

Fron Fawr



Fron Fawr in 2023.

The origins of this house lie in the quarrying of slate in this area and the need for living accommodation for those who would work in that industry; slate for floors, walls and roofing.

Although I had often looked across the valley from the Pass and admired the houses perched on the edge of the mountain, I did not see them close up until July 2006. One was for sale, Fron Fawr. I had been looking for a development project and this could be the one! Every house I had ever lived in has needed renovation and development but what was needed at Fron Fawr was on a different scale!

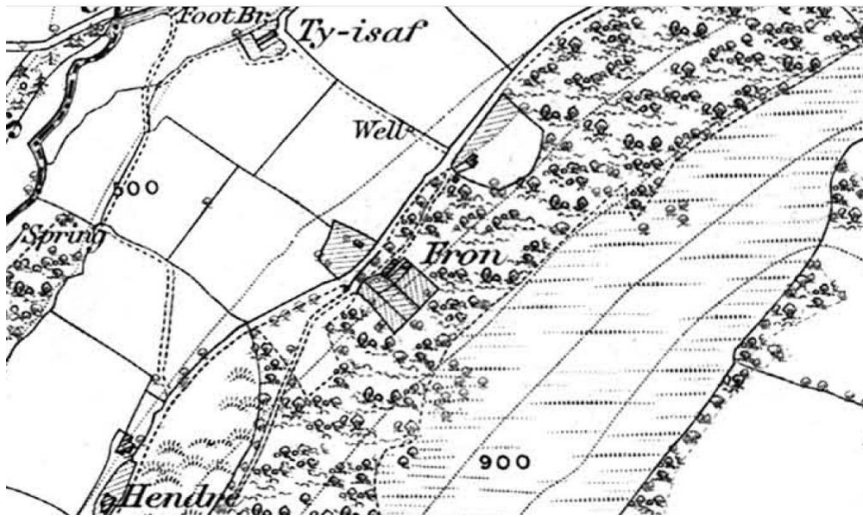
The history of the house is interesting. On the 1844 tithe map the land was marked as an arable croft, belonging to Thomas Davies who lived just below in Tŷn Fron. Thomas Davies sold the land in 1854 and Fron Fawr was actually built as three separate houses, to house workers at local slate quarries.



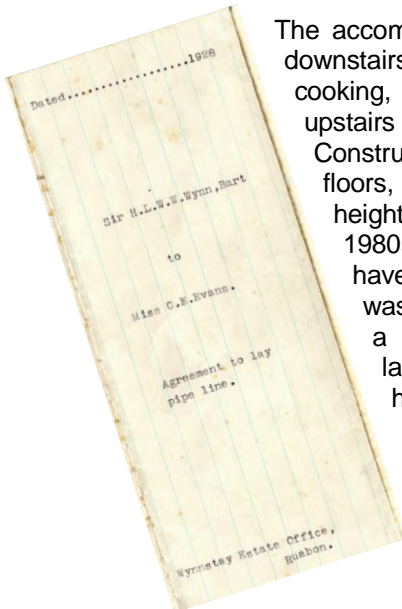
THE SCHEDULE referred to
14th January 1854. INDENTURE made between John Williams
of the first part Thomas Davies and Ellen his wife and
Peter Davies of the second part and Edward Davies of the
third part.

A schedule in a 1919 conveyance records the sale of the land by Thomas Davies in 1854.

On the tithe survey of 1844 Fron Fawr was just an arable croft (No. 284) owned and used by Thomas Davies, who lived at Tŷn Fron below (No. 283).



Fron Fawr (called just Fron) made its first appearance on maps in 1874. Courtesy Ordnance Survey.



Agreement by the Wynnstay Estate to lay a water pipe to Fron Fawr across its land in 1928.

The accommodation was limited to say the least; a downstairs room with a fireplace for heating and cooking, approximately 10 feet by 13 feet, and an upstairs room for sleeping. Outside lavatories. Construction was using all local materials - slate floors, walls and a slate roof. Apparently the roof height was increased by around 20 inches in the 1980s, which means the original height must have been somewhat uncomfortable! Heating was by coal. Water supply was originally from a local spring further up the mountain but latterly piped down to a position closer to the houses. Reliability was uncertain because sheep would occasionally fall into the well where water surfaced on the mountain. Outside sheds were used for storage of coal and wood. Each house had room for a small garden, used mainly for growing vegetables. Travel to work would most likely have been on foot. The nearest shop would have been in Pentredŵr. Church and Chapel would have been close by. The walk or ride to Llangollen was around two miles.

One question about the occupancy of the houses at Fron Fawr was about who lived there during WW1 and whether anyone went to fight and survived to return. The records are imperfect but it does appear that at least one young male did fight and did return.

That young man was John Francis Davies. Born in 1897 at Bwlch y Garnedd, Rhewl, his mother Sarah was widowed when John was only 2 years old. Having moved in with her mother at the Sun Rhewl for a few years, in 1904 Sarah remarried, and in 1911 John Francis was living at Fron Fawr with his mother Sarah Thomas, his stepfather Hugh Thomas and step brother Hywel Thomas. Sarah passed away in 1914 and John

Herbert Jones, Tower Farm, Llangollen, applied for J. F. Davies (18), teamsman, doing Council work, on the grounds that he was contractor to the Urban District Council, as refuse collector and doing all other work required, the man being indispensable.—Adjourned for two months.

John Francis Davies (18), engaged at the Tower Farm, whose case had been previously adjourned for a period of two months, was appealed for by Mr. Herbert Jones, the contractor to the Urban Council, who employs the man in collecting refuse.—The appeal was not assented to.

John Francis Davies, Tower Farm, Llangollen, team-man, applied for by Herbert Jones, Tower Farm, as contractor to the Llangollen Urban District Council for scavenging, etc.—Dismissed.
Joseph Thomas Davies, 75, Rhosddu Road, Wrexham, master-baker and confectioner.—Exempted to April 18.

Herbert Jones' applications and appeals for exemption from service for John Francis Davies, on the grounds that his work was indispensable. Llangollen Advertiser. September to December 1916.

Fortunately for John Francis he survived the horrors of the War and returned to live in Pentredŵr, although not at Fron Fawr. He married Sarah Williams in 1929 and they lived at No. 4 Post Office Terrace. For the remainder of his working life John was employed at the Moel y Faen Quarry. Sarah died in 1959 but John lived to the good age of 77 years, dying in 1975. Reporting on his death the Llangollen Broadsheet said that 'It broke almost the last links with Pentredŵr village as it was.'

went to work at Tower Farm with Herbert Jones, who we think was a relative. When John Francis was called to serve in 1916 Herbert applied for exemption on the grounds that John Francis and his work were indispensable. The application and appeal were dismissed in December of that year and John Francis went to fight. It has not been possible so far to discover any details of his service in the Great War, but it is known that he fought in Italy.



John Francis Davies (on the right) with workmates in the Moel y Faen Quarry.



Fron Fawr in 1932, when it was still three separate cottages.

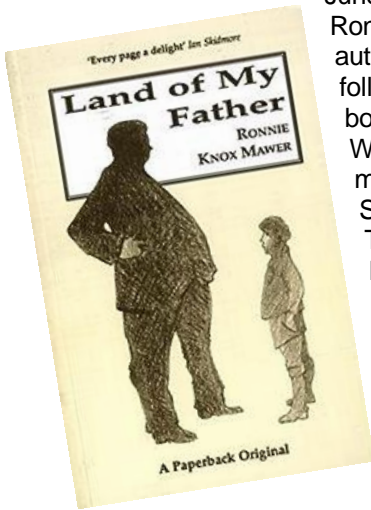
Over the years there have been many owners and many tenants, given the number of individual houses originally. Built as three cottages, at the beginning of the 20th century it had become just two – Rose Cottage and Hillcot. The reduction in activity in local quarries meant that quarry workers vanished from the list of rentees, although the houses within Fron Fawr continued to be rented out. By the 1920s it had become three homes again, then called Rose Mount, Hillcot and Rose Cottage, the then owner,

Clara Evans, living at Hillcot. In the early 1940s, Clara, now married to William Bickford, sold what had now reverted back to two cottages to Rosalie Cromar. In 1950 she, in turn, sold Rose Cottage and Hillcot to Richard Fletcher who, just a year later, sold them on to Edith Upson. Edith died in 1953 and left the cottages to her two sisters, Dorothy and Fanny Upson. The 'Miss Upsons' lived at Fron Fawr through the 1950s and 60s, adopting a young Jewish girl who's father had brought her out of Germany during the War. Her mother had disappeared somewhere during their flight from Germany and her sister ended up in Tel Aviv. The girl, Miriam Rosenburg, attended Dinas Brân school.



The Miss Upsons are on the left and right at the front of this photograph, taken outside the Siloh Chapel in Pentredŵr.

It is interesting that a number of local people that I have met like to tell me that 'I was born at Fron Fawr' or that 'I lived at Fron Fawr, it was lovely'. In 1973, Fron Fawr, having just been created by the joining together of the two cottages, was purchased by the Knox Mawer family, on their return from living and working in the Pacific Islands. Both June and Ronnie had strong Welsh family connections and were anxious to find a peaceful place to live in Wales, with their son and daughter. This despite the fact that both had business commitments to fulfil in London from time to time.



June was a presenter of BBC Woman's Hour and Ronnie was a barrister, although both were also authors. The family owned Fron Fawr for the following thirty years. Whilst Ronnie's series of books talk mainly about his early life in Wrexham and life as a magistrate in the South Pacific British Territories, June's book, 'A Ram in the Well' gives an idea of what life was like living at Fron Fawr at that time and the cast of characters they met and befriended.



I bought the house in 2006 and between that time and 2012 I have upgraded and modified the house, improving the access, providing a borehole water supply, new heating etc. It remains a beautiful and peaceful place to live.

By Nigel Petrie.



Fron Fawr sits above Holly Cottage in this photograph of 1934.