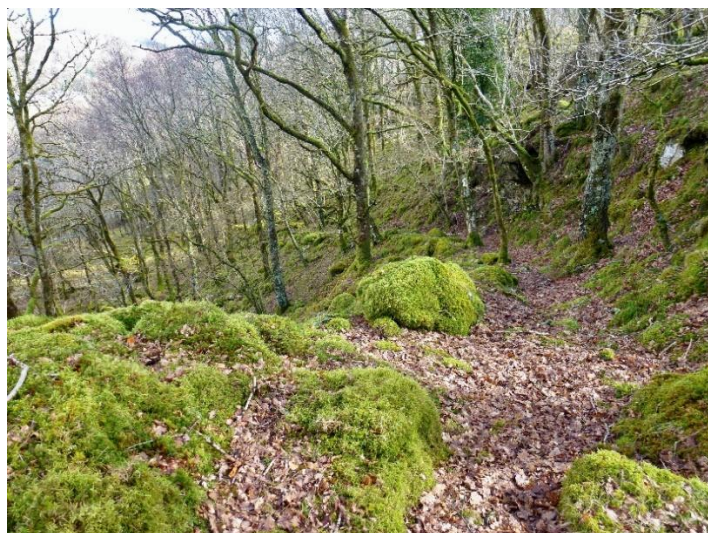


The abandoned houses of Bryn Coch farm



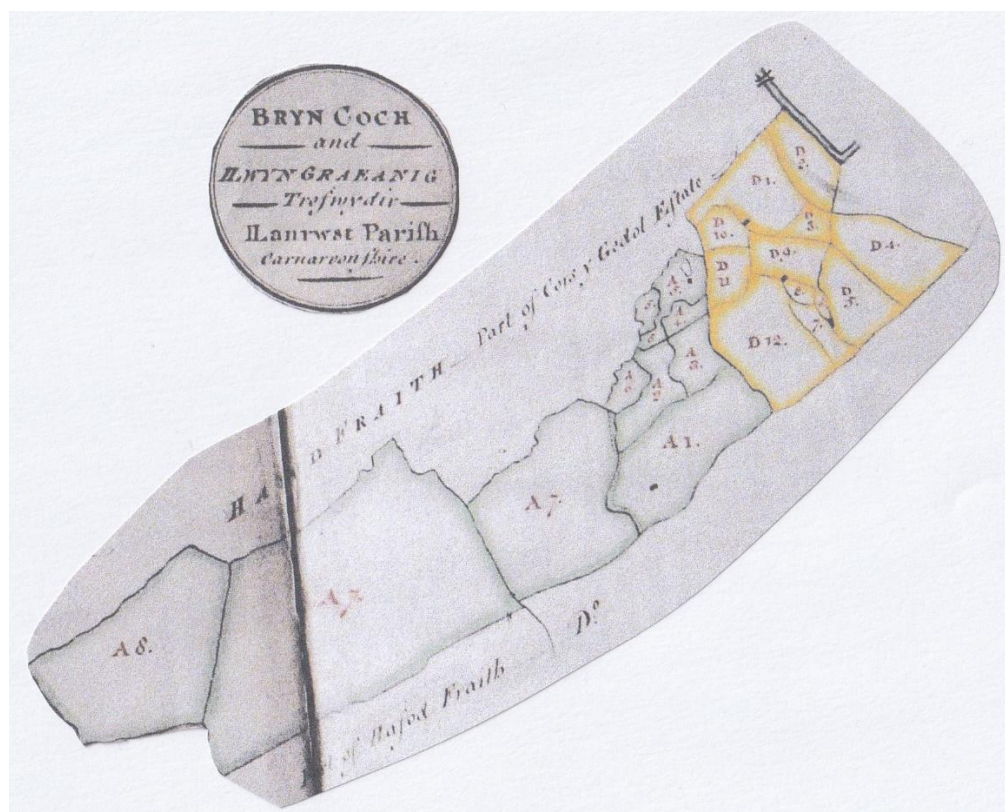
Walk along the old road from Pont Cyfyng in Capel Curig towards Tŷ Hyll on the A5, and you may see on your right a faint track disappearing into the Coed Bryn-y-Gefeilliau private woodland, more clearly visible when covered with snow. This leads to the abandoned farmhouse of Cae Coedyn, the lower part of the former Bryn Coch farm. Above the wood lie the ruins of Ysguborwen, where a larch tree is now pushing the old stone walls apart. Further up the hill on access land are the remains of Bryn Coch Ucha farmhouse, while returning down Sarn yr Offeiriad (the Priest's Path) are the moss-covered walls of the tiny Cae'r Lloiau [Calves' field] cottage. Yet in the 1841, five families, a total of 35 people, lived in these houses.

The Wynns of Gwydir had bought Bryn Coch farm by 1647. To either side lay Hafod Fraith farm, at that time owned by the Cors y Gedol estate in Merioneth, which later became part of the Mostyn estate. Bryn Coch extended down to the Afon Llugwy, though in the eighteenth century, Dol Bryncoch between the old road and the river to the east was part of Glynn farm, reached via stepping stones. Above Bryn Coch was a large area of rough pasture, Llwyn Graeanig attached to Bwlch Cynnyd farm in Dolwyddelan.

By 1724, Bryn Coch had been divided into two. The lower part, Bryn Coch issa, comprised 54 acres: though the farmhouse became known as Cae Coedyn – the name first appeared in 1766, when a rental of the Gwydir estate listed 'a moiety [i.e. half] of Bryn Coch, alias Cae Coedun'. In the 1785 Gwydir estate map of Bryn Coch, the Cae Coedyn farmhouse is in field D1. The tenant at this time was the widow of Morris Rogers, who had just died. Field D5 was called Cae Ysgubor: the building shown is Ysguborwen [white barn], which was converted into a dwelling around this time. Ysguborwen had become the farmhouse for Bryn Coch Issa by 1792, and two years later the first baptism was recorded here, when a son Morris was born to Owen and Margaret Roberts. Between Cae Coedyn and Ysguborwen was another building, Lletty'r petris [dwelling of the partridge]. There is no record of this being a dwelling house, but for nearly a century after 1760, two families lived at Cae Coedyn – perhaps one of them here?

Bryn Coch Ucha farm had 173 acres of land in 1785; the farmhouse is shown in field A1, 'House and gweirglodd y ty [house hay-meadow]' and is just above the modern track to Rhos Quarry. The building in A5, Cae'r Lloiau, is the ruin on the left going up Sarn yr Offeiriad [the Priest's path] between Pont Cyfyng and Dolwyddelan and was once a cottage. We first hear of it in the Capel

Curig baptism records in 1771, though it is hard to imagine that a family – at times seven people including a lodger - could live in such a tiny place.



1785 Gwydir estate map of Bryn Coch

A. Bryn Coch ucha	D Cae Coedyn/Bryn Coch issa
1. House & Gweirglodd y ty	1. Cae'r ty
2. Tuin yr Adar	2. Cae Llawry
3. Cae'r Gadlais	3. Cae Lloye
4. Buarth Cae'r Lloiau	4. Coed
5. Caeau'r Lloiau	5. Cae Scubor
6. Cae Newydd	6. Cae bach
7. T drym	7. Cae newydd
8. Y Dalffos	8. Cae Scubor bach
	9. Llety'r Pettris
	10. Bryn
	11. Lletty'r Pettris bach
	12. Gweirglodd
<i>Total 173 acres</i>	<i>Total 54 acres including meadows</i>

Ysguborwen and Cae Coedyn were very much involved in the early spread of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism in Capel Curig. Tradition has it that preaching began in Ysguborwen around 1785, under the auspices of the Dolwyddelan Methodists. Ten or twelve joined the group at this time, including in the 1790s Owen Evans and his wife Mary Williams, who were living on a smallholding at Ty'n y coed. Meetings were held in their cottage, but they were forced to move when the tenancy of Ty'n y coed changed hands. They were then at Dol Bryncoch for a few years, where the Methodist cause began to flag until rejuvenated by the 1818 Beddgelert religious revival.

Owen and Mary finally moved to Cae Coedyn, where most Methodist baptisms took place between 1819 and 1829, until Salem Chapel was built near the centre of Capel Curg in 1829; ministers travelled from Bethesda, Llangwm, Denbigh and Bala to perform the ceremony.



Cae Coedyn, the lower part of Bryn Coch

Peter Smith

Known dates	The Roberts family of Ysguborwen
1794	Owen Roberts (d1799) = Margaret (farmer at Cae Coedyn in 1806)
Lived Ysguborwen between 1818-1850	1. Mary Davies = Morris Roberts (1794-1873) = 2. Margaret Isaac (d1879)
Lived Ysguborwen <1861-1892	Margaret (b1818) Owen (b1820) David (1838-70) Griffith (1841-56) John Roberts (1832-92) = Elizabeth (d1881) Griffith (b Cae Coedyn 1858) David (b1862) Catherine (b1866) Rhys (b1871) Alice (b1875) Margaret (b1864) Morris Roberts (1874-1943) Daniel (1860-90) Jane Ellen Roberts (1869-1951) Owen (b1877) David Owen Roberts (1897-1917) <i>Family in USA</i>
Lived Ysguborwen till after 1901	

From the 1810s to the 1840s, at least two houses at Cae Coedyn were also occupied by a rapid succession of sub-tenants including farm labourers, a carpenter and a butcher, while after 1818 the farmer Morris Roberts and his first wife Mary Davies lived in Ysguborwen. In 1841, Morris Roberts was still farming Cae Coedyn but living at Ysguborwen with his second wife Margaret Isaacs and their three sons. By 1851 they had transferred to the farmhouse at Cae Coedyn. At this point, the Cae Coedyn portion of Bryn Coch farm still had 54 acres of land, but by 1871 the farm was reduced to 42 acres due to the planting of woodland by the Gwydir estate. A valuation of the Gwydir estate in 1861 valued the buildings on Cae Coedyn/Bryn Coch Issa at just £50 (Cae

Coedyn and Ysguborwen dwelling houses at £15 each, a back kitchen £5, turf shed £5, and cowhouse £10. Morris Roberts died in 1873 aged 80, when his goods were valued at under £100, and Margaret in 1879. After their deaths, Cae Coedyn, which needed considerable repairs, was abandoned - presumably no longer viable as a farm.



Ysguborwen today

Peter Smith

Morris and Margaret's eldest son John Roberts was living with his parents at Cae Coedyn in 1851 and working as a quarryman. For a period, Ysguborwen was unoccupied. John married his wife Elizabeth a few years later and their first child, Griffith, was born at Cae Coedyn in 1858. After this, they re-occupied Ysguborwen where they raised a further nine children. None of the children seem to have attended school before the 1872 Education Act provided free education and a new school in Capel Curig. After Elizabeth's death in 1888 and John's in 1892, their 22-year-old daughter Jane Ellen became the household head as the oldest child remaining at home. Living with her were her younger quarryman brother Morris, a nephew John Morris, and a boarder David Owen, also a quarryman. In 1897, Jane, still unmarried, bore a son David Owen Roberts.



Morris Roberts, Ysguborwen, emigrated to the USA in 1894

As soon as he was 21, Morris Roberts left Ysguborwen to emigrate to the United States, travelling on the SS Germanic from Liverpool with a single piece of baggage and sharing a cabin with seven other emigrants. He headed for the north-eastern state of Vermont, where his aunt Catherine (his mother's sister) had settled around 1860 after running away from home at Cwm Dyli, in Beddgelert parish to marry the hired hand David Roberts. Morris Roberts put down roots in the slate-quarrying village of West Paulet, where he married another Welsh emigrant, Elizabeth Griffiths Roberts. Buried with them in Vermont is David Roberts, Capel Curig, 1888-1915, possibly a nephew following in Morris's footsteps. Morris and Elizabeth Roberts' descendants now live in the US, including a great-granddaughter Kim Davies Fernalt. (Thanks go to Elsbeth Pears for supplying this information about her great-uncle Morris Roberts.)

After Morris left for America, another quarryman brother, Rhys, moved in with Jane Ellen at Ysguborwen, while their youngest brother Owen migrated to south Wales. By 1911, Jane, her son David Owen, and brother Rhys had left Ysguborwen to live in Bryn Llys Cottages, near the Bryn Tyrch Inn. This was the last time Ysguborwen was inhabited. During the First World War, David Owen Roberts was one of several young men from Bryn Llys who joined the army. Sadly, he was killed in the first battle of Gaza in 1917, aged 20, together with his schoolfriend and neighbour Private Matthew Hughes. They both joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and were involved in the Egypt Expeditionary Force attempting to dislodge the Ottoman Turks from Palestine and capture Jerusalem. Their bodies were never recovered and they are commemorated on the Jerusalem memorial. Both young men are listed on the North Wales Heroes' Memorial in Bangor, and David Owen Roberts is remembered in St Julitta's churchyard on the same gravestone as his uncle Rhys Roberts, Ysguborwen.



Ysguborwen after
abandonment in the early
20th century



Ruins of Bryn Coch Ucha

Frances Richardson

The decline and abandonment of Bryn Coch ucha follows a similar story. From the 1840s if not earlier, the farm was held by Thomas Williams and his wife Mary. They were assisted initially by two adult daughters, Mary and Jane, and a 14-year-old agricultural labourer Richard Roderick. After Thomas Williams died aged 75 in 1856, the widowed Mary carried on the farm for another 15 years till her death in 1869, aged 81, helped by her daughter Anne and her husband David Jones. They took the farm over after Mary's death, but when Anne also died the following year, David Jones, who was 18 years his wife's junior, continued with the help of his stepson William Prichard. David Jones remarried in the 1870s – tragically the couple's first baby, Grace, died at the age of one. After this, David and Jane Jones left Bryn Coch Ucha farm. John Williams, farmer of half of Rhos y golcerth took over Bryn Coch ucha, Bryn Coch issa/Cae Coedyn, and the neighbouring farm of Cerrig Gwynnion in 1880, and all the farmhouses were abandoned.



The remains of Cae'r Lloiau beside Sarn yr Offeiriad

Surprisingly, it was the tiny cottage of Cae'r Lloiau on Bryn Coch Ucha land that was the last home on Bryn Coch farm to be abandoned. It was the abode of labourers and quarrymen, and given its lack of comforts, was probably used as a last resort when no other home could be found. It was empty in 1851 but reoccupied in 1861 by Elizabeth Owens, a stocking weaver living with her five children and a quarryman boarder: her sons William aged 14 and Hugh aged 12 also worked in the quarry. In 1870 the cottage was again vacant, but from 1880-1920, the tenant was Ann Hughes, who lived there with her husband quarryman Morgan Thomas. Conditions must have been hard, and by 1920 the rent was only one shilling a year. The couple eventually moved to Ty'r Bont opposite Pont Cyffing, where Morgan died in 1921. Cae'r Lloiau too now lay deserted.

Frances Richardson