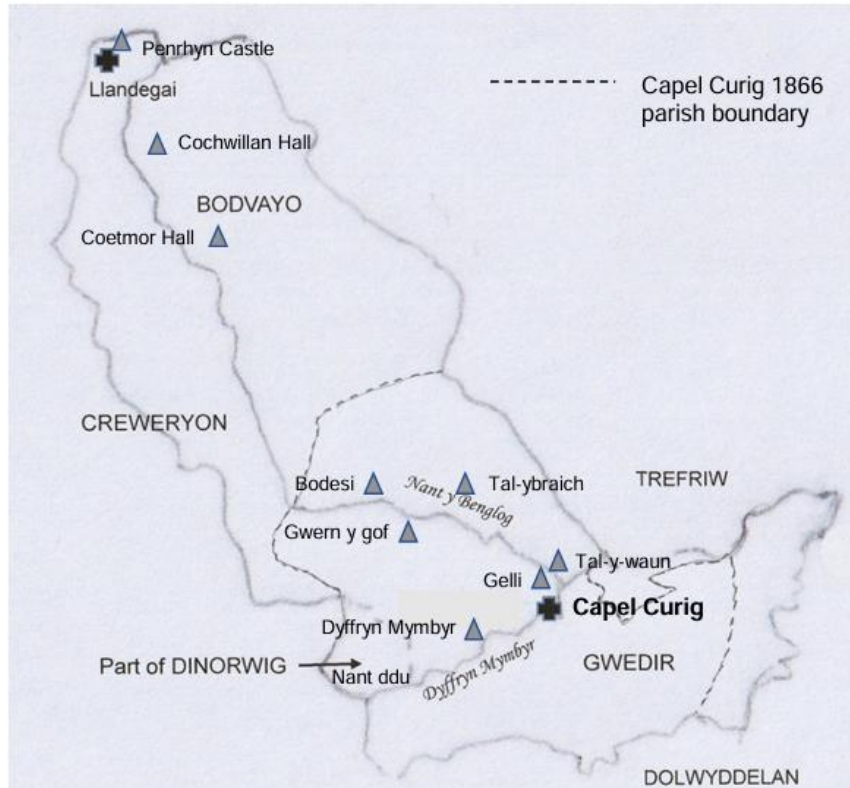


Capel Curig in the later Middle Ages

The place-name Capel Curig didn't exist before the sixteenth century. We think that Capel Curig (Curig's Chapel), now St Julitta's Church, was probably built in the 1540s, and this is also the first time any reference has been found to Capel Curig as a place-name. The chapel was built at the southern extremity of Llandegai parish, and remained a chapelry of Llandegai till 1866, when the new ecclesiastical parish of Capel Curig was created. This exploration of Capel Curig in the years 1350 to around 1500 focuses on the area covered by the 1866 parish.



Capel Curig parish and its medieval townships

Until the seventeenth century the civil unit for landownership in Gwynedd was not the parish but the township - created in twelfth and thirteenth centuries by the Welsh princes. Most land was held by kinship groups – like mini-clans – known as *gwelïau* and *gafaelion*. These were a mix of free tenant kindreds holding their land directly from the prince for a small annual rent, or bond/serf tenants who owed much heavier rents and services and were not free to leave the land. Demesne land was not tenanted, but farmed to provide food for the prince, his court and army. Because land was held by the kindred, it could not be bought and sold. On the death of a male member of the kindred, his land was divided between his sons or other male relatives.

After the English conquest of Gwynedd by Edward I in 1282, this system of Welsh landholding was retained, with the English king replacing the Welsh prince as the ultimate landowner. The first surviving survey describing the townships and landholding in Caernarfonshire was the Record of Caernarvon, drawn up in 1352. Four townships extended into the Capel Curig area. Creweryon (later called Cororion) was coterminous with the pre-1866 parish of Llandegai, which included most of the Glyderau between Dyffryn Mymbyr and Nant y Benglog. The upper reaches of Dyffryn Mymbyr west of Nant Ddu were however in Dinorwig township centred on Dolbadarn Castle, where the serfs belonged to the prince.

The northern side of Nant y Benglog up to the summits of Carnedd Llewelyn and Carnedd Dafydd was part of Bodvayo township, covering much the same area as the old parish of Llanllechid. The rest of the land in Capel Curig east of the chapel and on the flanks of Moel Siabod in the Mymbyr valley formed part of Gwedir township, while Trefriw township lay to the north-east.

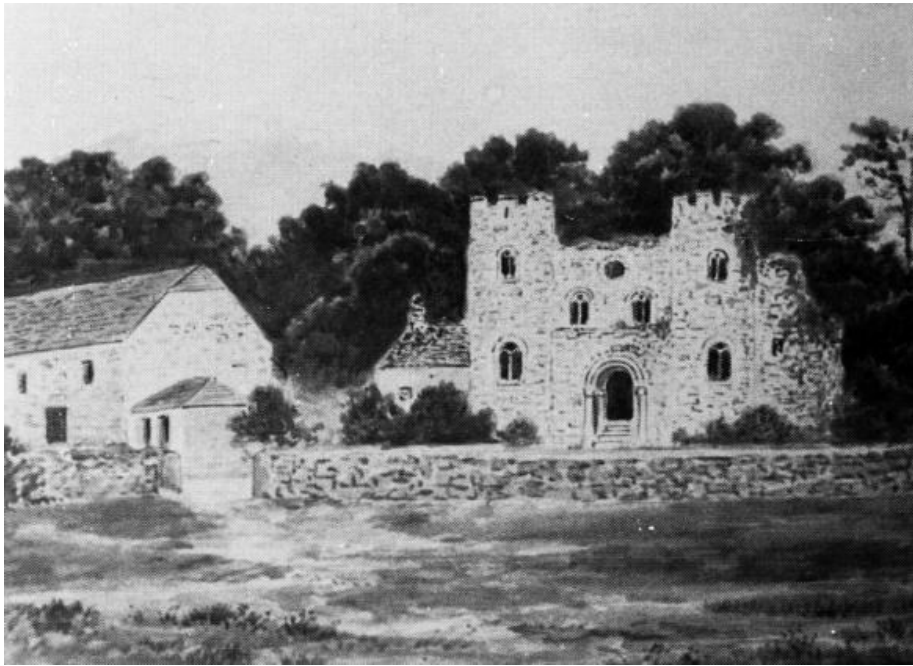
Creweryon and Dinorwig townships

In 1352, there were ten free *gafaelion* kinship groups in Creweryon. We don't know whether each occupied a discrete area of land, or whether the upland areas around Capel Curig were originally summer pastures for various kindred with their main holdings in the Ogwen valley and coastal area around Llandegai. We do know that in the late fourteenth century, Gelli Manach (later Gelli farm in Capel Curig) was held by Gruffudd ap Gwilym of Nant in Flintshire. He had acquired half of Gafael Goronwy ab Ednyfed in Creweryon centred around the current Penrhyn Castle, by marrying its heiress Generis ferch Madog. According to the Record of Caernarvon, this *gafael* was held on privileged terms typical of grants by the Welsh princes to their ministers - rent-free, but with a requirement to go on horseback with the lord in his war at their own cost for forty days and afterwards at the cost of the lord for all other services. Gruffudd and Generis's eldest son inherited the Flintshire lands, but their second son, Gwilym ap Gruffudd, is known as the founder of the Penrhyn estate. He consolidated the family's position in Creweryon through his first marriage, with Morfudd ferch Goronwy of Penmynydd, who was heiress of the remainder of Gafael Goronwy ab Ednyfed. After first siding with Owain Glyndwr's rebellion, he was one of the first Welsh gentry to submit to the Crown, and in 1407 was given a licence to buy back his forfeited Caernarfonshire lands, as well as the lands of 27 rebels and those of his Tudur relatives in Anglesey. He was given special permission in 1413 to marry an English heiress, Joan Stanley, daughter of Sir William Stanley of Hooton in Cheshire, and used her money to build up a large estate in 35 Caernarfonshire and Anglesey townships. He was also granted English denizenship [legal rights of English citizens], which allowed him to use English inheritance laws to ensure that the Penrhyn estate would pass intact to his eldest son with Joan.

When Gwilym died in 1431, he was probably the richest man in north Wales. Nevertheless, his widow Joan and their son William Griffith continued to expand the Penrhyn estate by buying out hereditary freeholders, including Gwern y Go in Capel Curig. Dyffryn Mymbyr was evidently held by several families, for in 1445, William bought the lands and tenements of Ieuan ap Blethyn Llwyd in Dyffryn Mymbyr, which Ieuan had inherited from Gwilym ap Ieuan ap Gruffudd Goch. This was followed in 1448 by Joan's purchase from Weirfill ferch Cynwrig ap Morus of her dower lands, after the death of her husband Dafydd ap Gruffudd ap Dafydd. Just ten days later, her four sons, William, Gruffudd, Rhys and Madog ap Dafydd also sold their share of Dyffryn Mymbyr to Joan.

At this time, land to the west of Nant ddu in Dyffryn Mymbyr, known as Nant ddu and Craig y Llefrey, was part of Dinorwig township in the parish of Llanberis. The lessees of Dyffryn Mymbyr leased three quarters of this holding during the 1550s and 1560s; the fourth part was purchased in 1615 by the then owner of Dyffryn Mymbyr, Simon Thelwall Esq. of Plas y Ward near Ruthin, and added to the farm. As a result, the land between Nant ddu and the Afon Mymbyr flowing from Llyn Cwmffynnon was transferred from Llanberis to Llandegai parish and thus became part of Capel Curig.

Bodvayo township



Coetmor Hall in Bethesda, the medieval home of the Coetmors who owned land in Nant y Benglog

Bodvayo comprised eight free *gafaelion*, but it is clear that the Capel Curig section of the township formed part of Gafael Iarddur. In 1352, the *gafael* was held by Gwilym ap Gruffudd, Madog ap Dafydd and other co-heirs of Iarddur, paying a rent to the Crown of 13 shillings and 8 pence a year. By the sixteenth century, Tal-y-waun, Bodesi and Tal-y-Llyn Ogwen belonged to the Coetmors of Coetmor Hall, one of only two remaining families directly descended from Iarddur by the male line. Their inheritance had been much greater in the fifteenth century, when the head of the family, Rhys Vychan, served Richard III as squire of the body, and was made a free denizen of England. This enabled him to circumvent Welsh land laws and purchase lands in Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, and Flintshire, plus three English manors. But after fighting with Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth where Richard was killed, Rhys forfeited nearly all his lands to supporters of the new king, Henry VII, except those in Bodvayo.

In 1389, Tal-y-braich and Glan Llugwy belonged to Robin ap Gruffudd ap Gwilym ap Gruffudd of Cochwillan, younger brother of Gwilym ap Gruffudd, the founder of the Penrhyn estate. There are conflicting stories about how he acquired this land. According to an early seventeenth-century manuscript, Iarddur, the founder of Gafael Iarddur in the twelfth century, had two sons, Madog and Iorwerth. As tenants holding directly from the Welsh prince, they were obliged to go to war with the prince if required. When Iorwerth refused, his lands were confiscated and given to his brother. Later, out of affection for his brother, Madog restored some of his lands to Iorwerth. Robin ap Gruffudd acquired the Cochwillan estate in Bodvayo by marrying Angharad, heiress in the sixth generation of the line descended from Iorwerth ab Iarddur. Alternatively, it has been suggested that Robin's father had inherited the Bodvayo lands through his grandmother Eva, another descendant of Iarddur.



Cochwillan Hall

In 1507, Henry VII freed the bondsmen and introduced English land law in north Wales, which allowed land to be bought and sold, as well as being inherited by the eldest son, which facilitated the creation of gentry estates. By this time however, all the Capel Curig land in the medieval townships of Creweryon and Bodvayo was already owned by just three estates – Penrhyn, Cochwillan and Coetmor. The Cochwillan estate became part of the Penrhyn estate in the early seventeenth century, and the Coetmor estate in the early nineteenth century.

Gwedir township

Gwedir was a mixed township containing free, bond, and demesne land. The founders of the three free *gwelïau* mentioned in the Record of Caernarvon, Cyfnerth, Iorwerth, and Iarddur ap Rhyfon, were grandsons of Nefydd Hardd [the hansom] of Nantconwy, who was infamous for the murder of Prince Idwal, the son of Owain Gwynedd. According to the chronicles, Idwal was given by his father to be fostered by Nefydd, who incited his son Dunod to kill the young prince at Llyn Idwal. As a result of this atrocity, Nefydd and his posterity were degraded from gentry to bondsmen, but in an attempt to expiate Idwal's murder, Nefydd's son Rhyfon gave lands to Llanrwst church and his posterity were restored to free status. (Other descendants of Nefydd Hardd in Dolwyddelan remained bondsmen.)

The Gwedir holdings of *gwelyau* Cyfnerth, Iorwerth and Iarddur ap Rhyfon were only part of the wider lands held by their kindred, which extended into the Denbighshire townships of Llanrwst and Garthgyfanedd, Caerhebenewith, and Prees [Trebyrs, later part of Ysbyty Ifan parish]. By the mid-fourteenth century, five or six generations after the *gwelyau* were founded, the growth of the kindred had led to considerable sub-division of their patrimony. Many free kinsmen still held small amounts of land in Denbighshire, and not all the *gwely* heirs for Gwedir township would have been resident. Some Gwedir freeholders also held land in Cwmlannerch township, which stretched from the Afon Llugwy north to the later Gwydir Castle. One was Gruffudd ap Dafydd Goch, son of an illegitimate son of Dafydd, the last of the Welsh princes. Gruffudd held land in Anglesey and Penmachno but gained most of his land in Nantconwy through marrying Margaret ferch Tudur ap Iorwerth, a descendant of the Gwedir gwely founder Cyfnerth ap Rhyfon. Her grandfather Iorwerth had been a senior official of the Welsh prince Gruffudd ap Llewelyn, who granted him half of Cwmlannerch township, now mostly in Betws-y-coed parish. As the major freeholder in Nantconwy, Gruffudd ap Dafydd Goch was called on to act as foreman of the Nantconwy jury taking evidence about landholdings for the Record of Caernarvon. His wonderful stone effigy in St Michael's Church, Betws-y-coed, dressed as

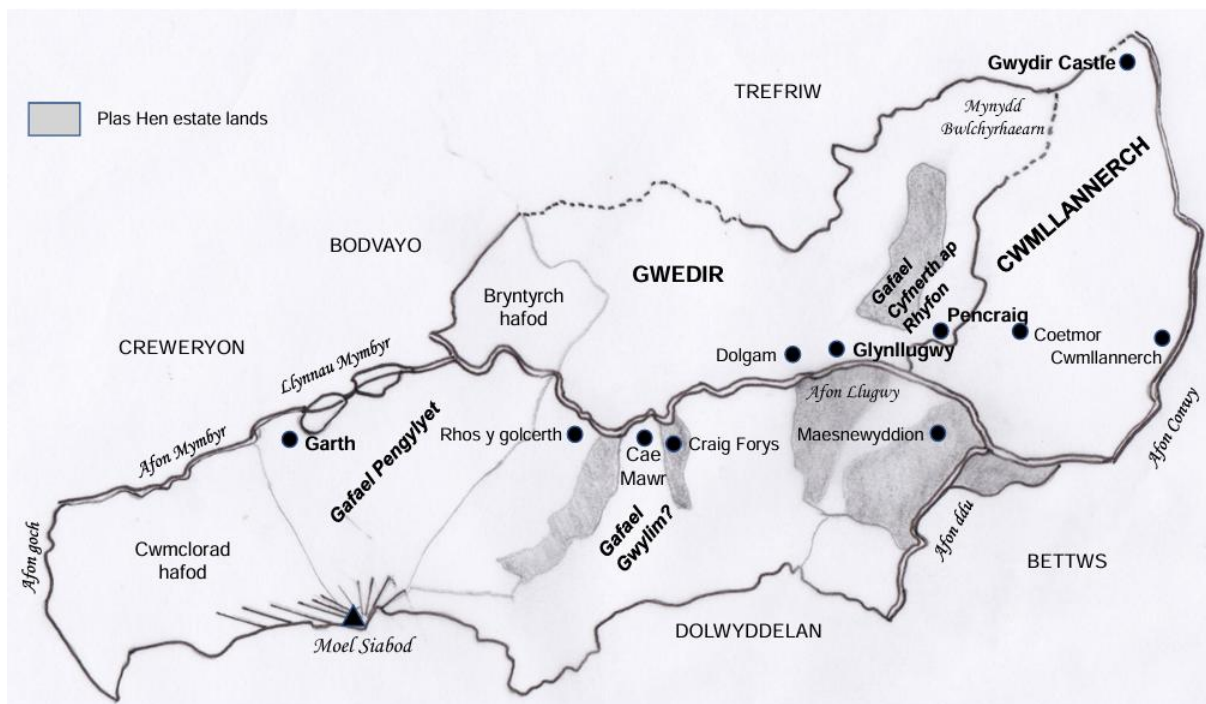
an esquire, suggests that he performed military service for Edward I in his Scottish or French wars, as did many other Welshmen.



Gruffudd ap Dafydd Goch's effigy in St Michael's Church, Betws-y-coed

The core of Gwely Cyfnerth ap Rhyfon holdings in which Gruffudd and Margaret had a share probably lay around Glynllugwy (modern Glyn farm). The last of their descendants to occupy Glynllugwy was Robert ap Owen ap Rheinalt in the 1590s. It was then acquired by Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and added to the Gwydir estate. Pencraig, now in Capel Curig parish, was the site of the Cwmlannerch free tenants' mill in 1352, though it may have been part of Gwely Cyfnerth ap Rhyfon in Gwedir township. Sir John Wynn of Gwydir tells us that by the late fifteenth century, Pencraig land was vacant, possibly because the last free tenant had been unable to pay his modest rent to the Crown.

The whereabouts of the other two free gwelïau in Gwedir are less clear, but probably comprised Rhos y Golcaeth and Cae Gwegi and an area from Maesnewyddion to Cerrig Gwnion to the south of the Afon Llugwy, all of which were freehold land in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Shaded areas on the map belonged to the Plas Hen estate in the seventeenth century, but how this estate came to own freehold land in Capel Curig is unclear.



Gwedir and Cwmlannerch townships in 1352

Gwedir township also included two bond *gafaelion* - Gafael Pengylyet and Gafael Willym ap Ruathlan – plus the Crown *hafodydd* of Cwmclorad and Bryntyrch. These *hafodydd* were summer pastures which had formerly been part of the demesne lands of the Welsh princes used for rearing cattle. By 1352, they had been leased out, Bryntyrch to Robert Pollard the chamberlain of North Wales, and Cwmclorad, which was capable of feeding 40 cattle, to John of Chirbury, who also leased the ten *hafodydd* attached to Dolwyddelan Castle.

One area of bond land, Gafael Pengylyet, constituted Bryn Engan and Garth farms on the north flank of Moel Siabod. This was the most marginal land in Capel Curig occupied year-round. In 1352, it was vacant through lack of tenants: the previous bond occupants had either died during the Black Death, or absconded to find better farms elsewhere. The area was periodically leased out by the Crown during the fifteenth century but was once again vacant in the late 1400s when the founder of the Gwydir estate, Maredudd ap Ieuan, bought a sub-lease of Gafael Pengylyet and of Dolwyddelan. He brought in settlers to re-tenant his farms and to form a private militia for the defence of Nantconwy against the incursions of robbers from Ysbyty Ifan. One of these settlers was Hoell ap Evan ap Pellyn, a tall Denbighshire archer, who became the tenant farmer of Garth.

Legend also surrounds Dafydd goch ab Einion ab Eide, one of the 1352 heirs of the other Gwedir bond *gafael*, Gafael Gwilym ap Rhiwallon, which may have included modern Cae Mawr. Dafydd's grandfather Eide had been an *uchelwr* (high-born), and he himself had probably held land in Llanrwst. But after committing murder he became a fugitive and forfeited his patrimony, before resurfacing as a bond tenant in Capel Curig.

So we can see that in 1352, nearly all of Capel Curig was held by independent Welsh freeholders, with a few areas of more marginal Crown land used as summer pastures or bond/serf holdings. Over time, both free and bond lands were bought by emerging local landowners, till by 1840, 52% of Capel Curig belonged to the Penrhyn estate and 42% to the Gwydir estate. How this came about is another story.

Frances Richardson