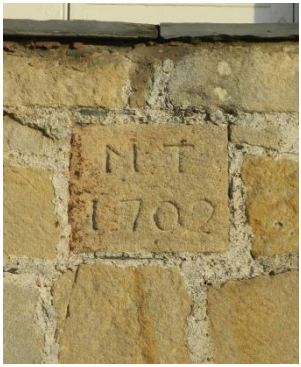
Pentrefelin Mill

Pentrefelin Mill in 2020.

In the edition of Byegones from May 2nd 1894 the Reverend Hugh Owens, who was custodian of Valle Crucis Abbey at the time, wrote “The Abbey became private property about 1625, and the first improvements in the way of building and repairing must have been done by Mathew Trevor in 1701, when he built Pentrevelin Mill and restored the fishponds”.[1] This would seem to be supported (to within a year at least) by the date stone in the wall of the Mill marked MT 1702.



The date stone in the wall of Pentrefelin Mill, with the initials of Mathew Trevor.

However, a rental document from 1606, referring to former lands of Valle Crucis Abbey, states ‘Richard Mathews aforesayd, tenaunt of one water corne myll standing neare unto the sayd demesnes within ye sayd parish’.[2] This can only be a reference to Pentrefelin Mill, indicating that not only did a mill of some kind exist a hundred years before the date stone would seem to show that this mill was built, but that it previously belonged to the Abbey, and so enjoyed an even earlier history.

Whilst it was a corn mill for Valle Crucis, Pentrefelin Mill would have been used primarily to grind corn that had been grown on Abbey lands. The Cistercian Order prohibited its abbeys to receive revenues from mills, since this ran counter to its ideals. However, in many cases this was ignored. Many mills also provided the Cistercian communities with income, with locals having to pay a sum of money (multure) to grind their corn.

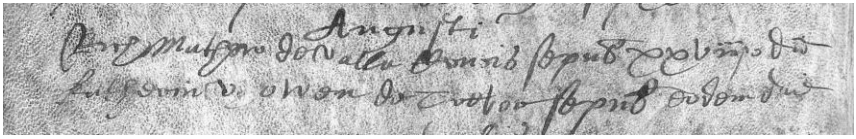
After the dissolution of Valle Crucis in 1536, the immediate lands around the Abbey were leased by Henry VIII to William Pickering, knight-marshal to the King. In turn the land passed to his son, also William Pickering and then, by marriage, to the Wootton family. It was Baron Edward Wootton who rented the lands to Richard Mathews in 1606.

Edward Wootton.

The Abbey property was granted to Edward Wootton by King James I in 1614, when he received the King's licence to dispose of such parts as he thought fit[3]. It seems that after this time Edward Wootton must have sold some parts of the Abbey lands, possibly including Pentrefelin Mill, to Richard Mathews, although other parts evidently stayed with the Wootton family, as a 1649 survey of Bromfield and Yale recorded 'the dissolved Monsatrie of Vala Crucis in the houldinge of Ladie Wootton' (Mary Wootton, wife of Edward's son Thomas)[4].

Richard Mathew was referred to in the records as a 'gent' and so was evidently a man of independent means and with good connections within society. He had married Jane Lloyd on May 21st 1598[5]. Jane died seventeen years later on September 8th 1615 and was buried in Llangollen churchyard[6]. There are no records to show that they had any children.

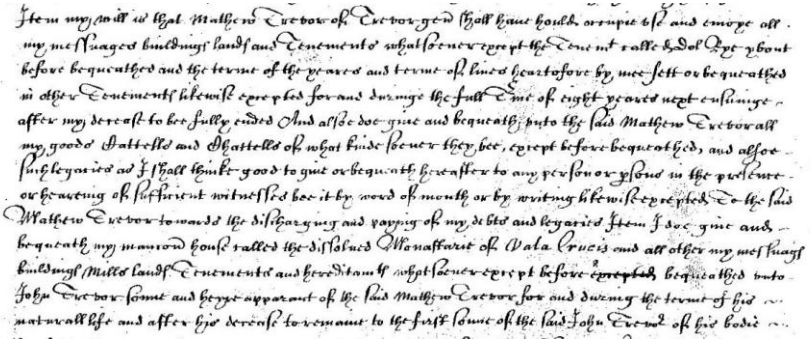
In 1628 Richard Mathew of Valle Crucis died, and on 28th August was also buried in Llangollen churchyard.



The burial record for Richard Mathews. Llangollen Parish Records.

Two weeks earlier he had made his last will and testament, bequeathing all of the 'messuages, buildings, mills and lands' belonging to the 'dissolved monastarie of Vala Crucis' to John Trevor, son of Mathew Trevor of Trevor Hall, and upon his death to 'the first sonne of the said John Trevor of his bodie lawfully begotten or to be begotten'.

In 1651, the remaining Abbey lands were stripped from Margaret Wootton as a punishment for being a recusant (a Catholic refusing to attend Anglican services) and sold[3]. They were purchased by Michael Lea and John Lawson, both of London and it is possible that, at this time, they sold on some of the former Abbey land to John Trevor.

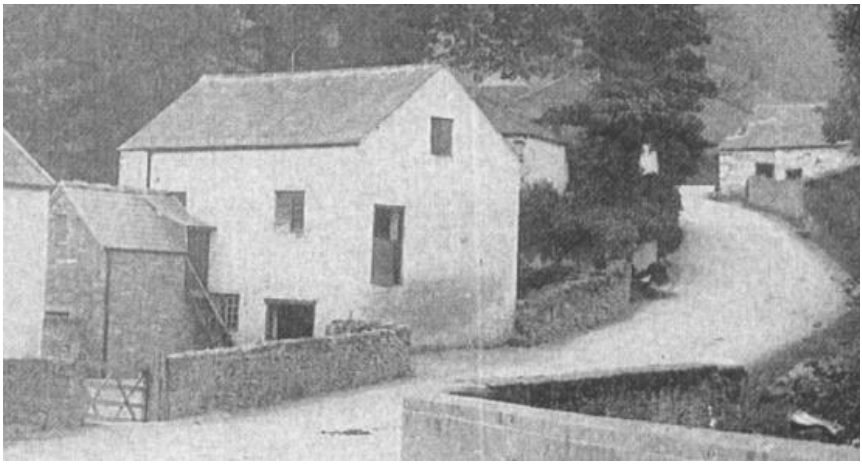


Richard Mathew's will.
CourtesyThe National Archives: PROB 11/154/295.

And so, by one route or the other, ownership of Pentrefelin Mill passed to the Trevor family of Trevor Hall, and would remain part of the Trevor Estate for over two hundred years.

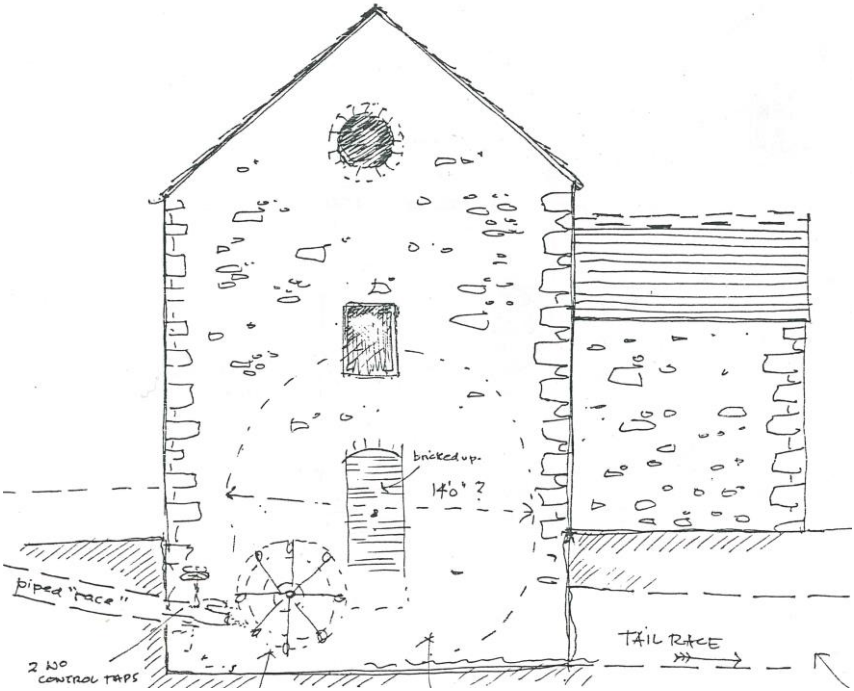
In 1682 John Trevor died in Wrexham Gaol, where he had been incarcerated for debt[7]. Debt, however, did not prevent him passing on the family lands, and his eldest son Mathew inherited the Mill along with the rest of the Trevor Estate. It was this Mathew Trevor who either rebuilt or carried out work on the Mill and put the date stone in the wall.

The main mill building is the one that today adjoins the main road, together with the small extension on one side that formed the kiln and the drying floor. Today the extension has been heightened, joined up to the converted outbuildings at the rear and all made into a house.



Pentrefelin Mill – possibly when it was working during the Second World War.

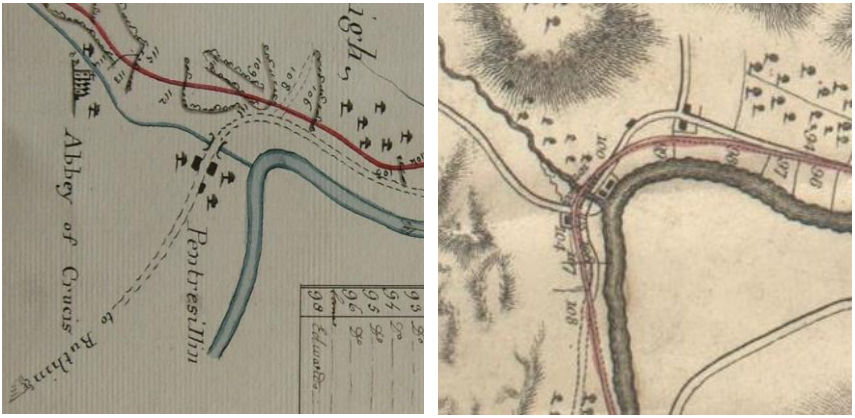
The mill wheel was located on the south west end of the building (the end that now lies away from the road). In the later years of operation the mill machinery was driven by an undershot double peltor wheel, but prior to that the power would have come from a much larger (14 foot diameter) undershot or possibly breast shot wheel.



A sketch of the west elevation of Pentrefelin Mill made by Ian Gough in 1987 as part of a survey of the Mill. The location of the original 14 foot mill wheel is indicated and the later Peltor wheel is shown.
Courtesy RCAHMW.

The mill was powered using water from the nearby Eglwyseg Stream. Water was taken from the stream around 130 metres south of Valle Crucis Abbey, with the flow controlled by a sluice. The water was fed down a leet, under the road about 30 metres above the mill and was then piped the short distance to the back of the mill to power the wheel. It is unclear whether the stream was dammed above the sluice, to create a more constant head of water, but the flow of the Eglwyseg stream would rarely have dropped low enough to have created an issue with the water supply.

This extract from the 1873 Ordnance Survey map shows Pentrefelin Corn Mill at the bottom. The sluice on the Eglwyseg Stream and the leet taking water to the Mill can be clearly seen.
Courtesy Ordnance Survey.



Plans of Pentrefelin made in 1792 (left) and 1803 (right). Courtesy Plas Kynaston Canal Group.

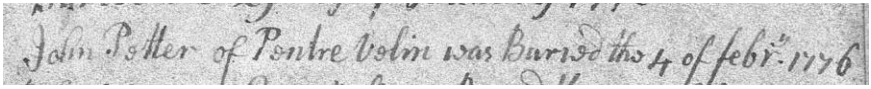
Originally Pentrefelin Mill would have presented a different aspect to the traveller along the road to Ruthin. Until the creation of the turnpike road at the beginning of the 19th century the main route to Ruthin appears to have been via Llantysilio. According to initial 1792 and 1803 plans by William Turner and John Duncombe (above) for proposed branches of the canal, having crossed the bridge over the Eglwyseg stream, the main road appears to have passed between Pentrefelin Mill and Pentrefelin House. With the building of the canal, and then the turnpike, the line of the road had to be changed and so the new turn off to Llantysilio was moved above Pentrefelin House.

Painting of Pentrefelin done by Thomas Walmsley for the Ladies of Llangollen in 1794, before the building of the canal and the re-routing of the road. Although difficult to be certain, due to a lot of artistic licence, it is likely to be Pentrefelin House on the right of the picture. Pentrefelin Mill will lie lower down on the other side of the stream from the trees on the left.

Just before Mathew Trevor inherited the Mill at the end of the 17th century, the Llantysilio and Llangollen Parish Records begin to show the names of the millers and millwrights who were working there[8]. Pentrefelin Mill lies in the township of Maesyrychen in the parish of Llantysilio. It was the only corn mill in the township and so any millers or millwrights from Maesyrychen are very likely to have been those operating Pentrefelin Mill.

The first miller that we can name was Ellis Jones, miller of Maesyrychen, who, with Elinor (sometimes Elin) Williams (sometimes verch or daughter of William), had seven children in the 1660s and 1670s whilst milling at Pentrefelin. Ellis died in 1676 and the milling at Pentrefelin appears to have passed to Edward Parry. Edward was described in the records as millwright of Pentrefelin in 1693, when he and his wife Margaret had a daughter Elizabeth. Forty years later, when Edward died in 1733, he was recorded as a milner (miller).

Edward and Margaret Parry were followed by John and Catherine Peter (or Petter). They are first recorded in November 1738 when they had their son John baptised in Llantysilio Church. Sadly 3 months later he died, but in November 1739 Catherine gave birth to another son, whom they also named John. The Petters milled at Pentrefelin until at least 1776, when John Petter died and was buried in Llantysilio churchyard. Whether this was the father or the son is unclear.

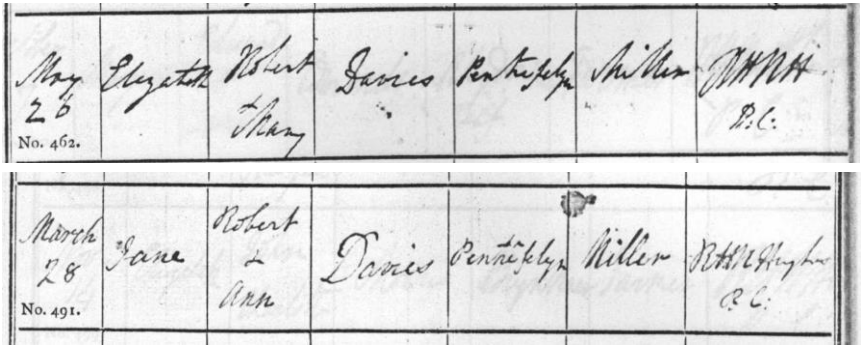

John Potter of Pontre Velin was Buried the 4 of febr. 1776

The burial record for John Petter in 1776. Llantysilio Parish Records.

The next miller at Pentrefelin, that we can see from the records at the end of the 18th century, appears to have been John Jones. Milner John Jones and his wife Mary had a son, also named John, in November 1779. It appears likely that the younger John took over the milling from his father as, in September 1807, miller John Jones (presumably the younger) of Maesyrychen had a daughter Anne with his wife Elizabeth. In August the following year miller John Jones (presumably the older) of Maesyrychen died.

John and Elizabeth went on to have four more daughters, Margaret, Elizabeth, Eleanor and Miriam, and also a son Enoch. However, for the birth of the second youngest daughter, Eleanor, in 1814 Elizabeth was described as ‘his wife formerly’, indicating that they had separated. When Enoch was born in 1818 Elizabeth is described as ‘his wife’. So either John Jones had remarried his former wife or he had taken another wife who was also called Elizabeth.

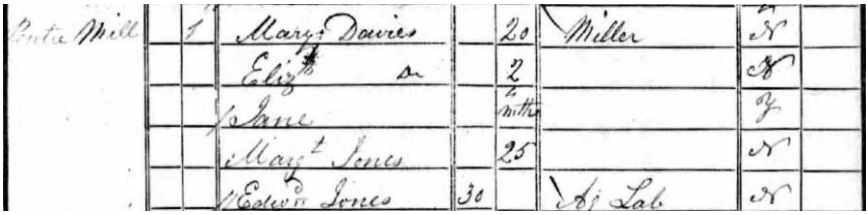
How long John Jones remained miller at Pentrefelin Mill, after the birth of their youngest daughter Miriam in 1822 is unclear, though possibly (see below) he returned 30 years later. Seventeen years later in May 1839, the Llantysilio Parish records showed the birth of Elizabeth, daughter of Robert (miller) and Mary Davies of Pentrefelin. Just two years later in 1841 miller Robert Davies of Pentrefelin had his daughter Jane baptised, but that time the mother was recorded as Ann Davies.


May 26 No. 462. Elizabeth Robert & Mary Davies Penytrefelyn Miller P.C.

March 28 No. 491. Jane Robert & Ann Davies Pentrefelyn Miller P.C.

The baptisms of Elizabeth Davies in 1839 Jane Davies in 1841.

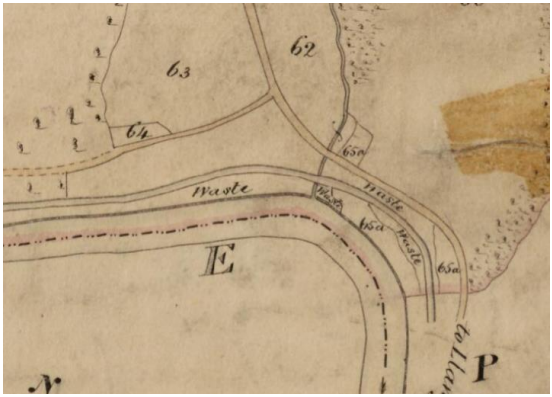
There is a mystery here – with Robert Davies appearing to have fathered two daughters within two years with two different wives or partners. We may have thought that Mary had died and Robert re-married, were it not for the 1841 census, which showed Mary still living at Pentrefelin Mill, along with Elizabeth and Jane.


Pentre Mill | 1 | Mary Davies | 20 | Miller | N
Eliz[th] D[r] | 2 | N
Jane | 2 months | N
Mary Jones | 25 | N
Edw[d] Jones | 30 | Lab | N

The 1841 census for Pentrefelin Mill.

Mary was noted as the miller on the census record and there was no mention of Robert. Had he eloped with Ann, the mother of his second daughter, leaving Mary to bring up the children. Or was Robert just away visiting on the night of the census and the name Ann in the baptism record simply an error?

Unfortunately Pentrefelin Mill is not marked on the tithe map or included in the tithe apportionments of 1841 and so it has not been possible to confirm from this whether Robert Davies' was still there at that time[9].

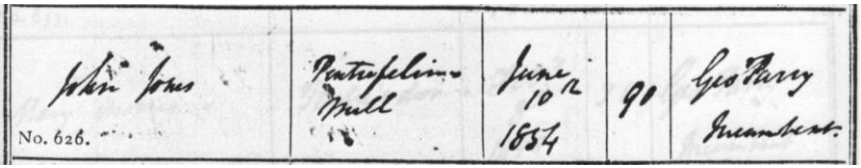


On the tithe map of 1841 the area with Pentrefelin Mill is not apportioned. Courtesy National Library Wales.

This is because certain properties that were 'formerly part and parcel of the ancient and adjoining abbey of Vale Crucis' were 'free and discharged from the payment of great and small Tithe' and so did not need to be included in the tithe survey.

It has not been possible to find with certainty either Robert or Ann Davies on the 1841 census and so the answer to the mystery of the relationship between Robert, Mary and Ann may never be known. What does seem certain is that by 1851 Robert, Mary, Elizabeth and Jane, along with new arrivals Edward, William and Catherine, had relocated to Glan-yCafn Mill in Glyndyfrdwy (see Glan-y-Cafn Mill, page **).

At Pentrefelin in 1851, 85 year old John Jones was the miller, living there with his wife Elizabeth, who was 75, an 82 year old servant Humphrey Humphries, who was also a miller, and 14 year old servant boy Edward Ledsam. It may be possible that this was the original John and Elizabeth, returning to mill at Pentrefelin after all of their children had moved away, although getting confused about their exact age. It seems more likely, however, that it was another John and Elizabeth Jones entirely, as this John Jones was recorded on the census as being born in Clocaenog, whereas we know that the original John Jones was born and baptised in Llantysilio. Whichever it was, in June 1854 John Jones of Pentrefelin Mill died, aged 90 years.



The burial record for John Jones in 1854. Llantysilio Parish Records.

By 1856 Thomas Jones was milling at Pentrefelin, along with his wife Mary. In April of that year their son Richard Henry was baptised at Llantysilio Church. Thomas was from Glyndyfrdwy and Mary from Bryneglwys and they and Richard's older sister Margaret had moved to Pentrefelin from Glyndyfrdwy, where they were living previously. Margaret and Richard were joined by a younger sister Jane in April 1859. On the 1861 census Thomas Jones is recorded as 39 years old, Mary as 31 and their three children Margaret, Richard and Jane as 7, 5 and 2 years old respectively. Whether Thomas Jones was connected with any of the previous Jones families who had lived at Pentrefelin it has not been possible to establish.

In 1868 Pentrefelin Mill, along with a number of other properties, was sold away from the Trevor Estate. This was as a result of a dispute at the Chancery Court between Robert Still (and others) and Pennant Iremonger (and others). Pennant was the daughter of Rice Thomas of the Coed Helen estate and Margaret Lloyd, heiress of the Trevor Hall Estate, including properties formerly belonging to Valle Crucis Abbey[10].

SALE BY MR. WILLIAM DEW.

Llantysilio and the Town and Parish of Llangollen (part of the Trevor Hall Estate,) Denbighshire.

VALUABLE FARMS, MILLS, HOUSES, AND BUILDING LAND.

MR. WILLIAM DEW has been appointed by the Master of the Rolls pursuant to a Decree of the High Court of Chancery made in a cause of "Still v. Iremonger," to SELL BY AUCTION, at the "Hand Hotel," Llangollen, on Friday, the 5th day of June, 1868, at Twelve for One o'clock in the afternoon, in 58 lots.

VALUABLE FREEHOLD FARMS, MILLS, HOUSES, and BUILDING LAND, in the Parish of Llantysilio, and in the Town and Parish of Llangollen, (forming part of the Trevor Hall Estate,) in the county of Denbigh.

The Lots are as follows:—

Lots 1 and 2, Pentrefelin Mill and Lands.

Lots 3 to 8, Cilmedw Farm, an Allotment of Land and several Shops and Houses, and also Llangollen Mill in Llangollen Town.

Lots 9 to 15, Cottage at Wenffrwd, and Lands, parts of Plas-isa, Graig-y-chwarel, and Farchwl and Cae-Llyntelin.

Lots 16 to 19, Trevor Mill and Lands, and Allotment on Trevor Mountain, and Lots 20 to 58, Lots of Building Land and Plantation, parts of Rhos-y-coed and Cae-isa, and Ty-isa Farm, and Cae Pistyll.

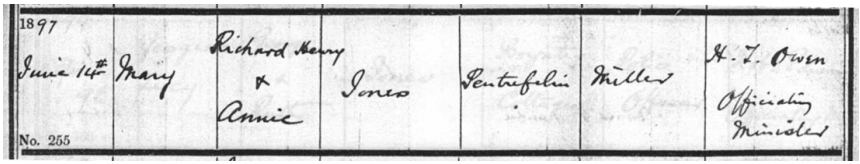
May be viewed by leave of the Tenants, and printed particulars and conditions of Sale may be had (gratis) of Mr. Stafford Francis Still, solicitor, 5 New-square, Lincoln's Inn, London,—of Messieurs Price Bolton and Filder, solicitors, 1 New-square, Lincoln's Inn, of Messieurs Hayes, Twisden and Parker, solicitors, 60 Russell-square, London, of Mr. William Griffith Haslam, land surveyor, Menai Bridge, Bangor, at the above Hotel, the Hotels in the neighbourhood, and of the Auctioneer Mr. William Dew, of Bangor, in the County of Carnarvon.

Dated the 7th day of May, 1868.

Auction of Trevor Hall property in the Llangollen Advertiser of May 1868.

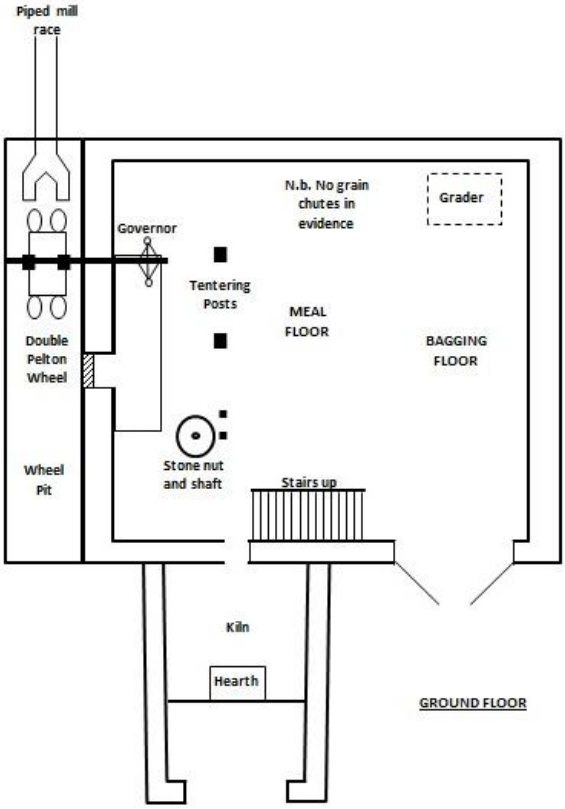
Thomas and Mary Jones were, however, still at Pentrefelin Mill in 1871, although Margaret and Richard had left and Jane had been joined by an eight year old younger brother John. As well as a miller Thomas Jones was also farming on the lands belonging to the Mill, keeping cattle, pigs and sheep as well as growing corn. Ten years later, in 1881, Richard had returned home to join Jane and John, who were still living with their parents. Thomas and Mary were still at Pentrefelin Mill in 1891, although all of the children had left and they were living with lodger Fanny Griffiths (73) and a servant William Hughes (14). Thomas was still the miller and William was recorded as the mill labourer.

By 1897 Richard had once again returned to Pentrefelin as a miller, this time with his wife Annie, as evidenced by the baptism of their daughter Mary in May of that year.



The baptism of Mary Jones in May 1897.

Thomas was evidently ill or feeling his age a bit, as in 1899 he gave up farming. He sold off all of his stock and equipment in an auction at the Mill and retired[11]. A year later he died and Mary took over the milling operations. In 1901 the 72 year old was recorded as the miller, employing widower Richard Davies (58) also as a miller. Also living there was Mary's granddaughter, 13 year old Nellie Jones.

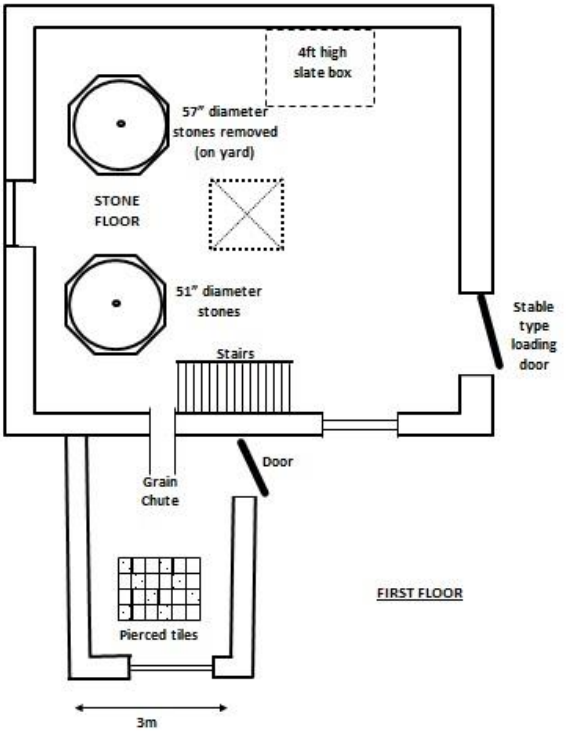


Milling was hard daily work, with the processes at the Mill being spread over three floors. The ground floor was mainly used as the meal floor, where chutes from the stone floor above, delivered cleaned grain for milling, meal for sifting, and milled products, each of which was collected in sacks. It was also where the flour was graded and bagged.

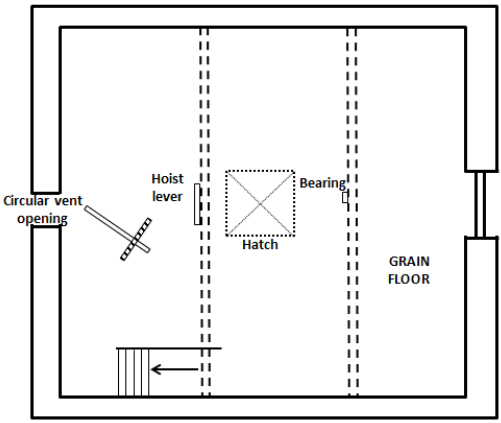
Plan of the ground floor at Pentrefelin Mill. Copied from a plan made by Ian Gough for RCAHMW in 1987.

Parts of the original mill machinery remain in the garden of Pentrefelin Mill (left) and some of the original features, such as this corn chute, are still in place within the building.
Courtesy of the current owner (2022).

The first floor of the Mill was the stone floor, where the grinding of the wheat was carried out. Pentrefelin Mill had two sets of stones, one pair 57 inches in diameter and the other pair 51 inches. From hoppers above the stones the grain fell into a smaller feed hopper and then along a short wooden chute, known as the shoe, which directed it down into the 'eye' of the runner stone.



Plans of the first (above) and second (below) floors at Pentrefelin Mill. Copied from plans made by Ian Gough for RCAHMW in 1987.



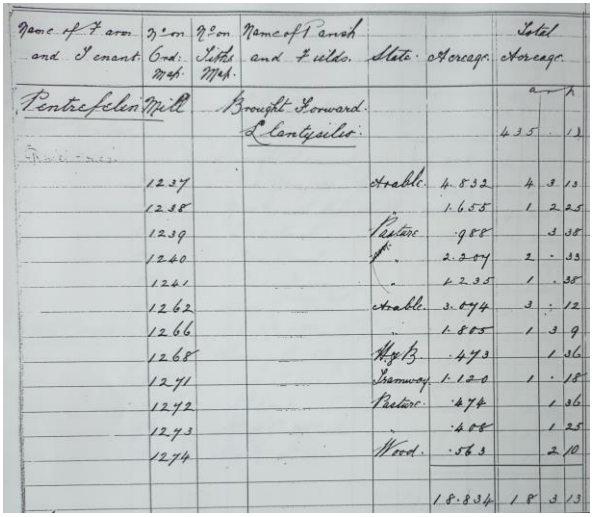
The second or top floor formed the grain floor. Grain loaded through the loading door on the floor below would have been hoisted up to this floor, where it was stored. Once on the top floor, the sacks would then have been emptied into the hoppers above the stones.

It would have been sometime at the end of the 19th century or the start of the 20th century that Pentrefelin Mill switched from using the traditional water wheel to the more efficient Pelton wheel. The Pelton wheel was invented by Lester Pelton in 1880 during the American gold rush. The design works best with fast flowing water and the turbine extracts energy by slowing the water down - known as an impulse turbine. With the axle of the new dual Pelton wheel being significantly lower than that of the original wheel, it was necessary to connect it to the existing drive shaft of the Mill machinery via gear wheels and a drive chain within the wall of the Mill.

The double Pelton wheel at Pentrefelin Mill (top) and the toothed wheels and chain connecting the wheel to the original drive shaft for the Mill machinery (bottom). Courtesy of the current owner (2021).

In 1911 the mill was still operating. 46 year old Daniel Jones was the miller, living with his wife Margaret, who was 45 and their son John Ivor aged 9. Daniel had been born in Llandderfel, Merionethshire, and had followed in his father's footsteps as a miller. He had previously been a miller in Hirnant in Montgomeryshire and at Caerwys Mill in Flintshire, before moving his family to carry on his trade at Pentrefelin.

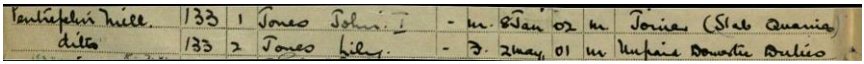
At this time Pentrefelin Mill is recorded as one of the properties owned by Sir Henry Beyer Robertson as part of the Llantysilio Hall estate, and so it seems likely that Charles Beyer (Sir Henry's godfather and owner of the Llantysilio estate, which he left to his godson when he died in 1876) had purchased the Mill when it was auctioned by Trevor Hall in 1868.



Name of Farm and Tenant	No. on Grd. Map.	No. on Tithe Map.	Name of Parish and Fields.	State.	Acreage.	Total Acreage. a. r. p.
Pentrefelen Mill			Brought Forward.			4 3 5 1
			Llantysilio.			
	1237			Arable	4.832	4 3 13
	1238				1.655	1 2 25
	1239			Pasture	.988	3 38
	1240			"	2.304	2 . 33
	1241			"	1.235	1 . 38
	1262			Arable	3.074	3 . 12
	1266				1.805	1 3 9
	1268			Hy & B.	.473	1 36
	1271			Tramway	1.120	1 . 18
	1272			Pasture	.474	1 36
	1273				.408	1 25
	1274			Wood	.583	2 10
					18.834	18 3 13

A list of properties belonging to Sir Henry Beyer Robertson of Llantysilio Hall at the start of the twentieth century includes Pentrefelin Mill. Courtesy Llangollen Museum, 2002.22.4.

John Ivor did not continue the family milling tradition. He became a joiner, working for the firm of D. Davies and Sons. In 1922 John married Lily Davies of Glen View, Llangollen and they lived in Llangollen. Although still working as a joiner in the slate quarries, in 1939 John and Lily returned to Pentrefelin Mill, which they had re-opened to grind corn during the period of the Second World War[12].



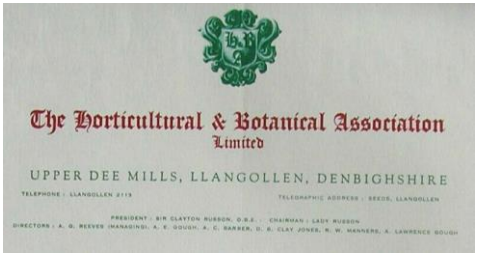
Pentrefelin Mill	133	1	Jones John I	-	M.	8 Jan 02	M	Joiner (Slate Quarries)
ditto	133	2	Jones Lily	-	F.	2 May 01	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties

John Ivor and Lily Jones at Pentrefelin Mill in 1939.

It would be the final time that Pentrefelin Mill was in operation. After the War John Ivor and Lily moved back into Llangollen to live on Brook Street, and John Ivor became the caretaker of the Town Hall, before sadly passing away in 1977.

Around 1942, Sir William Clayton Russon had relocated his seed company, R & G Cuthbert Ltd, to Dee Mills in Llangollen, and he purchased Abbey Dingle, just up the road from Pentrefelin Mill, to use as a nursery. The Mill appears to have been included in the sale as, in 1960, it was sold along with Abbey Dingle by Sir William and Gladys, his wife, to their company for £29,920[13].

During this period Pentrefelin Mill fell derelict. In 1980 R & G Cuthbert Ltd sold several pieces of land, including Abbey Dingle, to The Horticultural and Botanical Association Ltd. (which was an associated company). The Mill was not mentioned in the sale but it seems that it could have been included as five years later, in 1985, there was the sale of 'all that parcel of land, together with the disused Water Mill and house called Pentrefelin Mill Cottage' from The Horticultural and Botanical Association Ltd to Peter Dermot Kay and Linda Kay[14].


The Horticultural & Botanical Association
Limited
UPPER DEE MILLS, LLANGOLLEN, DENBIGHSHIRE

Letterhead of the The Horticultural and Botanical Association.

They sold the Mill on to Hugh Charles Sharp and it was he who transformed the building from a derelict shell into the lovely private house that it is today. Having completed the restoration he, in turn, sold Pentrefelin Mill to the current owner in the 1990s.

The derelict Pentrefelin Mill in the 1950s.

Some of the original working parts of the Mill have been kept as features in the renovated house.
Courtesy of the current owner (2021).