendly societies in England and Wales; *PP 1880*, LXVIII (365), Abstract of the quinquennial returns of sickness and mortality, experienced by friendly societies; TNA FS 1/897 & 1/899B, (County Denbighshire); TNA FS 1/884-5, (County Caernarvonshire); CULSC&A 466624, (*Rheolau gan Cymdeithas Gyfeillgar a elwir Caredigion Nant Conwy yn Llanrwst [Rules of the Nant Conwy Friendly Benefit Society, Llanrwst]*, 1822); CULSC&A 466680, (*Rheolau a threfniadau Cymdeithas Gyfeillgar Prys Uchaf, Rhydlydan, [Rules and regulations of the Prys Uchaf Friendly Society, Rhydlydan]*, 1828); CULSC&A 466128, (*Rheolau Cymdeithas Merched, Llanrwst [Rules of the Women's Society, Llanrwst]*, 1840); [www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives](http://www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives), accessed 15 July 2015.

members. Although no membership lists have been found for the period up to 1860, farmers and their sons comprised the largest group of members of the Ysbytty Ifan men's society at its dissolution in 1881, followed by shepherds, agricultural labourers, farm servants and slate quarrymen, with a sprinkling of craftsmen.<sup>620</sup> Most clubs placed a restriction on the area from which new members could be drawn. For Llanrwst societies, this might be a four or six mile radius from the town, but in the thinly-populated districts of Capel Curig and Dolwyddelan the limit was ten miles. Most clubs made provision for members who subsequently moved away from the area. This was important given the prevalence of farm service where servants often moved to a different parish each year, and to offer continued support to members from largely agricultural parishes moving into slate quarrying areas. Only half of the remaining members of the Ysbytty Ifan men's club in 1881 were still resident in the parish; at least 11 per cent lived in Penmachno, mostly working in the slate quarries, with the remainder further afield. Thus as long as a man joined a friendly society in his home parish before the age of 40 and kept up his contributions, he could hope to remain insured throughout his life. Some Nantconwy societies recognised that poverty might make this impossible, and allowed the discretionary refund of part of the member's contributions in these circumstances.

Women's friendly societies in north-west Wales appealed largely to the wives of farmers and craftsmen and to female servants, according to evidence given by the secretary of the Dolgelly Female Rechabite Friendly Society to the 1870s Parliamentary Commission on Friendly Societies.<sup>621</sup> The 82 members of the Ysbytty Ifan Friendly Sisters in 1860 must have come from a similar constituency of women who were either earning wages or contributing to the family business, as there was no other significant women's employment in the area.

---

<sup>620</sup> TNA FS1/897/76.

<sup>621</sup> *PP 1874*, XXIII (C.961, 995-8), Friendly and Benefit Societies' Commission, Minutes of evidence, p. 21.

The level of membership in areas where female friendly societies existed underlines the importance of wives' earnings to the family economy, both on the family farm and in some craft families, as well as the need for single women workers to insure against illness. The high proportion of women still working in agriculture may account for the strength of female friendly societies in in this area at a time when they were in rapid decline elsewhere.

Community leaders appear to have played an active role in establishing and running Nantconwy benefit clubs. Most societies had a category of honorary member requiring a subscription of between 5s and £1 a year, which entitled better-off supporters to a seat on the governing committee but not to benefits. Clergymen and large farmers were frequently asked to act as trustees. The main benefits of the male friendly societies were for sickness and death. Death benefits paid by Nantconwy male societies ranged from about a pound after an initial membership period, increasing with the length of membership to £4 or £5, often with an additional sum of 3d or 6d contributed by each member. Benefits paid on the death of a member's wife were more variable: half the member's benefit in Ysbytty Ifan or 10s to £5 in Dolwyddelan. Women's society death benefits were lower, commensurate with their lower subscriptions: both the Llanrwst and the Ysbytty Ifan women's societies paid a £2 funeral grant. In most cases these death benefits were considerably above the cost of a pauper burial – the median funeral payment by the Llanrwst Union in 1837-8 was only 11s. Although English town funerals became more elaborate during the nineteenth century, such trappings as a horse-drawn hearse were largely unknown in rural Nantconwy, where coffins often had to be carried on a bier along mountain footpaths. A friendly society death benefit therefore contained an important element of financial support for the widow, while pomp and a sense of communal belonging were supplied by the friendly society members. Men were expected to attend the funeral of any local member provided this did not involve the loss of a day's pay,

while eight members of the Ysbytty Ifan Friendly Sisters dressed in mourning were appointed to walk before the funeral procession of a deceased member.

Nantconwy friendly societies typically paid sickness benefits of 5 or 6s a week for the first six months, reducing to 4s for the next six months and 3s 6d weekly thereafter. This was more than men could expect from poor relief: the maximum allowance for illness in 1837-8 was 5s 3d a week, but the median for working-age men was only 2s 6d, and many only received a one-off temporary relief payment. In 1845, the median allowance to able-bodied men on account sickness quoted in Llanrwst Union medical certificates for outdoor relief had risen to 4s a week, but benefit was only paid to a small number of men with large families.<sup>622</sup> Nantconwy friendly society sickness benefits were well below the levels paid by societies in England or parts of industrial south Wales, but in general the initial level of sickness benefit was equivalent to around three quarters of an outdoor farm labourer's wage. The Llanrwst women's society paid 4s a week sickness benefit for three months and 2s after that, while the Ysbytty Ifan Friendly Sisters paid 3s for the first six months and 1s 6d thereafter. Sickness benefits in women's friendly societies were lower because maternity benefits were also paid: in Ysbytty Ifan married women received 10s on the birth of their first child and 5s for later children.

On average, Nantconwy friendly societies paid sickness benefit for 1.1 weeks per member yearly in 1846-50, rising to 1.5 weeks per annum by 1860. Considering that 63 per cent of Nantconwy male members in 1860 were engaged in 'heavy labour with exposure', this seems a relatively modest level.<sup>623</sup> In addition to sickness benefit, it was usual for English friendly

---

<sup>622</sup> DA GD/A/8a 3, (Minutes of Llanrwst Guardians, 1844-47).

<sup>623</sup> *PP 1880*, LXVIII (365), pp. 740-42. In 2013, UK workers took an average of 9.1 days a year sick leave: <http://www.hr magazine.co.uk>, accessed 15 July 2013.

societies to provide medical treatment for members, but this does not appear to have been the case in Nantconwy, where the Llanrwst Board allowed the Union Medical Officers to attend men who were usually in employment.<sup>624</sup>

The Poor Law Commission and its successor bodies advised unions that any sick benefits received from friendly societies should be fully offset against poor relief, otherwise destitution would no longer be a necessary element in claiming relief, and poor relief for sickness might come to be regarded as a right. Most Unions chose to ignore this advice in order to provide a positive incentive for workers to insure through friendly societies. The most common practice throughout the country, including most of Wales, was to reduce poor benefit by half for those receiving friendly society sick pay.<sup>625</sup>

This was the practice adopted by the Llanrwst Union, which reported in its evidence to the 1874 Commission that it typically paid 7-8s a week sickness poor relief for a married man not in a club with five children. By only partially offsetting sick club benefits, friendly society members would be 2-3s a week better off than men solely dependent on poor relief. About 53 paupers in the Union were or had been friendly society members. For some labourers, receiving benefit from a friendly society and the poor law might leave them better off than when earning. But friendly society benefits were particularly important for farmers and higher-paid workers such as quarrymen and craftsmen, for whom poor relief sickness benefit constituted a lower percentage of normal earnings. Poor relief also enabled members to top up income from the sick club to a bare maintenance level if they went onto reduced benefits after a prolonged period of sickness, or in old age. Although quarrying accidents were relatively rare, men injured by falls or blasting could expect on average to be incapacitated

---

<sup>624</sup> *PP 1840*, XVII (226), pp. 132-2.

<sup>625</sup> *PP 1874*, XXIII (C.961, 995-8), pp. cxc-i.

for a year or more.<sup>626</sup> It is therefore clear that while some Nantconwy farmers and their wives used friendly societies as an insurance to avoid any risk of falling onto the poor law, less well-off workers saw them as part of a total welfare package which might also include poor relief in sickness and old age.

Most Nantconwy friendly societies held out the prospect of extended sickness benefit in old age, in effect constituting a pension. The Capel Curig society's aims were to assist one another in sickness and old age, while the Ysbytty Ifan club rules promised a benefit of 3s 6d per week for life to members adjudged incurable or unable to work from accident, old age or blindness. Sadly, most local societies proved unable to fulfil these promises after 1880. E. Lynch Daniell's report on Welsh friendly societies to the 1871-4 Parliamentary Commission on Friendly Societies was pessimistic about the prospects for independent local societies, which he judged doomed to insolvency as their members aged and began drawing increased levels of sickness and death benefits. There was little understanding of actuarial information which was not available in the Welsh language, and younger men were reluctant to prop up clubs with an aging membership, preferring instead to join the expanding affiliated orders which were perceived as more financially sound. Daniell recommended that local clubs should either join one of the national affiliated orders, or dissolve and distribute their remaining funds amongst the membership before they became insolvent.<sup>627</sup> Several Nantconwy societies chose the latter course in the 1880s, sharing amounts ranging from £3 10s per member in Ysbytty Ifan, to £20 each on the dissolution of the Llanrwst Star of Hope Friendly Society.<sup>628</sup>

---

<sup>626</sup> Five Nantconwy men received poor relief in 1843-5 for periods of 3 to 24 months as a result of quarrying accidents: TNA MH 12/16075, 25 March 1845.

<sup>627</sup> *PP 1874*, XXIII (C.961, 995-8), Pt. II, E. Lynch Daniell's Report on Wales, pp. 2-5.

<sup>628</sup> TNA FS 1/897/76 & 197.

It is not possible to compare directly the relative sums that Nantconwy residents received from poor relief and friendly society benefits. However, the high and growing proportion of Nantconwy farmers and their wives, and of agricultural workers, craftsmen and quarrymen who became friendly society members over the period 1834-60, together with the level of benefit that members could claim in sickness or death benefit over and above the amount available from poor relief, shows that friendly society benefits became an increasingly important element in the family economy in this area. It also contributed significantly to the steady reduction in the cost of poor relief.

## ***Conclusions***

With the introduction of the New Poor Law, poor relief in Nantconwy evolved in response to four key factors. The starting point was existing relief practice and the extent to which the elected guardians of the new Llanrwst Poor Law Union, representing the views of the ratepayers, felt this suited local needs. A countervailing factor was the power and influence of the Poor Law Commission and its Assistant Commissioners in persuading the Llanrwst Board that they were legally obliged to change their policies. This was strongly influenced by the example of other unions in north-west Wales. Thirdly, the need for relief was affected by external factors such as the state of the economy, the weather, and epidemics which increased the level of illness and death. Finally, the new administrative machinery of the New Poor Law enhanced the agency of the poor themselves by providing more opportunities to apply for relief, and resulted in some levelling-up of benefits for the elderly between parishes in the union. New Poor Law changes in relief practice such as stopping the payment of rents also appear to have disrupted the moral economy between paupers and the local Poor Law authorities, reducing the reluctance of the poor to apply for relief or to ask the Board to reconsider decisions.

Most Welsh guardians preferred to retain allowances for low-paid farm labourers with large families, and workhouses were widely opposed as an expensive solution to a problem they did not have. Fundamentally, north Wales ratepayers were reasonably content with the way the Old Poor Law had operated, and believed that they should be allowed to spend their poor rates as they saw fit. The outcome was in effect a compromise between the aims of the Poor Law Commission and its successors and those of Welsh Boards. In Llanrwst, the payment of rents ceased, while family allowances were frozen for those already receiving them and largely phased out by 1850. This adversely affected the livelihoods of agricultural labourers with large families, and probably hastened the fall in the number of labourers which started after the Napoleonic Wars. The opening of the Llanrwst Workhouse in 1848 made very little difference to relief practices except in penalising unmarried mothers, most of whom lost their poor relief rather than enter the workhouse.

A number of factors influenced the relative roles of poor relief, philanthropy and self-help in Nantconwy. The lack of elite groups to finance or run organised charities limited the role played by organised philanthropy in the area. In common with most of Wales, outdoor relief remained overwhelmingly the most significant component of welfare for the elderly and widows in 1860, and indeed until the end of the century. In view of the less punitive implementation of the New Poor Law in north-west Wales and a relative lack of shame attached to seeking poor relief, poor relief retained a more important role in the welfare mix than in rural England. On the other hand, the low-cost ethos adopted by Welsh guardians and ratepayers implied that all those who could afford to make their own welfare provision should do so. The growth of better-paid employment from the 1830s meant that more men in Nantconwy could both afford friendly society contributions, and wished to insure for a higher level of benefit than provided by the Poor Law, though hopes that friendly societies could

provide them with a pension when past work were not fulfilled. Poor relief accordingly remained part of an economy of makeshifts in which the elderly and widows continued to work for as long as possible, where kin were expected to help, and where income was supplement by informal charity from church and chapel and from habitual alms rounds.

## Conclusion

In the mid-eighteenth century, Nantconwy had a predominantly agricultural economy where most families tenanted a farm, though it was connected to national markets principally by the trade in store cattle and a growing stocking-knitting proto-industry. Yet even in this remote corner of north Wales, the economic and social developments of the Industrial Revolution period had a profound impact on livelihoods, as Nantconwy inhabitants responded to national demand for agricultural products and proto-industrial manufactures, then had to adjust painfully to the loss of employment from spinning in the face of mechanisation and to a slow decline in earnings from stocking knitting.

Three broad phases can be seen in Nantconwy's transition from a traditional to a more modern market economy: a period of gradual change from 1750 to 1790; a period of dislocation from 1790 to 1830, when the level of poor relief rose six-fold; and from 1830 to 1860, when modest prosperity started to emerge as the hundred began to participate in the global slate trade, and farming made more intensive use of the uplands to supply regional and national demand for wool and mutton.

From 1750 to the 1790s, the economy remained overwhelmingly agricultural, and farms were organised on a basis recognisable from the medieval pattern of kinship-based landholding. Agriculture was largely for the market, with store cattle bred for national markets, and dairy produce and wool supplying local and regional markets, though most farmers also aimed to meet their family's subsistence needs. Ninety per cent of farms were owned by large and medium-sized estates, and were usually let on annual tenancies. As population steadily increased, landlords were well-placed to capitalise on rising agricultural prices and incipient land hunger, and they imposed large rent increases from the 1760s onwards. Most tenants

preferred to farm in tried and trusted ways adapted to suit the local topography, poor soils and harsh mountain climate. Without significant changes in farming methods or technology to increase productivity, the squeeze on farmers' profits contributed to more sub-division, sharing and sub-letting of farms. Change was fairly gradual, but population growth put pressure on traditional livelihoods as more families were unable to find farm tenancies, leading to an increase in the number of agricultural labourers. Nevertheless the cottager economy enabled most families to grow their own food and make use of the resources of the commons. Regular farm labourers enjoyed a number of additional benefits, such as board, the ability to grow potatoes, keep stock and cut peat on the farm.

Earnings were supplemented across the social spectrum by spinning and stocking knitting and only half of farm labourers were considered poor, even at the point of death. Although there was some poverty, help from kin, plus formal and informal charity was generally sufficient to relieve it. Poor relief paid from church rates gradually increased, until separate poor rates were eventually introduced in the 1770s and 1780s, though relief was concentrated largely on the few who were unable to earn a living, especially orphans and the infirm elderly.

The second period from the 1790s to around 1830 witnessed substantial disruption to livelihoods. The Napoleonic Wars brought increased prosperity for the farming community, but inflationary pressures reduced living standards for those without a foothold on the land. This led to considerable encroachment of smallholdings from the commons and wastes. Some landowners, especially the Gwydir estate, also increased the number of smallholdings available to rent. In the agricultural depression which followed the wars, landowners began to actively encourage agricultural improvement in order to shore up rents and land values. Although there were modest improvements in farming methods, the most important change

was the continued expansion into the uplands, which enabled a considerable increase in sheep numbers over the course of the nineteenth century. The development of a market in former communal meadow or mountain land and the growth of agisting allowed land to be used more efficiently, as farmers expanded or contracted their operations according to their family life-cycle, enabling more people to earn all or part of their livelihoods from the land. On the other hand, the failure of landowners to reduce rents after the wars left Nantconwy farmers with even less capital for improvements. The post-war agricultural slump forced farmers to lay off labourers and rely more on family labour, and the resulting lack of employment fuelled continued encroachment of subsistence smallholdings, as well as migration. Rather than a trend towards a more capitalist agriculture of larger farms and proletarianized labourers, Nantconwy therefore witnessed an increase in the number of farmers and smallholdings, as more people attempted to cling to the old cottager lifestyle, even though this was being undermined by a shortage of agricultural employment and the decline of proto-industry.

By-employment played a crucial role in the agrarian economy of Nantconwy throughout most of the period of this study, though changing significantly in its nature over time. The widespread involvement of families across the social spectrum in spinning and stocking knitting may well have enabled more families to make a living from the land by bolstering the viability of small farms and encouraging the growth of smallholdings. Nonetheless, although there was little farm engrossment or any significant loss of common rights, population growth outstripped the increase in the number of smallholdings, leaving more families without access to land. In the bleak period after the Napoleonic Wars, the squeeze on the living standards of the poor was further exacerbated by the loss of earnings from spinning as first carding then wool spinning were mechanised, and the more gradual decline of earnings from stocking

knitting. There remained a strong social expectation that kin should support their poor relatives, but the number of families too poor themselves to do so increased.

By the 1820s the cost of poor relief stabilised at about six times its 1780s level, witness to a considerable increase in poverty, as more people were unable to make ends meet from the economy of makeshift. The loss of family earnings after the mechanisation of spinning in the 1810s seems to have been a significant factor here. The majority of poor relief still went on supporting the traditional poor - the elderly and widows with children. Relief remained low and residual, intended to supplement the economy of makeshifts, with the elderly expected to continue work for as long as possible. Above all, hospitality and seeking alms within the community remained the norm. But unless they occupied a smallholding or potato ground, agricultural labourers with four or more children could not earn enough to keep the family and more of the elderly required partial support. By around 1830, three times as many people required some support as in the 1780s and median poor relief allowances had doubled.

The third period of rising prosperity began in the 1830s with increased employment in Nantconwy's slate quarries and for men working away from home during the week. The legacy of the enclosure movement changed attitudes towards the unenclosed commons and wastes, with landowners and farmers generally preferring to divide sheepwalks in severalty between different farms, even though they often remained physically unenclosed. In some cases the poor were disadvantaged, especially where landowners sought to exclude them from their customary exploitation of peat and rushes in order to preserve the game for sporting. However the poor could still gain access to peat in most places, and a market developed to supply grazing and cow-keep to residents without land or access to commons.

The layoff of farm labourers after the war and again in the 1840s, coupled with the decline in earnings from spinning and knitting, progressively undermined the livelihoods of smallholders and cottager families who had combined subsistence agriculture with some farm labouring and proto-industrial production. The subsistence smallholder was dealt a further blow by the potato blight of the late 1840s: henceforth, families could no longer rely on this nutritious crop to provide much of their subsistence. Moreover the cessation of rent payments and phasing-out of allowances for large families under the New Poor Law provided a further incentive for married men to leave the land. Although by mid-century some mainly elderly people continued to depend on smallholdings for their livelihood, these increasingly became an adjunct to another male occupation in quarrying, mining or craft work. Keeping cows also became a popular means of enhancing living standards, especially among the better-off elements of rural society - the families of shopkeepers, those in managerial and clerical occupations, craftsmen, quarrymen and lead miners.

Opportunities for by-employment by farming families gradually declined with the growth of specialized crafts and services and the demise of long-distance droving in the railway era. The ability to significantly supplement farm incomes through cartage was largely wiped out in Penmachno when the Cwm Penmachno quarries were linked to the Ffestiniog railway in the 1830s, though cartage remained an important by-employment in other parts of Nantconwy till after 1860. However the continued expansion of sheep farming provided some alternative to the loss of by-employment incomes.

Economic development and improvement of living standards was interrupted by the 'Hungry Forties', but resumed during the 1850s. The fall in poor relief costs after 1850 was due more to rising prosperity than to the opening of the Llanrwst workhouse or the ethos of the New Poor Law. Indeed, the Llanrwst guardians and Nantconwy ratepayers attempted, with a fair

measure of success, to preserve a low-cost system of poor relief without recourse to a workhouse for those they considered deserving. The elderly still continued to work for as long as possible; families were expected to look after their elderly parents or unmarried daughters with illegitimate children, and more could now apparently afford to do so. The role of friendly societies expanded to provide an enhanced level of welfare benefits for farmers, labourers, quarrymen, craftsmen, wives and female servants, and poor relief became even more concentrated on the traditional poor without kin able to look after them.

Despite the improved economic outlook in Nantconwy by the 1850s, out-migration continued. The lack of prospects in agriculture provided an incentive for many younger people to move to larger slate quarrying districts or to local towns in search of improved economic and marriage opportunities. Their places were often backfilled by people from more rural local parishes, though overall the drift of young adults away from Nantconwy reduced pressure on rural livelihoods.

In many ways the role of women in the Nantconwy economy changed less than in England, due mainly to their work on pastoral and family farms. Farmers' wives and daughters remained very much involved in the farming enterprise; if anything, the reduction in the number of male agricultural labourers after 1830 reinforced the prevalence of family farms and the role played by women. Women frequently took over running the farm when they became widows, ensuring themselves and their families a continued livelihood. This tradition was facilitated both by landowners and by husbands who usually bequeathed stock to their widows, and resulted in a much higher proportion of women farmers than in England. As women's earnings from proto-industry fell away, there was a rise in the male breadwinner family especially amongst quarrying, lead mining and craft families, but traditions of retaining

a foothold on the land remained strong, and women continued to play an integral role in running both farms and smallholdings.

The experience of rural north Wales during the transition from a traditional to a modern economy and society has been relatively neglected by historians. Despite the patchy nature of sources and the impossibility of applying staple techniques such as family reconstitution, this study has shown that new light can be thrown on the evolution of livelihoods in an upland pastoral environment in response to the opportunities and challenges created by population growth and economic modernization. In particular, it has shown that the development of a tripartite class society was not an inevitable outcome of modernization. Rather, the shape of change was influenced by a number of factors including the role of landowners, the viability of small pastoral farms, the extent of by-employment and earnings from proto-industry and the timing of their decline, the availability of non-agricultural employment, and the part played by the Poor Laws in supporting those whose livelihoods were adversely affected by the modernization process, while encouraging migration of the younger generation in search of new opportunities.

## Figures

Figure 1, Prices and real male wages during the Industrial Revolution .....	8
Figure 2, Gwydir slate quarries production.....	18
Figure 3, Nantconwy population, 1801-1901 .....	33
Figure 4, Nantconwy population compared to national trends, 1801-61 .....	34
Figure 5, Age and occupation of Nantconwy males, 1851-61.....	43
Figure 6, Nantconwy in-migration – birthplace of Nantconwy residents aged 15 and over in 1861 census .....	50
Figure 7, Distribution of Nantconwy residents aged 15+ in 1861 compared to national average .....	53
Figure 8, Origins and destinations of lifetime migrants, 1861 .....	54
Figure 9, Age distribution of male out-migrants, 1861 .....	56
Figure 10, Age distribution of female out-migrants, 1861 .....	57
Figure 11, Co-operative hay harvest at Capel Curig. ....	86
Figure 12, Nantconwy farm production c.1840.....	101
Figure 13, Distribution of Nantconwy farm sizes c.1770 and c.1840 .....	148
Figure 14, 'Men employed' and total male servants over 14 living in farms in 1851 census .....	152
Figure 15, Median Nantconwy farm size (acres) by 'men employed' .....	153
Figure 16, Nantconwy male employment including farm servants by farm size .....	154
Figure 17, Women shearing sheep near Bettws y coed .....	157
Figure 18, Proportion of women farmers in 1851 and 1901.....	162
Figure 19, Dairying near Bettws y coed, c.1850.....	172
Figure 20, Nantconwy inventory wealth, 1750-1799.....	184
Figure 21, Knitting stockings on the way to market .....	187
Figure 22, Trefriw woollen mill .....	193
Figure 23, The Royal Oak mill, Bettws y coed .....	199
Figure 24, Growth of poor relief expenditure, 1750-1835 .....	210
Figure 25, 'Interior of a farmhouse nr. Conwy' .....	220
Figure 26, 'Haymaking at Dolwyddelan below Moel Siabod' .....	228
Figure 27, Poor relief cost per head, 1803-29 .....	235
Figure 28, Nantconwy parishes cost of poor relief per head, 1803-31 .....	236
Figure 29, Types of poor relief expenditure, 1828-31 .....	241
Figure 30, Level of weekly allowances, 1824-1831 .....	242
Figure 31, Cost of poor relief in Nantconwy pro-rata to England and Wales, 1837-49.....	291
Figure 32, Nantconwy poor relief cost pro-rata to England and Wales, 1849-60 .....	291
Figure 33, Age and sex of Nantconwy paupers, 1837-8.....	294
Figure 34, Status of Nantconwy paupers 1837-8 .....	294
Figure 35, Distribution of regular allowances, 1837-8.....	294
Figure 36, Regional variation in monthly pensions .....	296
Figure 37, Type of relief in Nantconwy, 1837-8.....	296
Figure 38, Paupers on outdoor relief as percentage of population, 1846 .....	311

## **Maps**

Map 1, North Wales .....	12
Map 2, Nantconwy medieval townships and later parishes .....	13
Map 3, Development of the Nantconwy road network .....	20
Map 4, Trefriw farms and meadows, 1784 .....	81
Map 5, Patches and closes on Pencraig farm, Gwydir, 1787 .....	87
Map 6, Smallholdings on Cwmlannerch, 1784 .....	104
Map 7, Ty'n y Mynydd (16) and later enclosures from the waste .....	110
Map 8, Penmachno encroachments on 1842 tithe map .....	115
Map 9, Crown waste and common land in Nantconwy, 1750 .....	120
Map 10, Cefn Cyfarwydd on Gwydir terrier, 1784.....	133
Map 11, Llanrwst Poor Law Union .....	284
Map 12, Welsh Poor Law unions with date of workhouse opening in north-west Wales ...	286

## Tables

Table 1, Estimated Nantconwy population in 1749 and 1801	31
Table 2, Male occupations from baptismal registers and in 1851 census	36
Table 3, Nantconwy occupations in the 1811-31 censuses	37
Table 4, Occupations of Nantconwy males over 20 in 1831 census	37
Table 5, Nonconformist baptisms as percentage of all baptisms by father's occupation, 1813-37	40
Table 6, Nantconwy male occupations, 1841-61	42
Table 7, Comparison of male and female employment 1851-61	45
Table 8, Marriage patterns in four Nantconwy parishes, 1750-74	47
Table 9, Birthplace parish	50
Table 10, Birthplaces of males aged 15 and over by occupation, 1861	52
Table 11, Birthplaces of females aged 15 and over by occupation, 1861	52
Table 12, Changing land ownership 1750-1860*	78
Table 13, Wealth of farmers with inventories, 1750-74	83
Table 14, Inventory wealth of Nantconwy, Caernarvonshire and Cumbrian farmers	89
Table 15, 1760s rent increases	93
Table 16, Impact of 1760s rent increases on tenancies	94
Table 17, Napoleonic war impact on corn prices and rents	98
Table 18, Small tithe evidence of farm sharing and sub-letting, 1792	108
Table 19, Gwydir township small tithes, 1842	110
Table 20, Occupations of Penmachno smallholders, 1841	115
Table 21, Male labour over 14 years old on Nantconwy farms in the 1851 census	151
Table 22, Male family members working on Nantconwy farms	155
Table 23, Nantconwy women farmers 1750-1861	163
Table 24, Bequests in male farmers' wills from three Nantconwy parishes, 1750-1858	167
Table 25, Careers of widows inheriting stock, 1750-1858	177
Table 26, Occupation in Nantconwy inventory dataset, 1750-1799	182
Table 27, Evidence of by-employment in Nantconwy inventories 1750-1799	183
Table 28, Occupations of farm occupiers, 1841	204
Table 29, Occupations of non-farmers with cow-houses, 1861	205
Table 30, Dolwyddelan burials, 1750-84	221
Table 31, Occupations of Dolwyddelan men dying 1750-84	222
Table 32, Reported poor relief expenditure	226
Table 33, Charity and vestry records, 1750-84	227
Table 34, Poor relief and charity in 1784	230
Table 35, Type of poor relief by gender in Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan and Penmachno, 1784	232
Table 36, Status of carers, 1774-84	233
Table 37, Nantconwy poor law records, 1815-1837	237
Table 38, Recipients of pauper rents	249
Table 39, Type of relief expenditure, 1828-31	250
Table 40, Who received casual relief, excluding rent	251
Table 41, Out-parish relief, 1824-30	264
Table 42, Reasons for ceasing allowances in three north Wales unions, 1837	293
Table 43, Reason for temporary relief or allowance 1837-8	295
Table 44, Allowances to women under 60, 1837-8	301
Table 45, Relief of the Nantconwy elderly, 1837-8	304
Table 46, Relief for illness, 1837-8	308

Table 47, Indoor and outdoor relief, 1861	320
Table 48, Llanrwst Union paupers, 1861	320
Table 49, Registered friendly society membership in Nantconwy	326

## Bibliography

### Manuscript and archival sources

#### *Bangor University Archives*

- Bangor 558, (Penmachno charities' accounts including churchwardens' accounts, 1752-4).  
Bangor 559, (Penmachno charities' accounts, 1761-1793).  
Bangor 560, (Penmachno vestry book, 1772-85).  
Bangor 562, (Penmachno vestry book, 1824-29).  
Bangor 102,606, (Letter of D. Price-Downes n.d., early 19c).  
Bangor Mostyn 5782, (Gwydir rent roll, 1724).  
Bangor Mostyn 5448, (Rentrole of Robert Wynn of Berthddu Esq., 1750).  
Bangor Mostyn 5959, (Survey of Pant-Glas estate, 1767).  
Bangor Mostyn 6417, (William Owen's account with Edward Lloyd Esq., 1772).  
Bangor Mostyn 8464, (Sketch map of Lord Grosvenor's lands in Penmachno, n.d., c.1780).  
Bangor Mostyn 6058, (Particular of Lord Grosvenor's estates, c.1787).  
Bangor Mostyn 5791, (Penmachno rental, 1790).  
Bangor Mostyn 5794, (Mostyn rental, 1799).  
Bangor Mostyn 1299, (Draft deed of purchase of a tenement in Penmachno, 1801).  
Bangor Mostyn 6246, (Instructions for holding the court leet for the manor of Eidda, n.d., early 19c).  
Bangor Mostyn 8480, (Map of the estate in the parish of Penmachno belonging to Sir Edward Pryce Lloyd, 1806).  
Bangor Mostyn 7537, (Lord Mostyn bankruptcy declaration in Liverpool Commercial Court, 1853).  
David Griffith, (Journal of David Griffiths, Capel Curig schoolmaster, 1863).  
Nannau 3524, (Orders for the government of Penmachno almshouse, 1737).  
Penrhyn 274, (Freehold estates purchased by Lord Penrhyn, 1886).  
Penrhyn 1670, (Account for properties in county Caernarvon, 1748).  
Penrhyn Add. 2482, (Commission for the survey of the vill of Penmachno, 1577).  
Penrhyn Add. 2503, (Parliamentary survey of Nantconwy, 1649).  
Penrhyn Add. 2489, (Deed of partition Richard Lloyd properties in Penmachno, 1686).  
Penrhyn Add. 2266, (Conveyance of Tyddyn Issa yn Blaen Glasgwm, 1805).  
Penrhyn Add. 2252, (Sale and mortgage of Fedw Deg and Hafod y Chwaen, 1849).  
Penrhyn Add. 2257, (Mortgage to Humphrey Williams, 1857).  
Porth yr Aur 29,904, (Letter of John Pugh, 1814).  
Porth yr Aur 14,040, (Crown legal advice on north Wales landowners' case, 1821).

#### *British Library*

- O. R. Dawson, 'OS surveyors' drawings, Caernarvonshire' (1818).

#### *Cardiff University Library Special Collections and Archives*

- 466624, *Rheolau gan Cymdeithas Gyfeillgar a elwir Caredigion Nant Conwy yn Llanrwst [Rules of the Nant Conwy Friendly Benefit Society, Llanrwst]* (1822).  
466680, *Rheolau a threfniadau Cymdeithas Gyfeillgar Prys Uchaf, Rhydlydan [Rules and regulations of the Prys Uchaf Friendly Society, Rhydlydan]* (1828).  
466128, *Rheolau Cymdeithas Merched, Llanrwst [Rules of the Women's Society, Llanrwst]* (1840).

### *Conwy Archives*

Baptismal register microfilms for parishes Bettws y coed, Capel Curig, Dolwyddelan, Llanrhychwyn, Penmachno, Trefriw and Ysbytty Ifan.

Marriage register microfilms for Bettws y coed, Capel Curig, Dolwyddelan, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn.

CEP 11/26, (Bettws y coed vestry minute book, 1782-1808, 1824-30).

CEP 11/28, (Bettws y coed vestry account book, 1781-1805).

CEP 11/30-1, (Bettws y coed poor rate assessments, 1805-8, 1814-18).

CEP 14/1-2, (Dolwyddelan parish register, including churchwardens' accounts, 1722-63, 1764-84).

CEP 14/5 & 14/7, (Dolwyddelan, Llyfr Cofnodion y Festri [Vestry minute book], 1824-29, 1831-36).

CEP 14/12, (Dolwyddelan, Gwarcheidwaid y Tlodion [Overseer of the Poor accounts], 1831-34).

CEP 14/13, (Dolwyddelan Llyfr Cyfrifon [Account book], 1834-36).

CEP 14/15 & 14, (Dolwyddelan poor rate assessments, 1816-21, 1828-32).

### *Denbighshire Archives*

DD/WY 47, (Sir Watkin Williams Wynn of Wynnstay release to Sir Edward Pryce Lloyd of Pengwern, Flints and Bell Lloyd of Aberhirnant, Merioneth, of messuages and farms called Ty coch and Talardy Gerwin in Penmachno, 1827).

DD/WY 6840, (Petition to Parliament from the gentlemen, clergy and inhabitants of Llanrwst area against the duties on coal brought there by sea, early 19c).

GD/A/9c/1-3, (Llanrwst Union parochial ledgers, 1837-42, 1842-6, 1846-8).

GD/A/9e/1, 3-4, (Llanrwst Union general, parochial and non-settled poor ledgers, 1848-1853, 1856-1857, 1858-1860).

GD/A/84/1, (Minute book Llanrwst Union, 1837-38).

PD/69/1/226, (Llanrwst enclosure award and map, 1830).

QSD/DN/4/6, (Return of bastardy orders for Isdulas hundred, 1844-60).

### *Grimthorpe Castle*

Private MS in the possession of Lady Willoughby de Eresby, (Plan of an estate lying in the parishes of Llanrwst, Llanrhychwyn, Trefriw, Bettws and Dolwyddelan, belonging to Sir Peter Burrell and the Right Honorable Lady Willoughby de Eresby, 1784).

### *Flintshire Record Office*

Soughton Hall D/SH/824, (Surveys of estates belonging to John Wynne Esq., 1808).

### *Gwynedd Archives*

Nanhoron Estate Papers XD101/14/4, (Gwydir small tithe, 1792).

XC20/7, (Caernarvonshire War Agricultural Executive Committee correspondence, 1915).

XD/38/234, (Rent collection book, Gwydir Estate, 1758-9).

XD/38/1, (Manor court book of Maen Homan, 1832-1871).

XD/38/214, (Map of Pencraig, 1787).

XD/38/235, (Gwydir rental, 1779).

XD38/265, (Gwydir cartage book, 1818-1824).

XD38/279, (Gwydir mine leases, 1769-1862).

XD38/362, (Gwydir letter book, 1841-2).

XD/131/6, (Plan of Cwm Celyn, Bettws y coed, 1850).

XD/131/26, (Marriage settlement of Rees Jones, Llannerchelsi, Bettws y coed and Jane Jones, Caerhun, 1782).

XD/131/32, (Sale of Llannerchelsi to Lord Willoughby de Eresby, 1849).  
XD/131/61, (Valuation of farm buildings and cottages, 1861).  
XD/131/1495, 1497, 278/2, (Crown claim to waste, 1895).  
XQL/LT 2/1-7, (Land tax for Bettws y coed, Dolwyddelan, Llanrhychwyn, Gwydir,  
Penmachno, Trefriw, and Eidda, 1747/8-1810).  
XQS/1779/80/127-8, (Recognizances of innkeepers, Nantconwy, 1778-80).

#### *Lincolnshire Archives*

3ANC 7/23/2/30, (Letter of Fahy to Kennedy, 13 January 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/13, (Letter of Cadwaladr Ellis to Kennedy, 17 February 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/36, (Letter of Fahy to Kennedy, 13 February 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/42, (Letter of Fahy, 22 April 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/46, (Letter of Fahy to Kennedy, 18 April 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/71, (Plan for letting ground to villagers at Trefriw, 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/2/77, (Letter of Fahy, 14 April 1819).  
3ANC 7/23/4/526, (Rules of competition for prizes given by Lord Gwydir, 1820).  
ANC 18/5/5, (Gwydir estate voluntary subscriptions and payments, 1865).

#### *London Metropolitan Archives*

CLA/044/05/025, (Copy grant to Ditchfield and Highlord with notes of Crown leases,  
c.1628).

#### *National Library of Wales*

*An act for enabling trustees to sell, under the authority of the High Court of Chancery, the  
real estates devised by the will of Robert Watkin Wynne, Esquire (1829).*

B/1750-1858, (Bangor Diocese wills, inventories and bonds, 1750-1858).  
B/1754/104W,I, (Inventory of John Williams of Pandy, Penmachno, fuller, 1754).  
B/1755/61W, (Will of Griffith Williams, Bwlch Cynnyd, Dolwyddelan, 1755).  
B/1758/107I, (Inventory of Owen ap William Pugh, Tyddyn Ifan Goch, Llanrhychwyn, 1758).  
B/1763/254I, (Inventory of Hugh Roberts, Pant y Carw, Trefriw, 1763).  
B/1768/50I, (Inventory of Hugh Parry, Bettws y coed, 1768).  
B/1760/96W,I, (Will and inventory of Evan Williams, Gwydir, 1760).  
B/1770/69W, (Will of Ellis Williams, Garnedd, Dolwyddelan, 1770).  
B1780/99W, (Will of Rees Jones, Penmachno, 1780).  
B/1781/59I, (Inventory of William Jones, Vynhadog, Dolwyddelan, drover, 1781).  
B/1781/79I, (Inventory of Hugh Jones, Oernant, Penmachno, 1781).  
B/1793/154W, (Will of Edward Morgan, Tuddun du, Penmachno, 1793).  
B/1798/41I, (Inventory of John Hughes, Bettws y coed, slater, 1798).  
B/1798/48W, (Will of Margaret Hughes, Bwlch Cynnyd, Dolwyddelan, 1798).  
B/1799/76I, (Inventory of Robert Morris, Penbedw, Penmachno, 1799).  
B1802/129I, (Inventory of Anne Cadwaladr, Tyddyn Bach, Penmachno, 1802).  
B1819/119W,I, (Will and inventory of Catherine Davies, Tanrue, Trefriw, 1819).  
B/1832/130I, (Inventory of William Jones, Erw Clochydd, Penmachno, drover, 1832).  
B/1849/133W,I, (Will and inventory of William Evans, Glan yr afon, Llanrhychwyn, 1849).  
B/1849/149I, (Inventory of Robert Davies, Factory, Trefriw, yeoman, 1849).  
B/QA/2, (Diocese of Bangor Bishop's visitations, 1749).  
B/QA/5, (Diocese of Bangor Bishop's visitations, 1774).  
B/QA/6, (Diocese of Bangor Bishop's visitations, 1776).  
Baptismal register microfilms: NPR Ril 16/3871, (Bettws y Coed Brynmawr Calvinistic  
Methodist, 1806-37, Capel Curig/Llanrhychwyn Salem CM, 1814-36, Dolwyddelan Capel  
Ellen CM, 1813-37, Ysbytty Ifan CM, 1813-37): 17/3836, (Dolwyddelan Ganasareth

Independent, 1819-36); 18/3871, (Penmachno Salem CM, 1812-37); 19/3448, (Llanrwst Seion CM, 1810-37, Trefriw Peniel CM, 1815-37); 20/3444, (Llanrwst Tabernacle Independent, 1803-37).

Caernarvonshire Top. B3/22 B427, (Moses Griffith print, 'The Summit of Snowdon from Capel Cerig', c.1795).

Elwes 1229, (Lands in Penmagnho in the hands of Edward Wyn and Richard Lloyd, 1630s).

Elwes 1426, (Rental of the Pengwern estate, 1792).

Garn FPB 2/4, (Wills of Robert Hughes and family of Gwydir, Llwyn Gronw & Cae'r berllan, 1738-82).

Gwydir BRA 2, (Survey of the Welsh estates, 1766).

Gwydir BRA 3, (Gwydir estate revaluation, 1767).

Gwydir BRA 4, (Rental of the Gwydir estate, 1767).

Gwydir 70, (Deed of exchange between Sir Thomas Mostyn and the Hon. Peter Robert Drummond Burrell of Gwydir concerning properties in Bettws y coed, Gwydir township and Llanrwst, 1811).

Gwydir BRA 125, (Collection of estrays in Nantconwy, n.d., late 18c).

Gwydir BRA 79, (Sale of Berthddu estate, 1844).

NLW 16/49, (Bob Owen Croesor's rent book, c.1850).

NLW 9726B, (Accounts of trustees for the sale of the estates settled by the will of Robert, Duke of Ancaster, 1780-89).

NLW 9727D, (Valuation of the Gwydir Estate, 1806).

Nerquis Hall 1425, (Survey & valuation of the lands of Watkin Edward Wynne Esq., 1792).

Nerquis Hall 7, (Pengwern estate rental, 1806-14).

SA/MISC/1314, 1345, 1369, 1400, 1412b, 1434, 1484, (Notitiae St. Asaph population listings for Cerrigydruidion, Gwytherin, Llanddefel, Llanfor, Llangywer, Llanuwllyn and Ysbytty Ifan, 1683-6).

Sale Catalogue Caern. 199, (Sir Watkin Williams Wynne Bart, properties to be sold by auction, 1800).

William Day 3141F, (Reports, 1837-44).

William Day 3144F, (Abusive practices, 1837-44).

William Day 3145F, (Commissioners' correspondence, 1837-39).

William Day 3148F, (Union correspondence, 1837-44).

William Day 3149F, (Poor Law correspondence, unions etc., 1837-44).

*The National Archives*

CRES 5/235, (Presentments to Nantconway court baron and court leet, 1831-1900).

CRES 49/879, (Applications for leases of minerals, Penmachno, petition of Sir E. Pryce-Lloyd, 1813).

CRES 49/643, (Penmachno Crown rights, adverse claims by Col. Pennant and W. E. Wynne, 1858-78).

CRES 49/1632, (Deed concerning mineral, sporting and sheepwalk rights in Penmachno, 1870).

E 178/3383, (Award as to the native tenants of Dolwyddelan, 1589).

FS 1/884-5, (Friendly societies, County Caernarvonshire).

FS 1/885/42, (Brodorion Dyffryn Conwy [Conwy Valley Brothers]).

FS 1/897/76, (Friendly Society of Ysbytty Ifan).

FS 1/897/161, (Friendly Sisters Benefit Society, Ysbytty Ifan).

FS 1/897/197, (Y Seren Obeihiol, Llanrwst [Star of Hope, Llanrwst]).

FS 1/884/26, (Cymdeithas Gwyr a Llanciau, Glannau Lledr [Society of men and boys, Banks of the Lledr]).

FS 1/884/27, (Caredigion Glannau Llugwy [Friends of the Banks of the Llugwy]).

FS 1/897 & 1/899B, (Friendly societies, county Denbighshire).  
 HO 42/52/67, (Letter from H. Holland Edwards JP, Rector of Llanrwst, to Home Office, 27 October 1800).  
 IR 18/48/7, 20, 25, 61, 67, (Tithe map and schedules for Bettws y coed, 1841, Dolwyddelan, 1841, Llanrwst Gwydir township, 1842, Penmachno, 1842, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn, 1841).  
 IR 18/14097, 14112, 14117, 14152, 14158, (Tithe files for Bettws y coed, 1841, Dolwyddelan, 1841, Llanrwst Gwydir township, 1842, Penmachno, 1842, Trefriw and Llanrhychwyn, 1841).  
 MAF 68/272, (Agricultural returns, 1870).  
 MH 12/16075-7, (Llanrwst Poor Law Union correspondence, 1835-45, 1846-52, 1853-7).  
 MH 32/14, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, William Day, 1835-7).  
 MH 32/15, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, William Day, 1838).  
 MH 32/16, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, William Day, 1839-44).  
 MH 32/59, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, R. Digby Neave, 1836-48).  
 MH 32/75, (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner correspondence, Col. Wade, 1844-6).  
 T 1/480, (Letter from Judge Daines Barrington to the Lords Commissioners of the Great Seal, 28 August 1770), fo. 169.  
 T 1/515, (Opinion of Attorney General on enforcing the poor laws in the counties of Anglesey and Carnarvon, 28 July 1774). fo. 193.  
 T 1/515, (Letter of Daines Barrington, 4 December 1775), fo. 197-9.  
 T 29/44, (Minute of meeting of Lords of Treasury, 19 December 1775), fo. 215.

*Oddfellows*

[www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives](http://www.oddfellows.co.uk/OnlineArchives).

## Printed primary sources

Aikin, A., *Journal of a Tour through North Wales and Part of Shropshire* (London, 1797).  
 Bingley, Rev. W., *A Tour round North Wales* (London, 1800).  
 Booth, C., *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (London, 1894).  
 Cliffe, C. F., *The Book of North Wales* (London, 1850).  
 Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, *The Record of Caernarvon, 1352* (London, 1837).  
 Costello, L. S., *The Falls, Lakes, and Mountains of North Wales* (1845).  
 Cradock, J., *Letters from Snowdon* (London, 1770).  
 Davies, D., *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry* (Bath, 1795).  
 Davies, W., *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of North Wales* (London, 1810).  
 Eden, S. F. M., *The State of the Poor* (London, 1797).  
 Evans, H., *The Gorse Glen* (Liverpool, 1948).  
 Evans, Rev. J., *Letters Written during a Tour through North Wales* (London, 1804).  
 — *Letters Written During a Tour through South Wales* (London, 1804).  
 — *The Beauties of England and Wales, Vol. XVII* (London, 1812).  
 Fenton, R., *Tours in Wales 1804-1813* (London, 1917).  
 Firbank, T., *I Bought a Mountain* (1941).  
 Gibson, J., *Agriculture in Wales* (London, 1879).  
 Ginswick, J. (ed.), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales, 1849-1851: Letters to "The Morning Chronicle"*, Vol. III, (London, 1983).

Hutton, W., *Remarks upon North Wales* (Birmingham, 1803).

Hyde-Hall, E., *A Description of Caernarvonshire (1809-11)* (Caernarfon, 1952).

Jones, E., *Observations on the Scheme before Parliament for the Maintenance of the Poor* (Chester, 1776).

— *The Prevention of Poverty by Beneficial Clubs* (London, 1796).

Jones, O. G., *Gweithiau Gethin [Works of Gethin]* (Llanrwst, 1884).

Kay, G., *General View of the Agriculture of North Wales* (Edinburgh, 1794).

Kennedy, L., *The Present State of Tenancy in the Highland and Grazing Districts in Great Britain* (London, 1829).

*Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* (London, 1844).

*Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* ([www.british-history.ac.uk](http://www.british-history.ac.uk) , 1849).

Lewis, M. J. T. (ed.), *The Slate Quarries of North Wales in 1873: a Series of Letters by a Special Correspondent of the Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* (1987).

Malthus, T. R., *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London, 1803).

Marx, K., *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy* (London, 1926).

Owen, D., *Gwen Tomos* (1894, English translation by T. C. Williams and E. R. Harris, Wrexham, 1963).

Owen, N., *Caernarvonshire. A Sketch of its History, Antiquities, Mountains, and Productions.* (London, 1792).

PP 1801-02, VI (9), 1801 Census enumeration.

PP 1803-4, XIII (175), Returns relative to the expense and maintenance of the poor.

PP 1812, XI (316), 1811 census enumeration abstract.

PP 1818, XIX (82), Abstract of returns relative to the expense and maintenance of the poor.

PPs 1821, XVII (201), An account of the average price of all sorts of grain, 1791-1821; 1823, XIII (424), Average price of grain 1821-23; 1826, XXI (50), Average price of grain 1823-26.

PP 1821, IV (748), Report of the Select Committee on Poor Returns.

PP 1822, V (556), Report of the Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns.

PP 1822, XV (502), 1821 Census enumeration abstract.

PP 1826-7, XX (18), Poor Rates: an account of the amount of money levied by assessment for poor rates and county rates.

PP 1830, XXXI (141) and 1830-31, XI (219), Poor rates, abstract of accounts.

PP 1833, XXXVI-III (149), 1831 census enumeration abstract.

PP 1834, XV (579), Report from the Select Committee on Land revenues of the Crown.

PP 1834, XXII (606), Further Report of the Commissioners concerning charities in England and Wales.

PP 1834, XXIX (251), Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws.

PP 1834, XXX (44), Report on the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws, Appendix B1, Answers to Rural Queries.

PP 1835, XLVII (444), Poor rate returns, 1830-34.

PP 1836, XXIX (595), Second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales.

PP 1837, XXXI (546), Third annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.

PP 1837-38, XXVII (144), Report of Commissioners concerning charities in England and Wales.

PP 1837-38, XXXV (686), Municipal Corporations (England and Wales).

PP 1837-38, XXXVIII (449), Return of the number of orders of affiliation.

PP 1839, XX (239), Fifth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.

PP 1840, XVII (226), Report on the continuance of the Poor Law Commission.

PP 1840, XVII (245), Sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.

*PP 1842*, XIX (399), Eighth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1843*, XVII (434), Analytical digest of the reports made by the Commissioners inquiring into charities.  
*PP 1843*, XXI (468), Ninth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1844*, XIX (31), Report of the Poor Law Commissioners on the law concerning the maintenance of bastards.  
*PP 1844*, XIX (560), Tenth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1844*, XXVII (587), 1841 census abstract of returns.  
*PP 1845*, XV (609), Report on framework knitters.  
*PP 1845*, XXVII (624), Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1846*, XIX (704), Twelfth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1847*, XXVII (870), Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales.  
*PP 1847*, XXVIII (816), Thirteenth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners.  
*PP 1849*, XXV (1024), Report of the Commissioners for Administering the Laws for Relief of the Poor in England. 1848.  
*PP 1851*, XLIII (1339), Forms and Instructions for persons involved in taking account of the population of Great Britain.  
*PP 1851*, XXVI (1340), Third annual report of the Poor Law Board, 1850.  
*PP 1852-53*, C (31), Abstract of returns respecting friendly societies in England and Wales.  
*PP 1852-53*, LXXXIV (991), Poor removal.  
*PP 1852-3*, LXXXV (1631-2), Census of Great Britain, 1851. Population tables I.  
*PP 1852-3*, LXXXVIII (1691), 'Census of Great Britain, 1851. Population II.  
*PPs 1857 Session 2*, XXII (2260), *1857-58*, XXIII (2431), *1859 Session 2*, XII (2559), *1860*, XXIX (2712), *1861*, XVIII (2897), *1862*, XVII (2977), *1863*, XIV (3124), Annual Reports of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages, in England (1855-61).  
*PP 1860*, (383B.I), Poor rates and pauperism. Paupers relieved on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1861.  
*PP 1863*, LIII (3221), 1861 census abstract.  
*PP 1864*, XXIV (3389), Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the condition of mines in Great Britain.  
*PP 1867-8*, XVII (4068-I), Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture. First Report.  
*PP 1874*, XXIII (C.961, 995-8), Fourth report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into Friendly and Benefit Building Societies.  
*PP 1880*, LXVIII (365), Abstract of the quinquennial returns of sickness and mortality, experienced by friendly societies.  
*PP 1893-4*, XXXVI (C.6894), Royal Commission on the Agricultural Labourer, Vol. II, Summary Report.  
*PP 1894*, XXXVI-XXXVII (C.7439), First Report of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire, Minutes of Evidence Vols. I-II.  
*PP 1895*, XIV (C.7684), Report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor.  
*PP 1896*, XXXIV (C.8221), Report of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire.  
*Pembroke Herald*.  
 Pennant, T., *Tours in Wales* (London, 1810).  
*Piggott's North Wales Directory*, (1828-9).  
 Pugh, E., *Cambria Depicta* (London, 1818).  
 Roberts, E. C., *Dolwyddelan a'i Chumeriadau Hynod [Dolwyddelan and its Exceptional Characters]* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1924).  
 Roberts, E. O., *A Sketch of the Old Characters of Penmachno* (1940).

- Roberts, R., *A Wandering Scholar; the Life and Opinions of Robert Roberts* (Cardiff, 1991).
- Roberts, S., *Farmer Careful of Cil-Haul Uchaf*, (Conwy, 1881).
- Robertson, T., *Outline of the General Report upon the Size of Farms, and upon the Persons who Cultivate Farms* (Edinburgh, 1796).
- Rowlandson, T., 'Agriculture of north Wales', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* VIII (1846), pp. 553-89.
- Slater's North Wales Directory* (1849).
- Slater's North Wales Directory* (1883).
- Smith, A., *Wealth of Nations*, (Oxford, 1993).
- Thomas, E., *The Economics of Smallholdings: a Study based on a Survey of Small Farming in Carmarthenshire* (Cambridge, 1927).
- Vincent, J. E., *The Land Question in North Wales* (London, 1896).
- Warner, Rev. R., *A Walk through Wales in August 1797* (Bath, 1798).
- *A Second Walk through Wales* (Bath, 1800).
- Welch Piety* (1747-48).
- Williams, Rev. P. B., *The Tourist's Guide through the County of Caernarvon* (Caernarvon, 1821).
- Williams, W., *Observations on the Snowdon Mountains* (London, 1802).
- Young, A., *General View of the Agriculture of Lincolnshire* (London, 1799).
- 'Ysbytty Ifan, or the Hospitalers in Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1860), pp.105-124.

## Secondary works

- Allen, R. C., *Enclosure and the Yeoman: Agricultural Developments of the South Midlands 1450-1850* (Oxford, 1992).
- 'Pessimism preserved: real wages in the British Industrial revolution', *Oxford University Department of Economics Working Paper* 314 (2007).
- *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2009).
- Anderson, M., *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971).
- 'Mis-specification of servant occupations in the 1851 census: a problem revisited', in N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 260-9.
- Apfel, W. and Dunkley, P., 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History* 10 (1985), pp. 37-68.
- Arkell, T., 'Interpreting probate Inventories', in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 72-102.
- Armstrong, W. A., 'The influence of demographic factors on the position of the agricultural labourer in England and Wales, c 1750-1914', *AgHR* 29 (1981), pp. 71-82.
- 'Labour', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *AHEW*, Vol. VI, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 641-835.
- Ashby A. W. and Evans, I. L., *The Agriculture of Wales and Monmouthshire* (Cardiff, 1944).
- Aston T. H. and Philpin, C. H. E. (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985).
- Baker, A. R. H. and Butlin, R. A., *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973).
- Barnett, D. C., 'Allotments and the problem of rural poverty, 1780-1840', in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (eds.), *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1967), pp. 162-186.

- Beckett, J. V., 'The debate over farm sizes in eighteenth and nineteenth century England', *Agricultural History* 57 (1983), pp. 308-325.
- 'Landownership and estate management', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *AHEW*, Vol. VI, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 545-640.
  - 'The decline of the small landowner in England and Wales 1660-1900', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Landowners, Capitalists, and Entrepreneurs* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 89-112.
- Bennett, J. and Vernon, R. W., *Mines of the Gwydir Forest: Part 1* (Cuddington, 1989).
- Berg, M., *The Age of Manufactures 1700 - 1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London, 1994).
- Berkner, L. K., 'The stem family and the developmental cycle of the peasant household: an eighteenth-century Austrian example', *American Historical Review* 77 (1972), pp. 398-418.
- Blaug, M., 'The myth of the Old Poor Law and the making of the New', *Journal of Economic History* 23 (1963), pp. 151-84.
- Botelho, L., 'Aged and impotent: parish relief of the aged poor in early modern Suffolk', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp. 91-111.
- Boyer, G. R., *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990).
- Broad, J., 'Parish economies of welfare', *Historical Journal* 42 (1999), pp. 985-1006.
- Broadberry, S., Campbell, B. M. S., Klein, A., Overton, M. and van Leeuwen, B., *British Economic Growth 1270-1870* (Cambridge, 2015).
- Brown, R. L., *The Parish Pauper and the Poor Law: the Poor in Welshpool* (Welshpool, 2002).
- Brundage, A., *The Making of the New Poor Law 1832-39* (London, 1978).
- *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2002).
- Burchardt, J., *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (Woodbridge, 2002).
- Burchardt, J., and Cooper, J., *Breaking New Ground: Nineteenth Century Allotments from Local Sources* (Milton Keynes, 2010).
- Calendar of Wynn Papers*, (Aberystwyth, 1926).
- Carr, A. D., 'Medieval administrative divisions', in T. M. Bassett and B. L. Davies (eds.), *Atlas of Caernarvonshire* (Caernarfon, 1977), pp. 69-74.
- Chambers, J. D. and Mingay, G. E., *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880* (London, 1966).
- Chapman, J. 'The extent and nature of Parliamentary enclosure', *AgHR* 35 (1987), pp. 25-34.
- *A Guide to Parliamentary Enclosures in Wales* (Cardiff, 1992).
  - 'Parliamentary enclosure in the uplands', in I. D. Whyte and A. J. L. Winchester (eds.), *Society, Landscape and Environment in Upland Britain* (Birmingham, 2004), pp. 79-88.
- Checkland, S. G. and Checkland, E. O. A. (eds.), *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Harmondsworth, 1974).
- Clark, A., *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919).
- Clark, A., *The Struggle for the Breeches* (Berkeley, 1995).
- Clarkson, L. A., *Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of Industrialization?* (Basingstoke, 1985).
- Coleman, D. C., 'Proto-industrialization: a concept too many', *EcHR* 36 (1983), pp. 435-448.
- Colyer, R., 'The land agent in nineteenth century Wales', *WHR* VIII (1977), pp. 401-425.
- 'Limitations to agrarian development in nineteenth century Wales', *BBCS* (1978), pp. 602-617.

- 'Conditions of employment amongst the farm labour force in nineteenth century Wales', *Llafur* 3 (1982), pp. 33-40.
- Cooper, K. J., *Exodus from Cardiganshire* (Cardiff, 2011).
- Cragoe, M., *An Anglican Aristocracy: the Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832-1895* (Oxford 1996).
- Cragoe, M. and Readman, P. (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010).
- Creighton, C., 'The rise of the male breadwinner family: a reappraisal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996), pp. 310-337.
- Crompton, C. A., 'An exploration of the craft and trade structure of two Hertfordshire villages, 1851-1891: an application of nominal record linkage to directories and census enumerators' books', *Local Historian* (1998), pp. 145-158.
- Davidoff, L., 'The role of gender in the 'first industrial nation'; agriculture in England 1780-1850', in R. Crompton and M. Mann (eds.), *Gender and Stratification* (Cambridge, 1986).
- Davidoff, L. and Hall, C., *Family Fortunes; Men and Women in the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987).
- Davies, A. C., 'The Old Poor Law in an industrializing parish - Aberdare, 1818-36', *WHR* (1977), pp. 285-311.
- Davies, A. E., 'Some aspects of the operation of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire, 1750-1834', *Ceredigion* VI (1968), pp. 1-44.
- 'The New Poor Law in a rural area, 1834-1850', *Ceredigion* 8 (1978).
- Day, C., 'Geographical mobility in Wiltshire, 1754-1914', *Population Studies* (2012), pp. 50-75.
- Dewar, I. S., 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in south Glamorgan, 1836-38', *Morganwg* 11 (1967), pp. 46-70.
- Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (Oxford, 1959).
- Digby, A., *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978).
- 'The local state', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *AHEW*, Vol. VII, 1850-1914, Part II (2000), pp. 1425-64.
- Dodd, A. H., 'The Old Poor Law in north Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1926), pp. 111-32.
- 'The enclosure movement in north Wales', *BBCS* (1926-7), pp. 210-221.
- *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales* (Cardiff, 1951).
- *A History of Caernarvonshire 1284-1900* (Caernarfon, 1968).
- Draper, C., *Paupers, Bastards and Lunatics: The Story of the Conwy Union Workhouse* (Llanrwst, 2005).
- Driver, F., *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993).
- Dunkley, P., 'The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: a case study', *Historical Journal* 17 (1974), pp. 329-346.
- Edsall, N. C., *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1835-44* (Manchester, 1971).
- Emery, F., 'Wales', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW*, Vol. V, 1640-1750: *Regional Farming Systems* (1984), pp. 393-428.
- Englander, D., *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914: From Chadwick to Booth* (Harlow, 1998).
- Erickson, A. L., *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (Abingdon, 1993).
- Evans, M. and Jones, P., 'A stubborn, intractable body': resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877', *Family and Community History* 17 (2014), pp. 99-121.
- Feinstein, C. H., 'Pessimism perpetuated: real wages and the standard of living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution', *JECH* 58 (1998), pp. 625-658.

- Flynn-Hughes, C., 'Aspects of Old Poor Law administration and policy in Amlwch parish 1770-1837', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society* (1945).
- 'The workhouses of Caernarvonshire', *TCHS* 7 (1946), pp. 88-100.
- Fraser, D. (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976).
- French, H., 'How dependent were the 'dependent poor'? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change* 30 (2015), pp. 193-222.
- French, H. R. and Hoyle, R. W., 'The land market in a Pennine manor: Slaidburn, 1650-1780', *Continuity and Change* 14 (1999).
- Goose, N., 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the case of Hertfordshire', *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005), pp. 351-384.
- 'Farm service, seasonal unemployment and casual labour in mid nineteenth-century England', *AgHR* 54, (2006), pp. 274-303.
- Gorsky, M., 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *EcHR* 51 (1998), pp. 489-511.
- *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge, 1999).
- Gosden, P., *Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in the 19th Century* (London, 1973).
- Griffith, J. E., *Pedigrees of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire Families* (Horncastle, 1914).
- 'The diary of William Bulkeley', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions* (1931).
- Grigg, D., *Population Growth and Agrarian Change: An Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1980).
- Gwyn, D., *Welsh Slate: Archaeology and History of an Industry* (Aberystwyth, 2015).
- Hajnal, J., 'European marriage patterns in perspective', in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965).
- Hall, C., 'The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology', in S. Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London, 1979), pp. 15-32.
- Hammel, E. A., 'Chayanov revisited: a model for the economics of complex kin units', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102 (2005), pp. 7043-46.
- Healey, J., 'The development of poor relief in Lancashire, c. 1598-1680', *Historical Journal* 53, (2010), pp. 551-572.
- *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620-1730* (Woodbridge, 2014).
- Henriques, U. R. Q., 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past & Present* 37 (1967), pp. 103-29.
- Higgs, E., 'Women, occupations and the nineteenth century censuses', *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987), pp. 59-79.
- *Making Sense of the Census Revisited: Census Records for England and Wales 1801-1901* (London, 2005).
- Hill, B., *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989).
- 'Women, work and the census: a problem for historians of women', *History Workshop Journal* (1993), pp. 78-94.
- Hindle, S., *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004).
- Hirst, D. and Michael, P., 'Family, community and the lunatic in mid-nineteenth-century north Wales', in P. Bartlett and D. Wright (eds.), *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000* (London, 1999), pp. 66-85.
- Hitchcock, T., King, P. and Sharpe, P., *Chronicling Poverty: the Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997).

- Holderness, B. A., 'Widows in pre-industrial society: an essay upon their economic functions', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 423-442.
- Horrell, S. and Humphries, J., 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family, 1790-1865', *EcHR* XLVIII (1995), pp. 89-117.
- Howell, D. W., 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales', *WHR* 6 (1973), pp. 262-287.
- 'Landlords and estate management in Wales', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW* Vol. V (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 252-297.
  - *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London, 1977).
  - *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000).
  - 'The Land Question in nineteenth-century Wales, Ireland and Scotland: a comparative study', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 83-110.
- Howkins, A., 'Peasants, servants and labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c1870-1914', *AgHR* 42 (1994), pp. 49-62.  
*HR Magazine*, [www.hr magazine.co.uk](http://www.hr magazine.co.uk).
- Hufton, O., *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974).
- Hughes, P. G., *Wales and the Drovers; the Historic Background of an Epoch* (London, 1943).
- Humphries, J., ' "... The most free from objection..." The sexual division of labor and women's work in nineteenth-century England', *JECh* 47 (1987), pp. 929-949.
- 'Enclosures, common rights and women: the proletarianization of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *JECh* (1990), pp. 17-42
  - 'Female-headed households in early industrial Britain', *Labour History Review* 63 (1998), pp. 31-65.
- Humphreys, M., *The Crisis of Community; Montgomeryshire, 1680-1815* (Cardiff, 1996).
- Huzel, J. P., 'The demographic impact of the Old Poor Law: more reflexions on Malthus.' *EcHR* 33 (1980), pp. 367-381.
- Innes, J., 'The "mixed economy of welfare" in early modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c1683-1803)', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp. 139-180.
- 'The state of the poor in eighteenth-century England in European perspective', in J. Brewer and E. Hellwuth (eds.), *Rethinking Leviathan: The Eighteenth-Century State in Britain and Germany* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 225-80.
- James, B. L., 'The 'great landowners' of Wales', *NLWJ* XIV (1965-66).
- Jenkins, D. E., *Beddgelert, its Facts, Fairies and Folklore* (Beddgelert, 1899).
- Jenkins, J. G., *The Welsh Woollen Industry* (Cardiff, 1969).
- *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973).
  - *The Flannel Makers; a Brief History of the Welsh Woollen Industry* (Llanrwst, 2005), p. 23.
- Jenkins, P., *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983).
- Jenkins, R.T., 'A drover's account book', *TCHS* 6 (1945).
- 'Some pages in the history of Pant Glas, Ysbytty Ifan', *TCHS* 10 (1949), pp.12-32.
- John, E. (ed.), *Our Mothers' Land. Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff, 1991).
- Jones, D., 'Self-help in nineteenth century Wales: the rise and fall of the female friendly society', *Llafur* IV (1984), pp. 14-26.
- 'Did friendly societies matter? A study of friendly society membership in Glamorgan, 1794-1910', *WHR* 12, (1984-85), pp. 324-349.

- Jones, E. G., *Exchequer Proceedings (Equity) Concerning Wales: Henry VIII - Elizabeth* (Cardiff, 1939).
- Jones, G.R., 'Field systems in north Wales', in A. R. H. Baker and R. A. Butlin (eds.), *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 430-479.
- Jones, J.G., 'The Ffestiniog slate industry: the industrial pattern to 1831', *JMHRS* VI (1969), pp. 50-65.
- 'The Ffestiniog slate industry: the industrial pattern, 1831-1913', *JMHRS* VI (1970), pp. 191-213.
  - 'Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and his tenants', *WHR* 11 (1982), pp.1-30.
  - *The Wynn Family of Gwydir: Origins, Growth and Development c.1490-1674* (Aberystwyth, 1995).
- Jones, M.L., 'Merioneth woollen industry from 1750 to 182', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1939), pp. 181-208.
- Jones, R., 'Separate spheres?': women, language and respectability in Victorian Wales', in G.H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 177-214.
- Jones, T.I.J., *Exchequer Proceedings Concerning Wales in Tempore James I* (Cardiff, 1955).
- Jones Pierce, T., 'Landlords in Wales' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW* Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 357-81.
- Keibek, S.A.J. and Shaw-Taylor, L., 'Early modern rural by-employments: a re-examination of the probate inventory evidence', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 244-81.
- Kerblay, B., 'Chayanov and the theory of peasantry as a specific type of economy', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 150-160.
- Kidd, A., *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1999).
- King, P., 'Pauper inventories and the material lives of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997).
- King, S., 'Reconstructing lives: the poor, the Poor Law and welfare in Calverley, 1650-1820', *Social History* 22 (1997), pp. 318-338.
- 'Poor relief and English economic development reappraised', *EcHR* 50 (1997), pp. 360-368.
  - *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000).
  - 'Making the most of opportunity: the economy of makeshifts in the early modern north', in S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700 -1900: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).
- King, S., and Stewart, J., 'The history of the Poor Law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential', *Archives* XXVI (2001), pp. 134 – 148.
- King, S. and Tomkins, A., *The Poor in England, 1700-1900: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).
- Kitson, P.M., Shaw-Taylor, L., Wrigley, E.A., Davies, R.S., Newton, G. and Satchell, A.E.M., 'The creation of a 'census' of adult male employment for England and Wales for 1817', *Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History* 4 (2012).
- Knotter, A., 'Problems of the 'family economy'', in M. Prak (ed.), *Early Modern Capitalism: Economic and Social Change in Europe, 1400-1800* (2001), pp. 135-159.
- Kussmaul, A., *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981).
- Laslett, P., 'Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century', in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 125-58.
- Laslett, P., and Wall, R. (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972).

- Levine, D., *Family Formation in the Age of Nascent Capitalism* (London, 1977).
- Levine-Clark, M., 'Engendering relief: women, able-bodiedness, and the New Poor Law in early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History* 11 (2000), pp. 107-30.
- Lewis, W.J., *Lead Mining in Wales* (Cardiff, 1967).
- Lewis, M.J.T., *Blaen y Cwm and Cwt y Bugail Slate Quarries* (Mold, 2003).
- Lewis, M.J.T. and Williams, M.C., *Pioneers of Ffestiniog Slate* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1987).
- Lewis, R.A., 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* IX (1964), pp. 163-196.
- Lindsay, J., *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry* (Newton Abbot, 1974).
- Lord, E., 'Weighed in the balance and found wanting': female friendly societies, self-help and economic virtue in the east Midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Midland History* 22 (1997), pp. 100-112.
- Marshall, D., *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1926).
- Marshall, J.D., 'Agrarian wealth and social structure in pre-industrial Cumbria', *EcHR* XXXIII (1980), pp. 503-21.
- Marshall, J. D., 'Stages of industrialisation in Cumbria', in P. Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 132-155.
- Martin, J.M., 'Village traders and the emergence of a proletariat in south Warwickshire, 1750-1851', *AgHR* 32 (1984), pp. 179-188.
- McCord, N., 'The Poor Law and philanthropy', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976), pp. 87-110.
- Mendels, F. F., 'Proto-industrialization: the first phase of the industrialization process', *JECh* 32 (1972), pp. 241-261.
- Mills, D.R., 'Trouble with farms at the Census Office: an evaluation of farm statistics from the censuses of 1851-1881 in England and Wales', *AgHR* 47 (1999), pp. 58-77.
- Minchinton, W. E., 'The Agricultural Returns of 1800 for Wales', *BBCS* (1964), pp. 74 - 93.
- Mingay, G.E., 'The size of farms in the eighteenth century', *EcHR* 14 (1962), pp. 469-488.  
 — *English Landed Society: the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1968).  
 — *Parliamentary Enclosure in England. An Introduction to its Causes, Incidence and Impact, 1750-1850* (London, 1997).
- Moore-Colyer, R. J., *The Welsh Cattle Drovers* (Cardiff, 1976).  
 — 'Wales', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *AHEW* Vol VII, 1850-1914 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 427-452.
- Muldrew, C., *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011).  
 — "'Th'ancient Distaff' and 'Whirling Spindle': measuring the contribution of spinning to household earnings and the national economy in England, 1550-1770", *EcHR* 65 (2012), pp. 498-526.
- Neeson, J.M., *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993).
- Nutt, T., 'The paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in Old Poor Law Essex', in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 102-21.  
 — 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *EcHR* 63 (2010), pp. 335-61.
- Ogwen Williams, W., *Calendar of the Caernarvonshire Quarter Session Records* (Caernarfon, 1956).
- Open University, *Patterns and Processes of Internal Migration* (1982).

- Ottoway, S., and Williams, S., 'Reconstructing the life-cycle of poverty in the time of the Old Poor Law', *Archives* 23 (1998), pp. 19-29.
- Overton, M., 'Probate inventories and the reconstruction of agricultural landscapes', in M. Reed (ed.), *Discovering Past Landscapes* (London, 1984), pp. 167-94.  
 — *Agricultural Revolution in England: the Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge, 1996).
- Overton, M., Whittle, J., Dean, D. and Hann, A., *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London, 2004).
- Owen, B., 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union workhouse, Caersws, 1837-1847', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 78 (1990), pp. 115-60.
- Oxley, G.W., *Poor Relief in England and Wales, 1601-1834* (Newton Abbot, 1974).
- Parker, K., 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society* 74 (2004), pp. 169-98.
- Patriquin, L., *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor Relief in England, 1500-1860. Rethinking the Origins of the Welfare State* (Basingstoke, 2007).
- Pooley, C.G. and Doherty, J.C., 'The longitudinal study of migration: Welsh migration to English towns in the nineteenth century', in C. G. Pooley and I. D. Whyte (eds.), *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: a Social History of Migration* (London, 1991), pp. 143-173.
- Pooley, C.G., and Turnbull, J., *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1998).
- Powell, N.M.W., 'Near the margin of existence'? Upland prosperity in Wales during the early modern period', *Studia Celtica* XLI (2007), pp. 137-62.
- Pritchard, R.T., 'The post road in Caernarvonshire', *TCHS* 12 (1952), pp. 9-25.
- Pugh, R.B., *The Crown Estates* (London, 1960).
- Rees, A. D., *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1975).
- Richards, A.J., *Gazetteer of Slate Quarrying in Wales* (Pwllheli, 2007).
- Richardson, F., 'Women farmers of Snowdonia, 1750-1900', *Rural History* 25 (2014), pp. 161-81.
- Roberts, G.T., *The Language of the Blue Books* (Cardiff, 1998).
- Roberts, R. O. E., *Farming in Caernarfonshire around 1800* (Caernarfon, 1973).
- Rose, M.E., 'The allowance system under the New Poor Law', *EcHR* 19 (1966), pp. 607-620.  
 — *The Relief of Poverty, 1834-1914* (London, 1972).
- Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *An Inventory of Ancient and Historical Monuments in Caernarvonshire* (London, 1956).
- Rusnock, A. A., and Dietz, V. E., 'Defining women's sickness and work: female friendly societies in England, 1780-1830', *Journal of Women's History* 24 (2012), pp. 60-85.
- Sharpe, P., *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (Basingstoke, 1996).  
 — 'The female labour market in English agriculture during the Industrial Revolution; expansion or contraction?' in N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 51-75.
- Shaw-Taylor, L., 'Parliamentary enclosure and the emergence of an English agricultural proletariat', *JECH* 61 (2001), pp. 640-662.  
 — 'Family farms and capitalist farms in mid nineteenth century England', *AgHR* 53 (2005), pp. 640-662.  
 — 'Diverse experiences: the geography of adult female employment in England and the 1851 census', in N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 29-50.

- 'Rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming in England', *EcHR* 65 (2012), pp. 26-60.
- Shaw-Taylor, L. and Wrigley, E.A., 'Occupational structure and population change', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Britain, Vol. I, 1700-1870* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 53-88.
- Sheppard, J.A., 'East Yorkshire's agricultural labour force in the mid-nineteenth century', *AgHR* IX (1961), pp. 43-54.
- Shoemaker, R.B., *Gender in English Society 1650-1850* (London, 1998).
- Slack, P., *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (Cambridge, 1990).
- Smith, R.M., (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984).
- 'Aging and well-being in early modern England', in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-modernity* (London, 1998).
- Snell, K.D.M., *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985).
- 'Pauper settlement and the right to poor relief in England and Wales', *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991), pp. 375-415.
- 'Settlement, Poor Law and the rural historian: new approaches and opportunities', *Rural History* 3 (1992), pp. 145-172.
- *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006).
- Sokoll, T., 'Old age in poverty: the record of Essex pauper letters, 1780-1834', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 155-191.
- Solar, P. M., 'Poor relief and English economic development before the industrial revolution', *EcHR* XLVIII (1995), pp. 1-22.
- Spufford, M., 'The limitations of the probate inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 137-174.
- Stamp, L.D., 'The Welsh commons', in W.G. Hoskins and L.D. Stamp, *The Common Lands of England and Wales* (London, 1963), pp. 226-241.
- Silvester, R.J., 'The commons and waste: use and misuse in central Wales', in I.D. Whyte and A.J.L. Winchester (eds.), *Society, Landscape and Environment in Upland Britain* (Society for Landscape Studies, 2004).
- Stapleton, B., 'Inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850', *Social History* 18 (1993), pp. 339-55.
- Stewart, J. and King, S., 'Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales', *Rural History* 15 (2004), pp. 69-87.
- Tann, J., 'Corn milling', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *AHEW* Vol. VI (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 397-414.
- Taylor, J.S., 'The impact of pauper settlement, 1691-1834', *Past and Present* 73 (1976), pp. 42-73.
- 'A different kind of Speenhamland: nonresident relief in the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), pp. 183-208.
- Thane, P., 'Women and the poor law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop Journal* 6 (1978), pp. 29-51.
- *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000).
- Thirsk, J., 'The fantastical folly of fashion: the English stocking knitting industry, 1500-1700', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Rural Economy of England* (London, 1984), pp. 235-258.
- Thomas, B.B., 'The Old Poor Law in Ardudwy-Uwch-Artro', *BBCS* 7 (1935), pp. 153-191.
- Thomas, C., 'Patterns and processes of estate expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', *JMHR* VI (1972), pp. 333-342

- 'Estates and the rural economy of north Wales 1770-1850', *BBCS* 28 (1979), pp. 289-304.
- Thomas, D., *Agriculture in Wales during the Napoleonic Wars* (Cardiff, 1963).
- Thomas, E., *The Economics of Smallholdings: a Study based on a Survey of Small Farming in Carmarthenshire* (Cambridge, 1927).
- Thomas, T., *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times* (Bridgend, 1992).
- Thomson, D., 'The welfare of the elderly in the past: a family or community responsibility?' in M. Pelling and R. M. Smith (eds.), *Life, Death, and the Elderly* (London, 1991), pp.194-221.
- Thompson, F.M.L., *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963).
- 'The second Agricultural Revolution, 1815-1880', *EcHR* 21 (1968), pp. 62-77.
- Thompson, R.N., 'The working of the Poor Law Amendment Act in Cumbria, 1836-1871', *Northern History* 15 (1979), pp. 117-137.
- Tibbott, S.M., 'Knitting stockings in Wales: a domestic craft', *Folk Life* 16 (1978), pp. 61-73.
- Tillott, P.M., 'Sources of inaccuracy in the 1851 and 1861 censuses', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Qualitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 82-133.
- Tilly, L. and Scott, J.W., *Women, Work, and Family* (London, 1989).
- Todd, B.J., 'The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), pp. 54-85.
- 'Freebench and free enterprise: widows and their property in two Berkshire villages', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (1990), pp. 184-87.
- 'Demographic determinism and female agency: the remarrying widow reconsidered . . . again', *Continuity and Change* 9 (1994), pp. 421-450.
- Tranter, N.L., 'The labour supply 1780-1860', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700, Vol. 1: 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1981),
- Turner, M. and Mills, D., *Land and Property: The English Land Tax 1692-1832* (Gloucester, 1986).
- Verdon, N., *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England. Gender, Work and Wages* (Woodbridge, 2002).
- '" . . . subjects deserving of the highest praise': farmers' wives and the farm economy in England, c1700-1850', *AgHR* 51 (2003), pp. 23-39.
- 'The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: women's and children's employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *EcHR* 55 (2002), pp. 299-323.
- 'The 'lady farmer': gender, widowhood and farming in Victorian England', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Farmer in England 1650-1980* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 241-62.
- Vickery, A., 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *Historical Journal* 36 (1993),
- Vries, J. de, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *JECh* 5, (1994), pp. 249-70.
- *The Industrious Revolution* (Cambridge, 2008).
- Wales, T., 'Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from seventeenth-century Norfolk', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 351-88.
- Wall, R., 'Work, welfare and the family: an illustration of the adaptive family economy', in L. Bonfield, R. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds.), *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 261-294.

- Warner-Swett, K., 'Widowhood, custom and property in early modern north Wales', *WHR* 18 (1996), pp. 189-227.
- Watt, H., *Welsh Manors and their Records* (Aberystwyth, 2000).
- Webb, S. and B., *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part I. The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927).
- *English Poor Law History: the Last Hundred Years*. Vol. 1 (London, 1929).
- Whittle, J., 'Housewives and servants in rural England, 1440-1650: evidence of women's work from probate documents', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 15 (2005), pp. 51-74.
- (ed.), *Landlords and Tenants in Britain: Tawney's Agrarian Problem Revisited* (2013).
- Williams, D., *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1950).
- *The Rebecca Riots: a study in agrarian discontent* (Cardiff, 1955).
- Williams, G.H., 'Estate management in Dyffryn Conwy c 1685: the Caerhun, Baron Hill and Gwydir estates', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1979), pp. 31-74.
- 'Farming in Stuart Caernarfonshire', *TCHS* 42 (1981), pp. 49-80.
- Williams, G.J., *Hanes Plwyf Ffestiniog [History of Ffestiniog Parish]* (Wrexham, 1882).
- Williams, K., *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981).
- Williams, L.J. and Boyns, T., 'Occupations in Wales, 1851-1971', *Bulletin of Economic Research* 29 (1977), pp. 71-83.
- Williams, L.J. and Jones, D., 'Women at work in nineteenth century Wales', *Llafur* 3 (1982), pp. 33-44.
- Williams, M.C. and Lewis, M.J.T., *Gwydir Slate Quarries* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1989).
- Williams, S., *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834* (Woodbridge, 2011).
- 'Unmarried mothers and the new poor law in Hertfordshire', *LPS* 91 (2013), pp. 27-43.
- Williams, S.A., 'Care in the community: women and the Old Poor Law in early nineteenth-century Anglesey', *Llafur* 6 (1995), pp. 31-42.
- 'Women's employment in nineteenth-century Anglesey', *Llafur* 6 (1995), pp.30-45.
- Williams, V.P., *Plwyf Penmachno [The Parish of Penmachno]* (Llanrwst, 1996).
- Winchester, A. J. L., 'Beyond pasture rights; the management of turbary, estovers and other lesser rights on common land in England and Wales since 1600' in *AHRC Contested Common Land Symposium 2*, (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2009).
- Woods, R., *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000).
- Wrigley, E.A., 'The process of modernization and the Industrial Revolution in England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (1972), pp. 225-259.
- 'Men on the land and men in the countryside', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Poverty, Progress and Population* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 87-128.
- 'Rickman revisited: the population growth rates of English counties in the early modern period', *ECHR* 62 (2009), pp. 711-35.
- *The Early English Censuses* (Oxford, 2011).
- Wrigley E.A. and Schofield, R.S., *The Population History of England 1541 - 1871: a Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981).
- Wrigley, E.A., Davies, R.S., Oeppen J.E. and Schofield, R.S., *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837* (Cambridge, 1997).

## Unpublished papers and theses

- Flynn-Hughes, C., 'Development of the Poor Laws in Anglesey and Caernarfonshire between 1815 and 1914' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1945).
- Griffith, W.P. 'Poor Law in Wales: some random thoughts', <https://wiki.brookes.ac.uk/download/attachments/16614522/Griffith+OXFBROOKES.pdf>, (accessed 19/01/2015).
- Hooker, G.F., 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union 1836-1886: "the most difficult union in Wales"', (University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2013).
- Jones, D.L., 'Gweithrediad Deddf y Tlodion 1834 yn Udeb Bangor a Biwmares rhwng 1837 a 1871 [Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union between 1837 and 1871]' (University of Wales, Bangor PhD thesis, 1994).
- Morley, S.P., 'Community, self-help and mutual aid: friendly societies and the parish welfare system in rural Oxfordshire, 1834-1918', (University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 2012).
- Parry, G., 'Gweinyddiaeth Deddf y Tlodion yng ngorllewin Meirionnydd c. 1800-1894 [Administration of the Poor Law in West Merioneth, 1800-1894]' (University of Wales, Bangor PhD thesis, 1995).
- Parry, J.G., 'Stability and change in mid-eighteenth-century Caernarfonshire' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1978).
- Plume, G., 'The enclosure movement in Caernarvonshire' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1935).
- Richardson, F.A., 'Evolution of a hill farming community and its impact on the Snowdonia landscape: Capel Curig c.1750-1850' (University of Oxford MSc dissertation, 2009).
- Scheltinger, J., 'Gwydir estate 1814-1914; the management, finances and decline of a landed estate in north Wales in the nineteenth century' (University of Wales PhD thesis, 1992).
- Thomas, W., 'Women in rural society in south-west Wales c1780-1870' (University of Wales, Swansea PhD thesis, 2003).
- Williams, G.H., 'A study of Caernarfonshire probate records, 1630- 1690' (UCNW Bangor MA thesis, 1972).