

## 2. Mining and Agriculture

### Mining

Although it is south Wales that is famous for mining, there were a lot of mines in this area. At one point there were 24 mines operating although not all were successful. It is believed that gold was discovered in Merioneth in 1834 but mining didn't start until 1847, as the idea that there was gold in the area was ridiculed at first. A gold belt runs from Barmouth to the north of Bontddu. The two most famous mines are Clogau, which is above Bontddu, and Gwynfynydd which is above the head of the Mawddach estuary.

Clogau mine is also known as S. David's mine or Clogau St David's. In 1860 a vein of gold was struck and in just over three years the mine had produced £43,783 worth of gold. As word got out a Klondike type Gold Rush occurred with many new companies forming and people arriving to mine. Expensive machines were purchased and buildings built before the prospecting was complete. Not all the ventures were successful. The area bustled with life and work. Many farmers in the area would trek from their farms to work in the dangerous conditions of the mines. The workers would mostly stay in barracks at the mine in the week and head home for the weekends. The barracks sheltered hundreds. Barmouth did not benefit from the trade that these workers brought as much as Dolgellau as most of the workers' wages were spent there.



Clogau Mine 1895. Robert Jones in the foreground, with Robin the Donkey, carrying gold ingots to Barmouth.



Taking Clogau gold to town 1895

Four Barmouth businessmen created the Clogau Gold Mining Company in 1891 and in the following 5 years £19,688 worth of gold was mined. By 1899 a new company was formed called Saint Davids Gold and Copper Mines who purchased the Clogau mine as well as others in the area. At its height there were around 100 miners employed in the Bontddu district. The company was successful at first but unfortunately the gold became scarcer and by 1910 the Clogau mine was closed.

The Gwynfynydd mine was originally a lead mine, gold was first discovered there in 1864. Between 1888 and 1890 £35,000 of gold was extracted and then after that very little was found. The mine shut in 1916 when most of the miners were called up for the First World War.

In 1930 an enquiry opened in Dolgellau to look into the possibility of restarting the mining in the area. The aim was to reduce unemployment; previous data of ounces was produced and the employment of 500 men was used. However it was felt that even though there were unexplored gold veins, their number and size were uncertain and the cost of exploring them could outweigh any return. A few attempts have been made to mine over the years since then but with no lasting result. In the 1950's a local farmer tried to re-open a Bontddu mine but this venture did not last long.

The Clogau mine is the namesake of the Clogau Gold Jewellery brand which is world famous. Welsh Gold has been used in Royal rings and regalia for over 100 years. It is the most sought after gold as it is the rarest. Many Royals have had their wedding rings made from Clogau gold. They are:

- 1923 – The wedding ring of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, on her marriage to King George VI, was made from pure Welsh gold from the Clogau mine

- 1947 – The wedding ring of Queen Elizabeth II on her marriage to the Duke of Edinburgh was crafted from a nugget of pure Welsh gold from Clogau
- 1960 – Princess Margaret’s wedding ring from her marriage to Antony Armstrong – Jones (Lord Snowdon) was made from pure Welsh gold from the Clogau mine
- 1973 – Princess Anne’s wedding ring from her marriage to Mark Phillips was made of pure Welsh gold from Clogau
- 1981 – The wedding rings of Prince Charles and Princess Diana were both made from pure Welsh gold from Clogau
- 1Kg of Welsh gold from Gwynfynydd mine was presented to Queen Elizabeth II on her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1986. This may have been the source of gold for the Earl and Countess of Wessex’ wedding rings in 1999
- An ounce of Clogau gold was presented to the late Queen Elizabeth II to use for Prince William and Princess Kate’s wedding rings.



Clogau Mine 1957

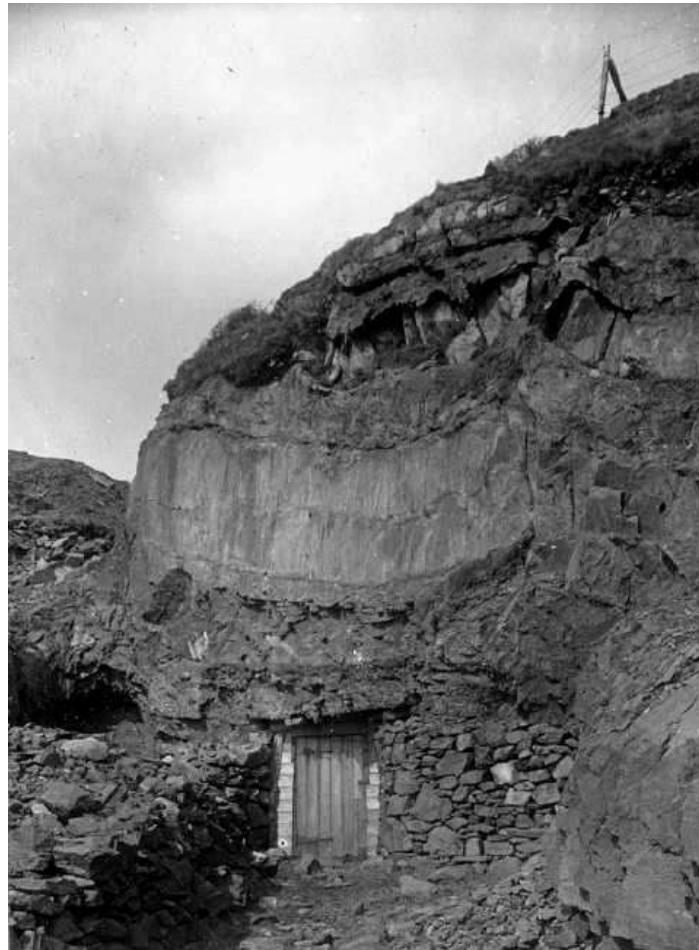


Clogau miner next to mine tracks 1957

As well as the gold mines manganese and copper were also mined in the area. In 1862 a firm named Barmouth Consols Copper, Silver-Lead & Gold Mining Co. Ltd was registered in London. It was trying to purchase a patch of land in Llangelynin but by 1878 the company was said to be no longer carrying on in business. A rich belt of manganese ran between Barmouth and Harlech in what is known as the Harlech Dome, which saw a chain of different mines running along the belt. There were many mines found directly around Barmouth.

Barmouth mine is located behind the house called Deronda, just above St John’s Church. It runs along the lower part of the path towards Craig y Gigfran (The Peak). Its entrance can be seen and was the playground of many a Barmouth child. Barmouth mine consisted of a number of underground workings. A letter exists from the owner in Birmingham, a John Abraham, complaining of falling output to which the foreman replied that there was an epidemic of influenza in Barmouth. The mine

existed from 1886 to 1891 and produced 1,261 tons in that time, on average employing 2 men. 1889 produced 545 tons alone. There are several entrances; two are on the path to the peak, one is next to the entrance to St John's Churchyard and one is a dripping well located along the path behind Deronda. They follow a quartz seam.



1894 Mine behind Deronda

Dinas Oleu (The National Trust land given by Fanny Talbot) is listed as a manganese mine. It is above the Barmouth formation which is above the Hafotty formation which contains a manganese ore bed. However it appears more like a stone quarry which can be seen over the road from the car park next to the Last Inn and up towards the Slabs above Panorama road.

Cell Fawr Mine (the farm behind the peak) is connected to the Hafotty mine and the Cell Fechan mine (the ruined farm on the path to the peak) all of which run along the Barmouth to Harlech Manganese Belt. Between 1891 and 1892 Cell Fawr produced 954 tons and employed 8 people. A tramway existed between Cell Fawr and the Hafotty mine. The Cell Fechan mine existed from about 1899 and produced 867 tons between that year and 1908. Its largest return was in 1900 when 277 tons were extracted. There is a network of tracks cut into the slopes around the area which probably served the workings. Hafotty is located above Llanaber in-between the Cell Fawr and Egryn mines. The mine contains iron pyrites, manganese and quartz. The mine produced 12,204 tons between 1886 and 1900 and in 1887 employed 52 people. 1890 was its best year producing 3,946 tons and employing 34 people. Within the mine there was a tramway, which took the mineral to a

loading point where a railway moved it to another loading point. From this point a horse-drawn sledge took the ore to Barmouth Road near St Marys where a horse and cart would transport it to Barmouth Station; usually three loads a day.



Hafotty 1887



Dripping Well Cell Fechan 1923

Garn (alternatively Panorama) mine is located at the Panorama walk and has a distinctive, obvious mine entrance. It is unclear what was mined here but it is described as the Panorama Copper and Gold mine and the entrance is built into the wall. The mine shaft is flooded.

## Agriculture

As can be easily seen, the hills around Barmouth are rocky and high with some grass land and some woodland. The area is not suitable for arable farming and the majority of farming in the area is pasture fields for livestock such as sheep, cattle and some horses. Comparing the fieldscapes of today against those over 150 years ago on maps, they have not changed much. It is easy to see the dry stone walls that appear all over the area and work their way down the slopes around the town and its outer limits. These walls are also well over 150 years old and mark the boundaries of the fields. Much of the landscape in the area is steep sloped woodland interspersed with pasture fields. The wood ranges in age from ancient to semi natural to mostly modern.

Most of the enclosures in the area are large and irregular in shape. Although no arable fields exist today there is evidence of what looks like post medieval land divisions probably for arable land cultivation, as it seems the fields had been cleared carefully of stones in what is a very rocky area. Upland areas were left as they are with no evidence of clearing taking place.

Actually Merioneth has always had one of the lowest proportions of arable land in Wales and England. Life would have been very hard farming the hills around here; living on the high slopes and enduring the harsh terrain. Imagine the times when there was no electricity or fuel or running water or supermarkets, living on these farms high above the towns, on the slopes and in the valleys. Imagine a harsh winter! The only entertainment would be the chapel; for many this would be Cutiau. Many of the farms were tenant farms, that is where a landlord owned the land and a farmer would farm the land. Squires of the 1800's were known for gambling to entertain themselves. It was not unusual for a tenant farmer to wake up in the morning and find they had a new landlord. There was a case where the eldest son of one family inherited a large farm estate with a house, livestock, land and fishing rights. Within a short space of time of inheriting it, he lost the lot in one night of gambling and had to move his family into his brother's nearby farm.



Market at St Anne's Square 1897

Cattle and livestock would be either driven into town to be auctioned off outside the Cors y Gedol building or in Dolgellau. In fact it was not unusual to see sheep and cows wandering the streets of Barmouth up to the 1980s although this was usually a few escapees. The well-known big landlords of the area in the past were Cors y Gedol, Nannau and Lord Harlech.

The wool trade was the biggest thing spanning the later parts of the 1600s, the 1700s and the 1800s. In 1770 Barmouth port exported £50,000 worth of wool products all around the world. The sheep would be sheared at the farms and then the wool taken to mills where it would be made into cloths on looms. There were very few factories in Wales before 1800 and almost all production was at home but as trans-Atlantic demand for Welsh cloth grew Merionethshire became dependant on the wool trade. Spinning and weaving gave a more stable and larger income than farming did. Some farms would have a fulling mill connected to it to full (thicken) the cloth. These mills were usually water-driven but there are examples of horizontal mills in the area that were horse-driven and used for grinding.



Shearing at Glandŵr 1920



Shearing at Garthgell 1973

Up above Glandwr Mill, where the Dwynant river flows down the valley, lies a holiday home. This was once a farm called Tyddyn y Pandy (Tyddyn – *Homestead/Small Holding*, Pandy – *Fulling Mill*). The same family farmed here for at least 160 years. Robert Williams kept a farm account book from 1843 to 1846. The book is a fascinating insight into how a farm operated in those times and shows transactions between Robert Williams and other local farms buying and selling cattle and timber as well as selling pigs and also butter to inhabitants of the town. One page shows the farmer paying wages to his workers including his miller David Jones. There are even drawings of the farm by his child, of the same name, who went on to be a sea captain. Interestingly there is an entry in 1845 for paying the doctor (pre-NHS times) and then a coffin. This was for his first wife passing away, then later that year paying for the ring for his second marriage. There are many entries of him still doing business with his first father-in-law, Edward Williams of Cell Fawr. Roberts's son, Cadwaladr, and then his children would take over the farm eventually, though only one of them remained a farmer throughout his life.



Tyddyn y Pandy



13  
Nov<sup>r</sup> 1845  
What I respect to receive  
Morris Jones & Delwen for  
Two Coffer Sitt<sup>n</sup> £ 11 0  
Edward Williams } 11 10 4  
Two Pipes Sitt<sup>n</sup> } Recom<sup>d</sup> 4  
Cade Williams for } fair day  
for Smith's pasture } £ 0 0  
W<sup>m</sup> Williams by }  
the said his Pipes } £ 13 1  
E. J. buter all paid } 18 6  
In My house } £ 13 7 6  
£ 43 18 0  
In the Bank } £ 0 0  
£ 33 18 10  
This is my account  
on the 13 day of November  
1845  
Rob<sup>t</sup> Williams  
this page settled for Account 16/45

Buter & King June 26/45  
Delivered this Day  
to Mr R<sup>t</sup> Ellis London  
For Buter £ 13 10 1  
At 9<sup>th</sup> in the } 18 1  
the Part } 6  
Sett<sup>d</sup>  
Rec<sup>d</sup> of Capt<sup>l</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Roberts  
Oct 27 for Buter  
36 pound at 10<sup>th</sup> } £ 10 -  
Nov<sup>r</sup> Mrs Ballard two bills  
1845 at 11<sup>th</sup> } £ 3 7 3  
Sett<sup>d</sup> by  
Nov<sup>r</sup> 13/45  
Edward Perry Bunting  
One bill at 10<sup>th</sup>  
By hand } 1 18 6  
Sett<sup>d</sup> by Ed Perry  
Rob<sup>t</sup> Williams } £ 6 15 9

Robert Williams Farm Account Book 1845

1845  
March Bought of  
W<sup>m</sup> Williams & Glyn  
(Paid) Wheat 2 winch } 13 0  
March to L<sup>th</sup> Amoyl  
(Paid) Wheat 1 winch } 7 3  
to L<sup>th</sup> Amoyl & do  
ne Wheat } 13 6  
to Capt<sup>l</sup> Edward Edwards }  
Bones 2 winch } 13 0  
Lime to W<sup>m</sup> Jones & Co  
Paid to John Jones  
for Limer goods } 8 1  
Do Mat } 6 6  
Paid to William Jones }  
Colgelly goods } 5 10  
Paid to Llanfach } £ 1 0 0  
£ 4 7 1

From March to August  
Paid for Copin } 2 3 1  
to the Doctor } 2 2 1  
to E<sup>th</sup> Jones for yards } 16 9  
to Ann Edwards } 10 0  
to E<sup>th</sup> Jones for grain } 3 3  
£ 5 15 0  
Paid to David Morris  
for Cato Seed } 14 6  
to J<sup>th</sup> Jones for Mourning } 5 6  
Paid in Llanfach } 10 10  
to Use of the house } 11 6  
Paid Money } 8 6  
to Mr Barnett for Lime } 14 9  
to My Friend } 1 10 0  
Day of Maria } 2 8 0  
Cady. Llanfach } 2 8 3  
King } 10 10 7

Robert Williams' Farm Account Book 1845

To illustrate the control of the estates in the area, a brochure from 1911 shows the sale of valuable farms, small holdings, accommodation and building lands and freehold ground rents with reservations. The sale was by the direction of Lord Harlech and took place at Cors y Gedol Hotel, Barmouth. Many local farms were included. The following freehold and ground rents with reservations were offered:

Sylfaen Farm, Golodd, Coed y Foel, Tyddyn y Pandy, Garth y Bwa, Cae Tudor Felin Sylfaen Mill House, Llwyn Onn Bach, Cae Fadog, Gorllwyn Fach as well as ground rents on Porkington Terrace.



Gwastadagnes 1890



Llwyn Du circa 1900



Carrying buttermilk from Sylfaen 1928



Del, Mot and Harry Jones at Llwyn Onn Bach 1931



Cae Tudur 1935 – Joseph and Gwen Roberts with John Owen Williams



1947 Cae Tudur - Griffith John Roberts



Trawsdir 1950 Mari Roberts



Cell Fechan 1951



1952 Llwyn Onn - Harry Jones Gorllwyn and John Tyddyn Williams harvesting



Tŷ Isaf – Tal y Bont

As has been seen previously farms such as Cell Fawr and Cell Fechan had mines on their land. It's said that Cell Fawr has a horse drawn horizontal grinding mill wheel. There is also a road that goes north from the farm and under this road there are holes. These holes used to be a larder for winter storage of food.



Cell Fawr and the Williams family 1936



Food larders under the road

Farms have seemed to diversify to survive over the years with camping, caravan sites, hydro schemes, building and local produce to name but a few.