

Notes on the history of the Early Quakers in the neighbourhood of Dolgelley

Dolgun.

(Norris Supplement to No 6. John ap John re.p 30 says)

According to a note in the old Monmouth Records a well-attended meeting was held at Dolgyn near Dolgelley on the seventh of the third month of the year 1683 and was the first regular annual meeting.

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It is said that representatives from nearly every county in Wales congregated at Dolgun, Dolgelley in 1683. It was a glorious meeting under God's smiles and blessing, and careful consideration was given to the state of the cause in Wales. Letters were also written to Annual Meeting in London and to the Welsh Quakers in Pennsylvania.

(Glann MSS 116 folio 29, 30 National Library of Wales)

Rowland Ellis of Brynmawr married the daughter of Ellis Morris of Dolgun, a rich Quaker and they had one daughter. The mother died young and Rowland Ellis married his cousin, the daughter of Robert ap Owen ap Lewis ap Griffith of Dyffrydan.

Dolserau.

In July 1659, Owen Humphreys Llwyndu, Thomas Ellis Iscregennan, Owes Lewis Tyddyngarreg and Robert Owen Dolserau were appointed to manage the finances of the militia.

This implies that they had not joined the Quakers at that date, but they were amongst their leaders very soon afterwards

In 1661 the brothers Owen and Samuel Humphreys of Llwyndu, Owen Lewis Tyddyngarreg and Robert Owen of Dolserau were imprisoned for refusing to take the oath of allegiance.

In 1668 they had been released, and services were being held in their houses.

Robert Owen of Dolserau was the great grand-son of Baron Owen of Llwyn and his wife was the daughter of the antiquarian Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt.

In 1673 Thomas Ellis the magnanimous and patriotic rector of Dolgelley died, and Morris Jones, the drunken parson - a man of very different character was appointed in his place.

Persecution became rife. Six of the Quakers were imprisoned for absenting themselves from church. Such was the hatred of the rector towards Robert Owen that he succeeded in keeping him in prison, which was in sight of his house, for five years and a half.

Pressure was brought on Jane Owen, his wife, to use her influence to persuade her husband to break his connection with the Quakers but she resolutely refused to do so.

She and her home was carefully watched, and she was threatened with imprisonment. But she arranged a number of meeting-places on the wooded slopes between Dolserau and Brithdir where the friends gathered during the hours of darkness.

It is likely that it was at one of these meetings that a young man named Ellis Pugh of Brithdir was converted under John ap John's ministry.

In 1690(?), Ellis Pugh was ordained minister of the church at Tyddyngarreg which had many members. Later Ellis Pugh emigrated to Pennsylvania and his book "Annerch y Cymry" Was published in Penn after his death.

In 1689 Edward ap Owen, formerly of Dolserau, purchased 312 acres of land in Penn, from John ap Thomas.

On July 27th 1683 Thomas Ellis of Iscregennan was given a letter of recommendation by the quarterly meeting of Dolserau.

Robert Owen and his family sailed from the Mersey on the 17th of Sept. 1684 but he and his wife died a few months after reaching Penn.

Tyddyngarreg.

In 1659 Owen Lewis was a member of the Committee to finance the militia - probably not a Quaker then.

In 1660 a small company who had gathered together to worship at Tyddyngarreg was disturbed by a number of armed men. The fourteen persons present were made prisoners but after walking about two miles they were released. But they were re-arrested next morning and forced to walk a distance of eighteen miles to Bala, where, with nine others, they were sentenced to Corwen prison where they remained for four months.

In 1665 Owen Lewis prepared a burial ground on his own land.

On the 25th day of the 4th month In 1681 Owen Lewis wrote from Tyddyngarreg to John ap Thomas, stating that several of the fraternity were in danger. He named ten persons, and begged all others to take every possible care until they had the opportunity of seeking the sympathy of the undersheriff.

In 1687 there is a reference to Lewis Owes, the son of, Tyddyngarreg - a tower of strength to the Quakers in the Dolgelley district. Records show that his connection with the Monthly Meeting at Tyddyngarreg lasted without a break from 1678 to 1700. All letters of recommendation to local emigrants to Penn during this period were in his handwriting.

In 1685 the following letter was sent from the annual meeting of the Welsh Quakers held at Tyddyngarreg to the Annual meeting in London - The secretary was William Humphrey Llwyndu. - "These may acquaint you that we are all well, and the Lord's presence is among us. His Truth is dear to us. Our God gives acceptance with himself and neighbours. They be slow to lay violent hands upon us. We are in love and united together, condescending one to another in love."

1698 Church at Tyddyngarreg visited by Hugh Roberts.

Brynmawr.

Rowland Ellis of Brynmawr became a Quaker when 25 years of age.

1674(?) Rowland Ellis was one of the persons imprisoned by Judge Walcott. After the death of Walcott there was no persecution for five years. During this time, and for the next ten years Rowland Ellis was a most ardent and energetic preacher.

1686 Rowland Ellis emigrated to Pennsylvania after being robbed and imprisoned in Wales. He sailed from Milford Haven on Oct 8th 1686, had a very stormy passage and landed in April 1687. Within a month after landing, he was a member of a deputation to the Land Commission to discuss the disposition of land in Penn. He returned to Brynmawr, to find that eldest daughter had married an Englishman who was a curate at Dolgelley. He sold his inheritance to Owen Lewis of Tyddyngarreg.

Rowland Ellis's father was one of Merioneth's first Quakers. He was the son and heir of Rees Lewis, Brynmawr, and his mother was the daughter and heiress of Humphrey ap Hugh of Llwyndu, Llwyngwrl.

Rowland Ellis married the daughter of Ellis Morris Dolgun. After her death he married the daughter of Robert ap Owen ap Lewis ap Griffith of Dyffrydan.

In Merion, Penn, he built a stone house after the plan of Brynmawr and called it by that name. The name was changed by a new occupant in the 18th century. He founded Brynmawr College and there is a Brynmawr Railway Station not far away.

Llwyndu, Llwyngwrl.

Owen and Samuel Humphreys lived in Llwyndu in 1651 and they were also appointed to provide finances for the militia in 1657.

In 1658 they were imprisoned for their faith, and we have a record of both being released in 1661.

Owen Humphrey had a piece of the Llwyndu farm consecrated for a burial place probably before he became a Quaker. This known as "Gardd Claddu'r Crynwyr" (The Quakers' Burial Garden). The date on the gate is 1646.

George Fox and John ap John visited Llwyndu in 1657 after making a tour of the farm houses above Dolgelley. They reported that some of the most respectable and influential inhabitants congregated to worship at the house which was referred to by Fox as "Sea Syde".

In 1685 Wm Humphrey wrote the letter from Tyddingarreg to the Annual meeting in London (See Tyddingarreg).

The daughter of, Owen Humphrey married Robert Owen of Frongoch, Bala, who settled in Penn in 1690. Robert Owen was a very popular preacher in Penn. He was a man of great intelligence, an adroit peacemaker, and gave great service in numerous spheres.

Hugh Roberts visited Llwyndu in 1698 and preached to a large and enthusiastic congregation.

Ellis Pugh, the author of "Annerch i'r Cymry" published in Pennsylvania was born at Pen Rhos, a house not very far from Tyddingarreg.

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By the middle of the eighteenth century, the number of Friends in the Dolgelley district, owing to removals and deaths, had been reduced considerably. But by the efforts of Dorothy Owen, the number had increased so much by 1791-2 that

A Meeting house was built on the Tyddingarreg land. Dorothy Owen was the daughter of Rowland and Lowry Owen of Dewisbren. She was brought up as a Friend, but in her young days she seems to have sought the companionship of young people whose main interests were the pleasures of life. But when she was about twenty one years of age she reformed her ways and, two years later, she was giving public testimony and winning others to her faith. Later, she devoted the whole of her time to Preaching. She was noted for her faithfulness to meetings.

Neither distance nor storm would keep her away as long as she was able to go. She often walked forty miles over rough mountain roads in order to attend a Monthly Meeting.