

The House at the Wellspring

**A History of Ty'n y Ffynnon
House 1760 -2015**



Robert Jeffrey Southall

Text Copyright © RJ Southall 2017

Introduction

Ty'n y Ffynnon is a small farmstead situated on the lower slopes of Mynydd Machen just below Penrhiw Warren at the bottom of the Sirhowy Valley just before it joins the Ebbw Valley at Crosskeys. It appears to have always been a small land holding rarely exceeding 17 acres since it was established as a farmstead in the late 18th, or early 19th, Century. The name Ty'n y Ffynnon may be translated as Spring House, Fountain House or Well House depending upon location, in this case there is a well or spring located just behind the house so Wellspring House best describes it.

The earliest reference to the location comes from a Tredegar Estate map dated 1760. At this time there were no buildings of any kind on any of the land holdings shown on the map below and it is assumed that they were rented out as pasture for animals. E1 on the map was later incorporated into nearby Gelli Ffynniog which was already in existence at this time. D1 on the map, which later became Ty'y Ffynnon farm, was at this time a single 14 acre field tenanted by Evan Thomas. The three parcels of land labelled C1, C2 and C3 were three small fields totalling 6 acres tenanted by David John. It is assumed that C2 would later become the location for Pen Heol Sais house whereas Pen Heol Sais cottage was built on the waste adjacent to the trackway between C2 and D1. It also seems likely that whoever tenanted these fields also have commoner's rights to graze on the Curtain Mountain, which was the name of Mynydd Machen at this time.

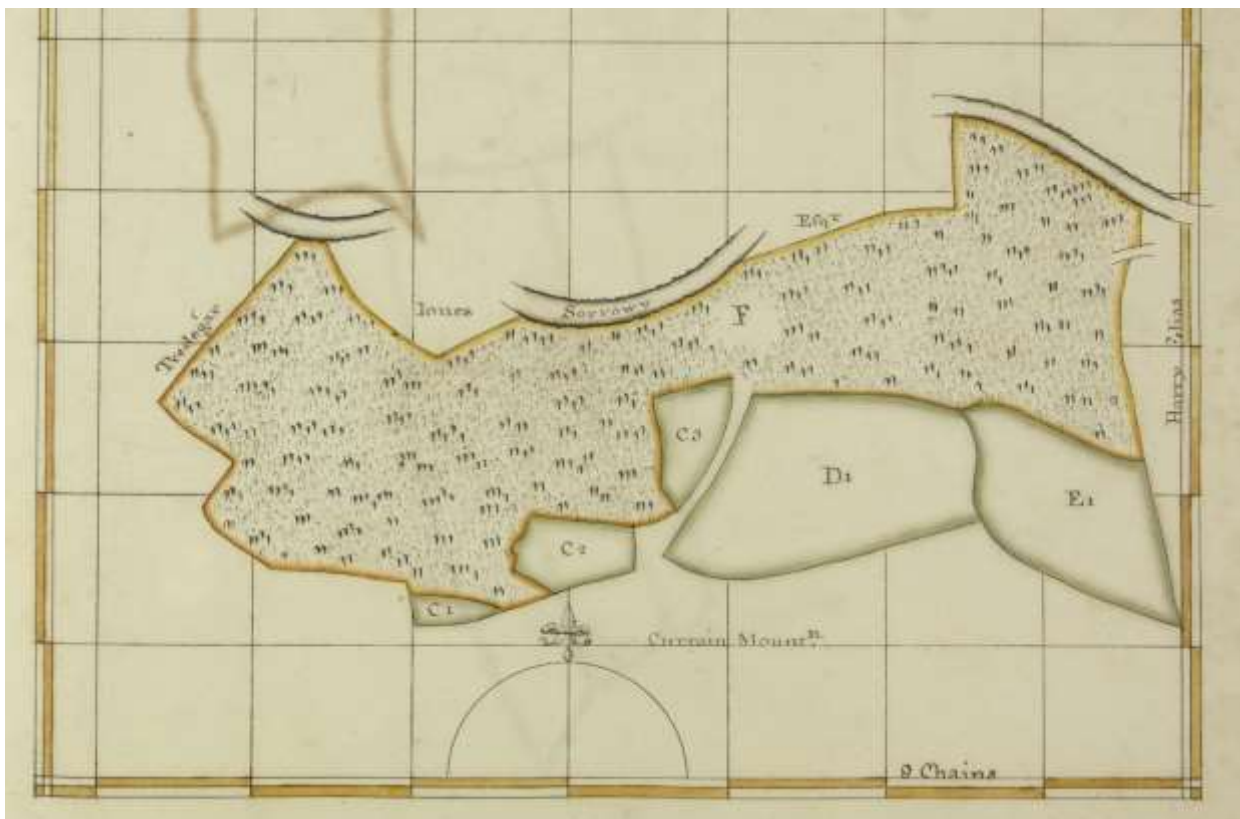


Figure 1 Tredegar Estate map dated 1760 showing the location of Ty'n Y Ffynnon (D1) and Pen Heol Sais (C2) (Robert Snell NLW)

It is currently not known when the farmhouse at Ty'n y Ffynnon was first constructed although it seems likely to have been around 1800. Using land tax records it has been possible to trace the property which was already inhabited by William Howells in 1828 back to 1804. In the land tax records for the parish of Machen of that year a small property owned by Sir Charles Morgan of Tredegar is being tenanted by Henry Absalom with a land tax value of 3s, 10 ½d. Henry, or Harry, continued to hold the tenancy until at least 1819 and by the 1828 land tax assessment the property is referred to as 'Late Harry Absalom' the occupier now being William Howells who would remain tenant at Tyn y Ffynnon until the 1880s.



Figure 2: Ty'n y Ffynnon farmhouse prior to modernisation in the early 2000s (© Christine Langridge)

The farmhouse at Ty'n Y Ffynnon

To my knowledge no historical assessment has taken place at this location as the house has not been considered either ancient or unique, however it is attractive and worthy of attention. Author and architectural historian Paul R Davis provided the following assessment of the house based on the following photographic evidence:

The house does not look convincingly earlier than 1800. Nevertheless it an attractive looking house, with nice stone tiled roof. It seems to have been a typical early 19th century direct-entry dwelling with chimneys on both gables (the RH and middle one seem to mark the extent of the original house). Subsequently it seems that an extension was built to the left with another

chimney and an unsymmetrical roofline. The second photo shows a lean-to extension (possibly a dairy) at the rear which overlaps the lop-sided end bit, so is either contemporary, or a further addition. The only hint of an earlier origin is the central chimney stack, which is positioned some distance away from the central window, suggesting that the FP wall is fairly thick

Christine Langridge whose family once lived at Tyn y Ffynnon has also given us a description of the interior of the house:

Downstairs there was a kitchen, living room and door leading to a small dairy. Next to the dairy was a barn (far right) and then outside a so called toilet! Opposite the farm house were outbuildings which could have been a Blacksmith's shop and barn. There was a pig's cot in garden.

The 1841 census

The first census does not name Ty'n y Ffynnon but given its location in Waunfawr next to Henry Williams at Gelli Ffyniog farm it is not difficult to identify. William Howell (45) who had been at the property since at least 1828, is described as a clerk in works, his wife Rachel (55) and sons Daniel (15) and David (13). Also resident is Sarah Joseph a 15 year old live-in female servant.

Ty'n y Ffynnon.			
Howell William	378 Waun	Meadow	1 3 2 - 46
	394 Ffynniog	Pasture	- 3 24 - 16
	395 blotch	Meadow	1 - 15 - 2
	396 bae dan yr heol	Meadow	2 - 7 - 46
	401 Cae Ffiont	Arable	3 1 24 - 56
	402 bae Draining	()	2 3 21 - 56
	403 Cae uchaf	Meadow	2 1 39 - 46
	404 ()	Arable	1 1 22 - 26
	405 Cae bilog	Pasture	1 2 33 - 46
			117 2 33 + 1 15
Phillips Margaret	390 Cottage and garden		- 2 16
Thomas Thomas	400 ()		- 1 21

Figure 3: The tithe apportionment for Ty'n y Ffynnon and Pen Heol Sais house and cottage (Tithe apportionment for Parish of Machen NLW)

Tithe Apportionment of 1842

At the time of the Machen tithe map in 1842 Ty'n y Ffynnon was a 17 acre farm owned by Sir Charles Morgan of Tredegar and tenanted by William



Figure 4 Ty Yn Y Ffynnon from the Machen Tithe map of 1841 (NLW)

Howell. The farm has eight fields and consist of three meadows, two pastures and three arable. All the fields are named with Waun being a 'meadow', Cae Dan y Heol 'field below the road', Cae Hwnt the 'further field', Cae Drainog the 'hedgehog field', Cae Bilwg the 'billhook field', Cae Ucha, the 'upper field' which is split into two parcels of meadow and pasture and finally 'clotch' which doesn't seem to have a translation.

The Howell Family's Tenure at Ty'n y Ffynnon

Thankfully the 1851 census called for more personal information about the population and as such we can now find out a little more about William Howells and his family. William Howell is aged 55 in 1851 suggesting that he had been born in 1795 or 96. His birthplace is given as the Hamlet of Rhydygwern, which is that part of the parish of Machen which was across the River Rhymney in the old county of Glamorganshire. William is described as a farmer of 17 acres of land. William's wife Rachel was aged 67 at the 1851 census and twelve years older than her husband. She had been born around 1784 in the nearby parish of Mynyddislwyn. Their children had all reached adulthood by 1851 with Daniel, aged 25, employed as a coal banker in a nearby colliery and younger son David aged 22 employed on the farm. Also in residence at this time was Ann Fear an eighteen year old serving girl who would have been put to domestic tasks around the house.



Figure 5: The rear of Tyn y Ffynnon farmhouse showing the dairy (© Christine Langridge)



Figure 6a the arrangement of buildings at Ty yn y Ffynnon farmstead in 1841 (Machen tithe map NLW)



Figure 6b the arrangement of buildings at Ty yn y Ffynnon farmstead in 1875 (NLS OS map Monmouthshire XXVII Published: 1885)

There was also an older son called William had been born in Machen in 1824 when his father was employed as a mason. Evidence from non-conformist and non-parochial registers gives William's date of birth as 22 July 1824 and also provides a record that he was baptised into the

Calvinistic Methodists at Penuel Chapel at Tredegar on 3 October 1824. The Calvinistic Methodists, sometimes known as Welsh Presbyterians, were once prominent in the south Wales valleys. Risca had its first Calvinistic Methodist chapel at Soar which was constructed the first decade of the nineteenth century. When the new building was built in around 1848 old Soar was divided into the three cottages which can still be seen today near the Darran Public house. The new chapel, named Zoar, was next to the Risca Urban District Council Offices, now the Risca Male Choir practice rooms, and was demolished in 1989. As if to confirm the family's commitment to the faith elder son David, born 3rd June 1822, was baptised into the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists at Zoar on 2 Aug 1828 and younger son Daniel, born March 1826, was also baptised at Zoar on 16 of April of that year. The Howells were obviously full of zeal for Calvinistic Methodism at this time.



Figure 7: the former Zoar Chapel Risca, now three private houses (© Robert Jeffrey Southall)

By 1851 William the younger was already married, to another Ann, and resident near Risca Bridge in Pontymister, although at this time in the parish of Machen. He was employed as a tailor and would later own his own tailor and drapery shop near Dr Robathan's Grove House in Risca, which at that time lay within the parish of Machen. It seems likely that at the time of the 1841 census he was a journeyman serving his apprenticeship in various tailors' shops around south Wales. William Howell the younger would remain at Risca and work within his profession of tailor and draper until the late 1880s.

By the 1861 census William Howells senior is 65 years old and described as a farmer of 28 acres. His wife Rachel is now 77 years old and their younger son David, a 27 year old farmer's son, must have been responsible for much of the hard labour on the farm. In addition a Mary Jones aged 28 was employed as a domestic servant no doubt to help the now aged Mrs Howell in the day to day running of the house. Younger son Daniel is by now absent but he reappears on the 1881 census as a 53 year old farmer at Green Meadow farm along with his wife Elizabeth (53) and sons Mathew (18), who was employed on the farm, and William (10) who was still at school. Daniel and Elizabeth must have married around 1862 as by the 1881 census their eldest is 18 years old. The family would remain at Cwmfelinfach and Daniel's death would be recorded in January 1911 at Newport when he would have been about 83 years old. The last time William Howells is conclusively named as residing at Tyn y Ffynnon is on the 1866 electoral register which reads 'William Howells, leasehold house & lands'. Ty'n y Ffynnon is not named on either the 1871 nor 1881 censuses. 'William Howell of Risca, land & house as tenant' does appear on the 1889 electoral register, however this is more likely to be William seniors eldest son William the younger, the draper and tailor of Risca, who continued his families tenancy of the house and farm, perhaps subleasing it to one of his sons.

The 1871 census returns for Lower Machen, which included parts of Risca on the eastern side of the Ebbw lists William Howells (46) tailor and draper, Risca Road near the Grove which is the present day Oxford House and the 1881 census features William Howells described as a Tailor & Draper living and working along with his large family at a house/shop called Chemist & Druggist (later called Myrtle Cottage) two doors from Dr Robathan at the Grove in Risca. The census reads as follows: William Howells (57) Tailor & Draper; Ann (52); Roda (21) Acting as servant; Minnie (13) acting as Servant; David (18) farmer; William (29) butcher; Arthur (13) nephew employed as errand boy and one boarder David Evans (21) a journeyman tailor from Bletherston Pembrokeshire. It is interestingly that William's 18 year old son David is described as a farmer and it would not be unreasonable to suggest that he was actually farming at Ty'n y Ffynnon and that the family had remained tenants following the elder William's death. This would certainly have been practical given that elder brother William (III) was a butcher and his uncle Daniel Howell also farmed at Green Meadow in Cwmfelinfach.

The Jones family

John Jones and his young family were at Ton Pleasant house in Cwmfelinfach at the time of the 1881 census and, given that the village was little more than a hamlet at this time, they would certainly have known Daniel Howells of Green Meadow farm. John Jones was born in 1851 high above Cwmfelinfach on Mynyddislwyn at Pant-y-trwyn farm. He was the son of William Jones and his wife Ann (nee James). William had farmed for a number of years at Glan-yr-Afon farm in the parish of Machen which was

actually just across Pont Lawrence Rees from Cwmfelinfach and there is evidence that his family had resided earlier in the century at Dyffryn Farm just down the Sirhowy valley near the present day village of Wattsville. The land tax records name a William Jones, probably John Jones's grandfather, at Dyffrin (sic) between 1805-1814 paying a land tax of 6 shillings.

John and Ruth (nee Thomas) were married in the July of 1871 but on the census of that year, which was obviously taken before their marriage, John was living with his sister and her husband, James and Mary Ann James, at Duffryn Farm and Ruth was with her family at Ochryth. Their first child Mary Ann was born in 1871 and according to her birth certificate she was born during the September at Penrhiwsais Upper Machen which was later known as Warren House and Cottage. Their second child Elizabeth was born February 1874 also at Penrhiwsais and they were at Ton Pleasant by 1881 census. The 1891 census was their first at Ty'n y Ffynnon, although there is evidence from electoral register that they were there by 1889. The 1891 census reads: John Jones a 39 year old 'plate layer,' his wife Ruth (38), their daughters Elizabeth (17) described as a dressmaker, Rhoda (14) employed as a pupil teacher, Myfanwy (12) a scholar and the youngest Gladys aged 2. In addition there were two sons Arthur (8) and Gwilym (6) who were both at school. John was employed as a platelayer maintaining the nearby railway lines.



Figure 8: Platelayers at work on the Mountsorrel branch line in Leicestershire (source: <http://heritage-centre.co.uk/visit-us/a-brief-history-of-the-railway/#jp-carousel-1665>)

Essentially platelayers were trackmen who maintained the railway track once it had been laid. They were usually employed in gangs with a given area of track ('length') to look after. They were responsible for all aspects of track maintenance such as replacing worn out rails or rotten sleepers,

packing to ensure a level track, weeding and clearance of the drains working in a gang of perhaps 8 or so men under the leadership of a ganger, looking after a certain 'length' of line. These men were literally the backbone of the railway, with little available to them in the way of mechanical assistance in those days and often involving arduous and uncomfortable work but without decent track, the railways could not run.

The 1901 census sees an enlarged Jones family with the addition of another son, named Jehoiada, aged 3. John is still employed as a platelayer and middle son Gwilym is employed as a railway porter however eldest son Arthur is now absent. Evidence from the electoral registers lists the Jones family at Ty'n y Ffynnon between 1889 and 1905 and after this time moved down closer to the railway line to live at Glandwr House, 4 Full Moon, Crosskeys which was a small community centred around the LNWR Risca to Tredegar railway line and the Full Moon public house. The 1911 census sees a much reduced Jones family with John, now aged 63, employed as a railway ganger, Ruth (61), middle son Gwilym aged 28 and now employed as an electrician in the colliery and youngest son Jehoiada aged 11 (which may be incorrect) now at school. It is possible that a house may have come with John's promotion to ganger which would explain the family moving down from Ty'n y Ffynnon to the side of the railway line. By the 1930s the family had relocated once again to a newer house, no doubt with all the modern conveniences at Nine Mile Point Road.



Figure 6 John Jones in his 80s with his sons Gwilym (left) and Arthur. The photograph was taken August 1932 at Nine Mile Point Road Wattsville. (© Christine Langridge)

Christine Langridge who is descended from John Jones takes up the story of what became of her family after moved from Ty'n y Ffynnon:

“John and Ruth had moved to Glandwr House, Full Moon by 1904. Between 1905 and 1912 they had lost all four of their daughters to TB. Between 1913 and 1917 they had moved to 48 Nine Mile Point Road where Ruth died in July of that year aged 65. In August 1920 John married Rachel Jones (nee Walters) at Pontypool. They lived at Pentre Grange, Goytre until the 1930 after which they are living at Brynawelon House, Ty Mawr Road, Rumney where John died 1st July 1940 aged 89. John and Ruth are buried at Twyn Gwyn Baptist Church on Mynyddislwyn. John and Ruth had three sons. Arthur the eldest was living in Tredegar on the 1901 census working on the railways. After the 1911 census he moved from Merthyr Tydfil with his wife and children to Bridgend where he died in 1968 aged 86. Gwilym, my Grandfather, lived at 50 Nine Mile Point Road where my mother was born. He worked as an Electrician at Nine Mile Point Colliery. Died in 1954 after marrying for a second time. My Grandmother Sarah died in 1944 at 50 Nine Mile Point Road. The youngest son Jehoiada moved with his father John to Goytre to become a farmer but moved to Newport after the First World War to run Belmont Dairies with his wife and daughter. He died in 1946 as a result of injuries sustained in the war.”

Following the departure of the Jones family a number of people, the Moseley's, Pettiford's and Stephens' all passed through Ty'n Y Ffynnon never staying more than a few years. George Moseley is listed on the electoral register between 1905 and 1907 and it is certainly this George who appears a resident of Bright Street Crosskeys on the 1901 census. George, who had been born 'George Brooks' in Risca in 1843 (1847?) was the stepson of William Moseley a collier who came to Risca from Frampton Cotteril in Gloucestershire in the 1840s and married George's recently widowed mother in 1848-49. At the time of the 1901 census he is described as a 58 year old widowed coalminer and hewer below ground. His family consists of his sons Alfred (25) and William (16) both coalminers and daughters Mary (21) and Martha (18) who are not described on the census as being employed so would have kept house for their father and brothers. The family had previously lived at Wattsville on the 1891 census. Why George Moseley chose to relocate up to Tyn y Ffynnon farm around 1904 will probably never be known. He may have chosen to retire from the pit, and it is possible that his large family may have accommodated this, or he may have lost his job through an accident in the pit which would have meant that he would also have lost his home in Bright Street and sought the nearest available accommodation. Evidence from the 1911 census though give us clues that George may have decided to leave the pit to try his hand at farming. This was something that his brother in law George Hoare had also aspired, resulting in him taking on the Pandy Farm at Crosskeys during the 1890s. The basis of this judgement is that George is describes himself as a farmer on this census. And, in addition Horace Jefferies in his history of Pandy Park the Home of Crosskeys RFC also points out that the first home ground the team played upon was 'Moseley's Field' at Newtown Crosskeys.

In 1911 George, aged 68, resides, along with his son William John (24) and Ellen Scott (62) a live in domestic servant, at Waterloo House Newtown Crosskeys. This house still exists and is situated between the old Monkey public house and Pont-y-cwmmmer Bridge, and just across the way, a little distance up the Ebbw Valley, was the old Pandy Farm still situated at this time in its river meadow. George's brother in law George Hoare the tenant had passed away in 1906 it is likely that George is renting and farming the land while his half-sister Margaret and her son Henry continued to reside in the farmhouse along with an aged aunt, a domestic servant and several lodgers.



Figure 7 the Pandy Farm at Crosskeys. The people in the photograph could be George Hoare and his wife Margaret (After Collins & Powell)

This is obviously all guess work but it does seem plausible that George would continue farming at the Pandy up to the time of his death in the late 1920s. Of course by this time the Old Pandy had a new role in the locality being well known as Pandy Park, referred to as 'George Hoare's Farm ' by Horace Jefferies, the home of Crosskeys Rugby Football Club.

MOSELEY George of Waterloo House Cross Keys **Monmouthshire**
died 16 May 1927 Probate **London** 6 July to William John
Moseley miner. Effects £108 14s. 6d.

George Moseley was not a wealthy man, as his probate above attests, but he may have been comfortable and contented with his lot, taking care of his animals on the Pandy meadows, drinking, carding and bargaining with his pals in the Tredegar Arms and watching Crosskeys RFC on the Pandy fields on a Saturday afternoon. Whatever the case he was 85 years of age at the time of his death and reaching this age was no mean feat in the mining valleys of south Wales where life was hard, and often short, in the early years of the twentieth century.

From 1907 to 1909 a William Pettiford is named as the resident of Tyn' Y Ffynnon farm. There are 3 William Pettifords on the 1901 census for Crosskeys from two different families, one being a father and son, and 2 on the 1911 census. These families both had their origins in the West of England, one at Portishead in Somerset and the other at Fairford in Gloucestershire with the latter being neighbours of George Moseley at Bright Street Crosskeys in 1901. Either family could have taken on Ty'n Y Ffynnon for this period of time but it seems most likely that it was Moseley's neighbour William Pettiford, a coalminer who was already 62 years old in 1901, with only an 18 year old daughter in tow who decided to spend his last few years scratching a living of sorts at the farm while drawing Lloyd George's recently introduced old age pension.

The 1911 census sees William Stephens, a 36 year old colliery weigher, originally from Grosmont near Abergavenny, at Ty'n y Ffynnon farm Nine Mile Point Crosskeys along with his wife Annie (30). Sons Gwyn (3) and Arthur (1), daughters Edith (1) and Olwen (11 months) and a live in domestic servant Blodwen Nash, aged 15 who would no doubt have been an essential help for Mrs Stephens. The family had moved to the farm in 1906 or early 1909 and would remain until 1915.

John Perry who tenanted Ty'n y Ffynnon between 1915 and 1926 had his origins in the West Country, this time at Penselwood which is situated at the meeting point of 3 counties, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire and no doubt he, like so many young men from the rural counties of the west of England, he had been drawn to the south Wales valleys with the promise of work in the rapidly expanding coal industry. On the 1891 and 1901 censuses John is employed as a coalminer and colliery timberman at Waunlwyd and Cwm in the Ebbw Vale area. However Elizabeth, John's wife of 25 years, they had married in 1886, had been born at Crosskeys and this probably drew them back down the Ebbw Valley to be closer to her elderly relatives.

John and his family appear on the 1911 census as residents of 20 Colliery Place Risca. According to local historian John Venn "Colliery Place was the earliest local housing for miners. The cottages appeared early in the 19th century and appear in all the census returns that are available although various names are used at different times including River Row, Colliery Row and Rookery. The later name appears on a birth certificate of 1864. The

cottages appear, but are not named, on the first O.S. map of 1883 whilst on the second O.S. map of 1901 they are marked as Old Colliery Rows. A first-hand account of living there in the 1870's is given in a chapter of the book *Man of the Valleys*. The cottages were near the River Ebbw on the opposite side of the river from the Fire Station and some remains still exist. They were condemned between the wars, residents moved to newly built council houses in Fernlea and the T.A. allowed to blow them up as an exercise.”

On the census John, then aged 47 is described as a ‘colliery examiner underground’. According to Phil Jenkins of *Industrial Gwent* “*examiners were much the same as deputies, their duties to report on the general condition of the mine. It appears that they were often elected by the 'Fed' so whether they were regarded by the owners as 'examiners'.*” The terms ‘examiner’ and ‘firemen’ went out of use towards the end of the nineteenth century but deputies and their associated shot firers remained important health and safety officials in the coalmines of south Wales and elsewhere in the UK

The Deputy

*The deputy holds a position of the same importance as a sergeant in the army and, as his name implies, he is regarded as the deputy of the manager in his own particular district. Doubts about the division of his duties between safety and production have been removed by the Coal Mines (Officials and Inspections) General Regulations, 1951, by which the deputy is made responsible not only for the safety of his district, but for all operations in progress therein. In addition to a wide technical experience of the very varied operations for which he is responsible, he is the representative of the management in direct contact with the man, and the personal relations in the district depend largely on his approach. **Excerpt from COAL-MINING ECONOMICS first published 1957***

At the 1911 census John resides with his wife Elizabeth (44) and his daughters Rosina aged 16 and Elizabeth aged 5. The couples elder daughter, Mrs Sarah Bushell, lives with her husband and children just a few doors away at 17 Colliery place. By the time they relocated to the farm John would be 51, his wife 48 and younger daughter 9 years of age. They would remain at Ty'n y Ffynnon for approximately 11 years



Figure 8 (a & b) Two views of Ty'n Y Ffynnon house in the late 1990s. With Crosskeys and Mynydd Medart in the distance in the lower photograph. (© Christine Langridge)

The Thomas's at Ty'n Y Ffynnon 1926-1953

Thomas and Mary Louisa Thomas appear at Ty'n Y Ffynnon for the first time on the 1926 electoral register for the Risca Division of the Bedwellty Parliamentary constituency. Thomas James Thomas was born in Hereford about 1882 and at the time of the 1911 census he was 29 years old and employed as a coachman working in an undertaker's livery stables at Tredegar near the head of the Sirhowy valley. The family resided at Mount Street Tredegar at this time.

Thomas's wife Mary Louisa, also aged 29 on the 1911 census, was born on Mynyddislwyn and prior to her marriage in 1907 been Mary Louisa Edmunds of Pant Glas and Cwmcaesingrug Farms. Mary was the daughter of Thomas Edmunds, a gentleman farmer of 100 acres and his wife Catherine. The family had been prominent on Mynyddislwyn for over a century and Mary's grandfather Edmund Edmunds was an owner occupying yeoman farmer who resided at Pant Glas like his father and grandfather before him.



Figure 9: Edwardian funeral procession featuring the type of horse drawn coach T Thomas may have driven (Source: <https://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-funerals.htm>)

Mrs A Meyrick writing in her 'Brief history of the Parish of Mynyddislwyn' (1954) describes the Edmunds family as *"quite an aristocratic family, an air of superiority could be noticed on entering the farm yard. Dairy utensils gleaming on the wall in readiness for use. The lady of the house, a very dignified person was always ready to extend a welcome to anyone who happened to call upon her. The old Oak and Mahogany Furniture were a shining example of good order. An old oak dresser covered with pewter ware and other things that were used to adorn the farm houses of distinction"*. (After Len Burland 2002)

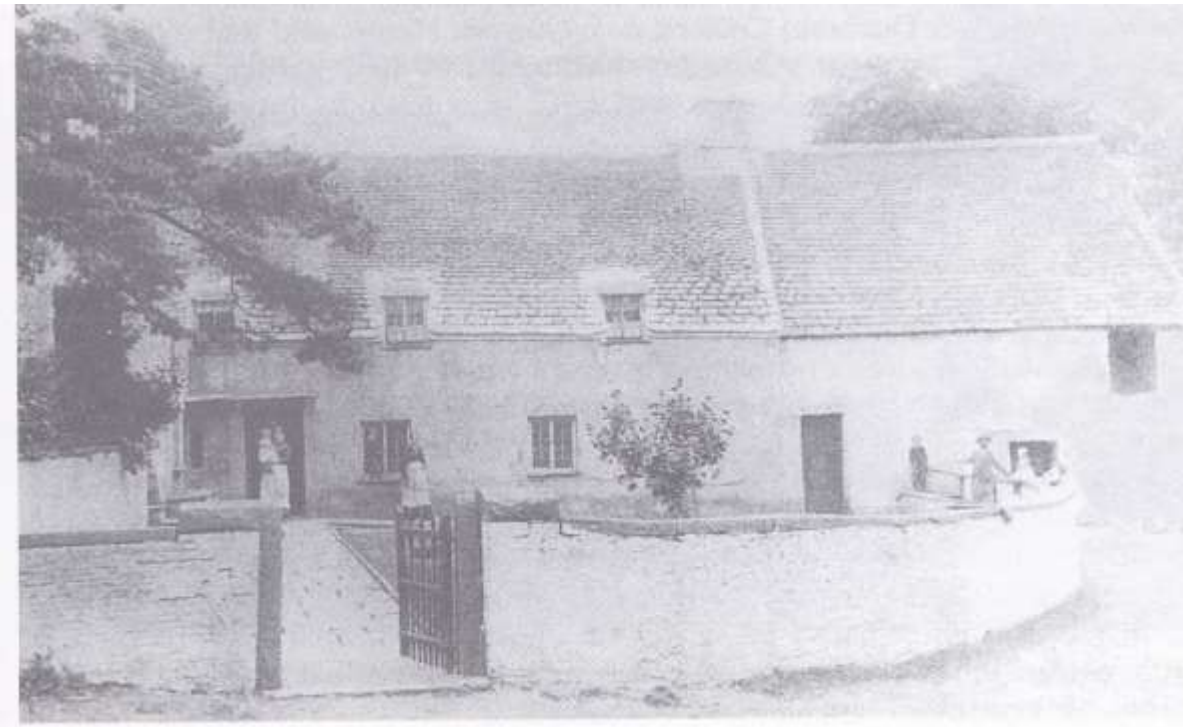


Figure 10: The family of Thomas and Catherine Edmunds pictured outside Pantglas farm about 1883. Mary Louisa could be the baby in arms in the farmhouse doorway. (After Len Burland 2002)

This was the home that Mary-Louisa had spent her formative years however following the 1891 census, for some reason possibly her father Thomas's illness, the family had relocated to the smaller Cwmcaesingrug where they are found on the 1901 census. Thomas had died in 1896 and in 1904 his widow Catherine married Thomas Lewis of Caerllwyn. Mrs Catherine Lewis died at Cwmcaesingrug on the 28th December 1924 with probate being granted to her sons Morgan Edmunds and Islwyn Edmunds on 2nd April 1925 with effects of £229 14s. It would have been around this time, early-mid 1925, that Thomas and Mary-Louisa took on the tenancy of Ty'n y Ffynnon and this may not be coincidental. With Thomas's experience of working with horses he wouldn't have found it too difficult to find employment in the coal industry as a haulier or stableman and it may even have been the case that, like the Harris's of nearby Pontymister farm in Risca, he specialised in rearing and resting pit horses for the local collieries. Whatever the case Mary Louisa would also have been reassured to be close to her brothers on Mynyddislwyn.

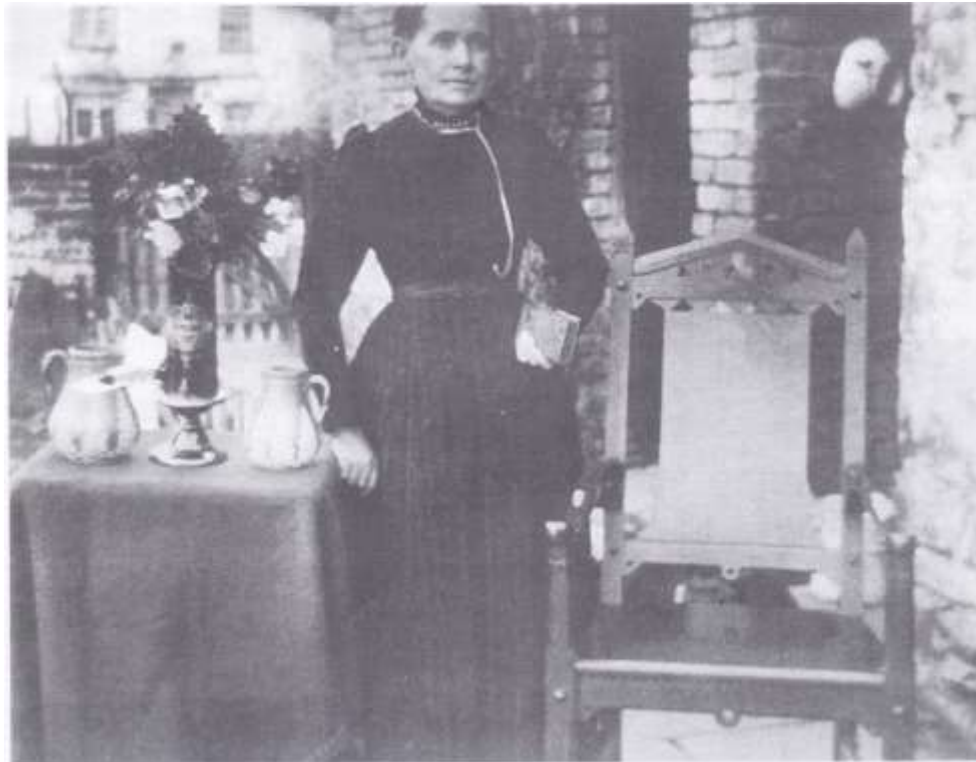


Figure 11: Mary-Louisa's mother Mrs Catherine Edmunds of Cwmcaesingrug farm in 1904. This was the year she married Thomas Lewis. Catherine was the niece of the poet Islwyn and she is pictured here with the Bardic Chair he won at the 1877 Treherbert Eisteddfod (After Len Burland 2002)

The 1939 census register confirms some of these details and tells us a little more about the family. Thomas aged 55, referred to as James T. Thomas, was born on 18 April 1884 and was employed as a colliery haulier underground. This would probably have been at Risca colliery across the valley at Wattsville. Mary L Thomas also aged 55, was born on 21 Jan 1884 and is described, like all married women on the register, as unpaid domestic labour. The couple have two children a daughter Mary L Thomas, who would have been about 18 or 19 years of age, was born on 10 Sept 1920 and a son Daniel H Thomas who was 13 years of age and still at school having been born on 17 Aug 1926. The couple's daughter Mary would later marry and assume the surname of Brean –this last detail was hand written onto the register at a later date.

We currently know that the couple appeared as residents of the farm up to the 1946 electoral register, however. Mary Louisa Thomas's death was recorded at Caerleon in December 1945. She would have been approximately 61 years of age at the time of her death. Thomas James and Daniel Thomas continue to be named as residents of Ty'n y Ffynnon farm between 1946 and 1953. After 1953 the farm remained unoccupied until late 1955 or early 1956 and it may have been at this time that it was purchased by the Forestry Commission on the breakup of the Tredegar Estate.

The Nicholls at Ty'n Y Ffynnon

After the Thomas's vacated Ty'n y Ffynnon it seems likely that the Forestry Commission took a lease on the property as they did with Ty'n y Ffynnon and Pant Gwyn in the Carn valley, and after this the house would have been used to accommodate the Commission's staff, perhaps at first temporarily and afterwards for the longer term.

Harold Nicholls who lived at Ty'n y Ffynnon from approximately 1955 up until around 1999 spent much of his working life with the Forestry Commission. His birth was registered at Pontypridd in December 1925 and it is currently believe that his family resided in the Mountain Ash area of the Cynon valley. Harold married Gwyneth Megan Smith, possibly born at Abergavenny in late 1922, at Pontypridd in December 1948 and the couple were to have two children, Linda born 1949 and Christopher Huw born 1961, while they lived at Ty'n y Ffynnon. Harold Nicholls is best remembered as 'Harry Nicks' and was well known as the very first warden who worked the entrance gate at the Cwmcarn Scenic. Gwyneth was better known locally by her second name Megan and she worked for some years in the kitchen or restaurant at Ynys Hywel Countryside centre. She also worked in Crosskeys Rugby Club during this time. According to local resident Maggie Thomas Harold and Megan's daughter Linda Nichols was in her year at Waunfawr primary school and the family were very well liked in the Crosskeys area.

Alun Booth who lived at Hafod Tudor Terrace in Wattsville between 1954 and 1966 remembers that Mrs Nicholls and her daughter would walk down to Wattsville to visit the shop where his wife worked. This is not surprising as Wattsville is the closest village to Ty'n y Ffynnon and it would have been far more convenient for the Nicholls to drop down to Nine Mile Point Station pass over the bridge and walk into Wattsville to make their essential day to day purchases than going further afield to Crosskeys or Risca. Barbara White who has lived in the Carn Valley for many years remembers 'Harry Nicks' and thinks he was employed in Cwmcarn by the Forestry Commission because he was coming to the end of his service and was in semi-retirement. He would have been in his sixties in the 1980s. Barbara recalls that her partner John Morgan visited the Nicholls at Ty'n Y Ffynnon to do some work for Harry and said that it was a hell of a place to get to because the road up to it was really bad. The house was also very run down, both inside and out, at this time. Barbara believes that the Nicholls had mains electricity there but their water came from a spring or well.

The Nicholls's daughter Linda married around 1971 and moved away and their son Christopher, sadly drowned aged 35 in the River Sirhowy in October 1997 after a night out in Cwmfelinfach. It is believed that because of this the Nicholls could no longer face living at Ty'n y Ffynnon and moved near to where their Daughter was living at that time.



Figure 12: Two Victorian fireplaces in need of TLC, pictured in the late 1990s before the house was renovated. Note the brick lined bread oven on the right in the lower fireplace. (© Christine Langridge)



Figure 13: Victorian outside privy in need of TLC, pictured in the late 1990s before the house was renovated. (© Christine Langridge)

In 1999 Ty'n Y Ffynnon was sold to Jeremy Bruce Yeomans who was to start renovating the house but, finding the task onerous, sold it on again in 2004. It is believed that the house has changed hands at least twice since and in the last decade it has been extensively modernised with a new access road constructed off Pont Lawrence lane.



Figure 14: Renovated outbuilding in the yard opposite the house (© Robert Jeffrey Southall)

FIN

Bibliography and Sources

1. National Library of Wales: Tredegar Estate Maps
 - Robert Snell: A survey of the Tredegar Estate : in the parishes of St. Brides, Peterstone, Coedkernew, Marshfield, St Mellons, Llanfihangel Vedw, Machen, Bedwas, Mynyddislwyn, Bedwellty, Eglwysilan, Gelligaer and Llantarnam 1760
2. Ancestry.co.uk: 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911 Censuses
3. Gwent Archives: Land Tax Assessments for the Parish of Machen: 1804, 1805, 1806, 1808, 1811, 1814, 1818, 1819, 1829
4. National Library of Scotland: Ordnance Survey Map Monmouthshire XXVII (includes: Bedwas; Mynyddislwyn.) Surveyed: 1875 Published: 1885
5. Len Burland 'A Historical Tour Around Mynyddislwyn Mountain' (Old Bakehouse Publications, Abertillery 2002)



Figure 15: Ty'n y Ffynnon – the house at the Wellspring in 2017 (© Robert Jeffrey Southall)