

Up the Wooded path to Polly Morgan's

**A history of Penrhiw-gwiail cottages, Lower Machen
between 1841 -1962**



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Introduction

If you take the single track lane which turns off to the left from Pentre Tai Road in Rhiwderin village and, after heading uphill for about a half a mile, you pass the gated entrance to Pant Glas farm, eventually you will come to the point where the road levels out and five narrow lanes meet. All of these lanes are metalled except for one. In the field just to your left there once stood a small cottage called Pump Heol, or Five Lanes, Cottage. From this point take the un-metalled stoney track and walk up hill, but beware as this is often very muddy and slippery after rain. After a short walk uphill there are fields on your left and woods to your right as you continue to climb. Eventually you are walking a muddy track with trees on your left and right. As you continue walking the ground begins to level out and the trees on your left begin to thin and you see fields emerge from behind large broadleaf trees. It is at this point that you have finally reached that place known to Risca and Pontymister people as Polly Morgan's. This location is shown on OS maps under its actual name Penrhiw-gwiall. If you are attentive you will notice fallen walls and rubble among the trees on left side of the track. This is all that remains of Polly Morgan's cottage. Of the other cottage, once located a little further along on the left side of the track, there are no remains and no indication that there was ever a cottage in this place that housed a well maintained hearth and an industrious family.



Fig 1. The ruins of Polly Morgan's Cottage taken by Ralph Collins just before their demolition in 2007 (photo: Ralph Collins)

In his book 'Western Valley walks' (2010) Newport author Ralph Collins provides us with the fullest available account of the ruins of the cottage:

Along this section you will find a ruined cottage, once the home of Polly Morgan, with a large overgrown garden. It was built from a mixture of stones: Old Red Sandstone, Limestone and Millstone Grit. There is even a timber frame remaining in a doorway of the pine end, even though the roof and much of the masonry have long since collapsed

The Origins of the name Penrhiw-Gwiail

The original name Penrhiw'r-gwiail translates from the original Welsh as 'The Hill Top of the Wicker Rods'. It may be that once this part of Coed Mawr, or the Big Wood, was used for growing hazel which would have been coppiced by local woodsmen to provide the flexible greenwood rods used for the manufacturer of wicker hurdles. These hurdles were in great demand in the centuries before industrially produced metal fencing wire came into use.



Fig 2 Woven greenwood hazel hurdle fence panels were once a common feature of rural life (unknown source)

This area in the parishes of Machen and Bassaleg was long the domain of the Tredegar Estate and all the fields and woodlands hereabouts were valuable assets of the Morgan family of Tredegar Park. The Morgans, via their estate managers and agents, would have leased out these lands to tenant farmers, such as the Edmunds of Lower Maendy, and woodsmen, such as the Jenkins family of Ochrywth. By the 1840s there were two cottages and gardens at Penrhiw-gwial which were leased out to tenants however at the time of the Tredegar Estate map of 1760 these two small parcels of land adjacent to the track were still integral to the 88 acres of land of Maendy Uchaf farm tenanted at that time by Thomas Edward Rees.

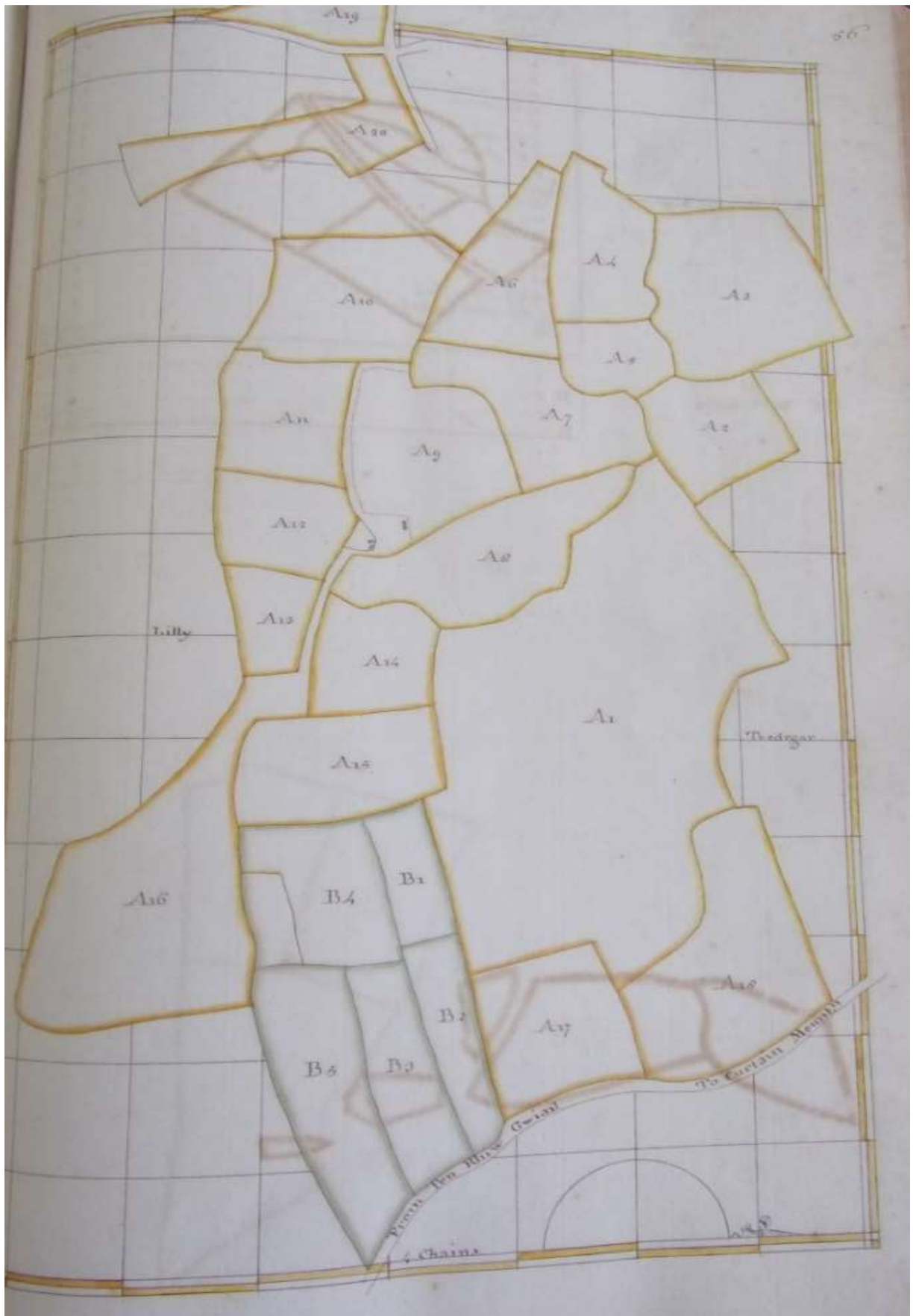


Fig 3 Maendy Uchaf farm from the Tredegar Survey of 1760. The cottages and gardens at Penrhiwgwial would later be carved out from a trackside sliver of field A17 (NLW)



Fig. 4 Upper Maendy farm from the Exact Survey commissioned by the Tredegar Estate in 1773. The cottages at Penrhio-gwail were located adjacent to the track in the field marked 3. 1. 0. (NLW)

The Machen Tithe map of 1841 and apportionment of 1842

Unfortunately it has not been possible to identify Penrhiw-gwiall on the land tax assessments for Machen taken between 1803 and 1828 so the first hard evidence we have of cottages there come from the Parish of Machen Tithe map surveyed by W. Jones in 1841 (see below). By this time two cottages and gardens had appeared alongside the parish road from Rhiwderin to Mynydd Machen. The accompanying tithe schedule lists the owner and occupiers of these cottages as follows: (634) Meredith Jones (Tenant) cottage and garden and garden, owner - Sir Charles Morgan 1 rood 2 perches and (635) Edward Harris (tenant) cottage & garden, owner Sir Charles Morgan - 1 rood 4 perches. So both properties were official in that they were recognised, and rented out, by the Tredegar Estate, although one or both may have begun their life in the early 1800s as squatter's cottages located in the waste at the side of the parish road.



Fig 5 the 1841 Machen tithe map showing the Penrhiw-gwiall area (NLW)

Census Data

The earliest census data we have comes from the 1841 census for the parish of Machen. Meredith Jones, aged 40, who appears as tenant on the tithe apportionment taken one year later, is present. He was an agricultural labourer, possibly working for Edmund Edmund on the adjacent Maendy Uchaf farm. Also present in the same household is his wife Ann, also aged 40, and their children Thomas (12), Ann (9) Hannah (6), Meredith (2). Sadly this census includes very few personal details about this family so we have to wait until the 1851 census to find out more about them. The Harris family who also feature on the apportionment are not present at this census –although they are not far away and can be found on the census listed between the entries for Machen Place (Plas Machen) and Machen Pandy. They appear as follows: Ann Harris (65), Edward Harris (20) tyler and plasterer and Margaret Harris (25) who could be Edward's wife or sister. Another family called Relight (probably Rellitt) are listed on the census in a cottage beneath the entry for the Jones family. William Relight, aged 55, is described as a mason, his wife Hannah is 40, and their children Elizabeth (15), Robert an apprentice mason aged 10, William (7) and Ann (2). None of the children of school age are described as 'scholars' which means they probably would have received no formal education at this time, aside from some instruction in reading the bible at the Sunday school of their local chapel.

Thankfully at the 1851 census the Jones and Harris are still resident in the cottages at Penrhiw-gwail, respectively referred to on the census as 'Five Lanes' and 'Penrhiwgweal' (sic). This affords us the opportunity to find out a little more about their origins. Meredith Jones is by now 51 years old. He had been born at Llanfrynach near Brecon in 1800, although this is referred on the census to a 'Brekon, Lanafranach' (sic). Meredith's wife Ann, aged 50, and both of his children Meredith (12) and William (8) were born at Machen. The two boys are referred to as 'scholars' and this fact is significant as schooling was not freely provided for the children of labourers in the 1850s. It could be that Meredith was employed by the Morgans on their estate and his children were therefore provided with free schooling at Machen National School which was established in 1834 by the Rev. Augustus Morgan of Machen House. Rev Morgan was a younger brother of Lord Tredegar and Rector of the parish. This school house is still visible in Lower Machen (see Fig. 6 page 9). This is now a private residence called Parkfield House.

The Harrises are headed by Ann aged 74, who would have been referred to as 'the Widow Harris' as was the fashion in those days. Ann had been born at Michaelstone y Fedw in 1775. Her son Edward Harris, aged 30, is described as a tyler (sic). Ann's 17 year grand-daughter Sarah-Ann is also present and is referred to as 'servant'. All had been born at Michaelstone which is only a few miles distant down the valley of the River Rhydney from Lower Machen.



Fig. 6 Machen National School which was established in 1834 by the Rev. Augustus Morgan of Machen House and is now a private residence called Parkfield House (RJS)



Fig. 7 Welsh country cottage (circa 1900) from the Davies family of Ty Isaf Bedwas collection. This cottage may have been located at Bedwas or Lower Machen as the family farmed at Panteg Farm in Lower Machen. (Linda Davies)

Meredith Jones and his family are still at their cottage at the next census in 1861. Meredith is still employed as a labourer at the age of 61. His wife Ann is now 60 and their sons. Younger William (18) is described as a labourer while elder son Meredith (22) is described as a 'platelayer'. Meredith would have been employed maintaining nearby railway lines as essentially platelayers were trackmen who maintained the railway track once it had been laid. They were usually employed in gangs of perhaps 8 or so men under the leadership of a ganger 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 on their 'length' of line. These men were literally the backbone of the railway, with little available to them in the way of mechanical assistance it was often arduous and uncomfortable work, but without decent track the trains could not run. Meredith Jones the senior would remain at the cottage until his death aged 67 in the first quarter of 1868. By the 1871 census the younger Meredith is resident near Heolddu Farm at Gelli Groes Pontllanfraith. He is now is married with a son and daughter. Later his occupation as a railway inspector would take him to the Stapleton area of Bristol where he was to die aged 73 in 1912.

Edward Harris is no longer at Penrhiw-gwiail in 1861. His mother having passed away he is now a lodger in Turnpike Road Risca in the home of Charles Lloyd, butcher. In his place another Harris has arrived namely Thomas Harris, a 57 year old mason, who was born at Bassaleg in 1801. With him are his wife Rebecca, also aged 57 and born at Machen, his two daughters, Hannah aged 23, and Martha aged 17, both of whom had been born at Risca, and finally his son Mark who at the age of 14 is described as a scholar. The fact that neither daughters nor son were employed is significant and seems to indicate that the family could have been relatively well off which is surprising given that 10 years earlier Thomas and his elder son David, then referred to as Harries and resident at Pont-y-mason, were both employed as labourers in the tinworks at Rogerstone. Interestingly evidence has come to light that the family were practicing Baptists. David had been baptised at Beulah Chapel at Newbridge while the family were resident at Ty'n Ffynnon in the parish of Risca. The fact they were Baptists probably means that the men were teetotal so the family's money was carefully managed and set aside for the children's education. By 1891 both David and Mark Harris, and their own respective families, were resident in Water Lane Risca. Although listed under Ochryth, and not named, on the 1871 census Thomas Harris and his daughter remain in their cottage at Penrhiw-Gwiail. Thomas is now a widowed 68 year old contractor in Pontymister tinplate works living with his unmarried 26 year old daughter Martha. She is not described as being in employment so would have been an unpaid housekeeper for her father.

Edward Edmunds 71 year old widowed farm labourer, Edward Edwards aged 39 a grandson and farm servant, Thomas Edmunds 33 grandson and farm servant, Ann Edmunds aged 66 Edward senior's daughter, Mary Watkins aged 21 a grand-daughter and servant and finally Edward Edmunds, the younger, aged 15 who is described as a great grandson and servant.



Fig. 9 Penrhiw-Gwial from the 1878 Ordnance Survey map (NLS)

Rebecca's unmarried sister Ann, late of Ty Cenol, was named executrix (the female executor of a will) and the main beneficiary of her father's will. One of the duties given to her was to pay her sister Rebecca, wife of James Edmunds, £1. She obviously did much more than this because in 1861, 7 years later, Rebecca and her son John are residing with Ann and their nephew Edward Edmunds at Llandanglws farm. There is no entry for Lower Maindy on the 1861 census and it may be that the Edmunds' copyhold lapsed with the death of Edward Edmunds the senior. It was commonly the case in the eighteenth century that leases were granted for 99 years or two lives and this would explain why the Edmunds also held Llandanglws farm which was also a Tredegar Estate holding. Ann Edmunds died aged 80 in the second quarter of 1865 and the 1871 census brings us full circle and sees Rebecca and her son John at Penrhiw-gwial.

The Edmunds are still at the cottage at the time of the 1881 census although it is now referred to as 'Penheol y Gwial' (Top of the Wicker Rods Road). John is now 40 and his mother Rebecca is 82 years old, a considerable achievement when you consider the living conditions that the occupants of rural cottages endured at this time but, considering her

father's longevity, this may have been no surprise as the family were obviously of a sound constitution. Rebecca appears to have died at the age of 87 in 1886 and her death was recorded in the first quarter of that year at Newport. After his mother's death it would appear that John lived alone.



Fig. 10 The Victorian housewife's lot was one of never ending toil rather than the idyllic life shown in 'Home 'Be It Ever So Humble' by George Smith (1867)

The other cottage at Penrhiw-gwiail was tenanted by a family called Rosser. This surname was very common in the nearby village of Risca during the nineteenth century, however the family name is patronymic, like Edmunds, i.e. *Rosser* is the Welsh for Roger, which means families of this name were not necessarily related and all they actually shared was an ancestor with the common Christian name of Rosser. David Rosser, the head of the household, was a 47 year old labourer who had been born at Machen in 1836. Daniel and Ann, David's parents had been born at Llanvedw and Rhydygwern, just across the river Rhymney from the village of Upper Machen which was still known in those days as Froomista (Fwrwm Ishta) after its popular roadside inn. At the 1861 census David is residing with his parents at Nantyceisad on the Bedwas side of the village. At this time David was employed as a collier in one of the nearby collieries. By 1871 David was married and living at Ty Cenol, where Rebecca Edmunds and her son John had lived thirty years previously. At this time he is still employed as a collier. David, and his wife Hannah who had been born at Risca, would have

married in the mid-1860s and their son Thomas was born at Machen in 1868. There is also a 7 month old daughter named Myra (or Maria) on the 1871 census however she is not present ten years later as she had passed away at just 7 years of age in the third quarter of 1877 - childhood mortality was very common at this time. The 1881 census sees David employed as a labourer along with his 15 year old son Thomas. There are also two lodgers present in their home. These were William Edmunds, aged 75 and employed as a farm labourer (he doesn't appear to be a member of the Upper Maindy family who had died by this time), and David Phillip a 25 year old platelayer employed on the railways. No doubt David's wife Hannah would have had her hands full feeding and keeping house for four men all engaged in hard manual labour.

On the 1891 census the Penrhiw-gwial cottages are referred to as *Coedmawr*. David Rosser is now 57 years old and employed as a general labourer, his wife Hannah is 54 and their son Thomas is a 23 year old tinplate worker. The Rossers are occupying a cottage of 4 rooms while their neighbour John Edmunds, now aged 50, has split his cottage with Evan Bowen, a 54 year old labourer, and his wife Sarah aged 68. Both were originally from Builth in Brecknockshire. The cottage appears to have been split amicably with 2 rooms apiece and, with John now alone, sharing the cottage would have made it easier to cover his rent and meet day to day expenses on what would have been a very meagre income.



Fig. 11 Rhiwderin village around 1900 (South Wales Argus)

By 1901 John Edmunds is no longer at Penrhiw-gwiall as he has relocated to the nearby village of Draythan (sic). This is probably indicative that John was a Tredegar estate worker. At this time Draethan was the estate village serving Ruperra Castle, the seat of Frederick Courtenay Morgan who was younger brother of Lord Godfrey Morgan, 1st Viscount Tredegar. Godfrey was known locally as a great philanthropist and during his years as Lord Tredegar many of the tied properties, including the cottages at Penrhiw-gwiall, were rebuilt or modernised. Moreover most of the occupants of the village would have worked on the estate or its tenanted farms and lived in tied cottages. This certainly seems to have been the case with John Edmunds. At the 1901 census John, who is described as an 'ordinary agricultural labourer', is lodging with Mary Watkins aged 71 and her 17 year old niece. In 1911, 10 years later, John, now retired, is still at Draethan, in his own 3 roomed tied cottage. His former landlady Mary Watkins is next door. Her niece has departed and, now aged 81, she is alone in her own three room cottage.

Into the New Century

The Rosser family are still at Penrhiw-gwiall cottages in 1901 however David and his wife Hannah are absent, David having died in October 1900 aged 66, and the family in the newly numbered 'Number 1' is now headed by their son Thomas Rosser (33) who is employed as a steelworks labourer. He has now married Cecelia Mary (30) and they have three children David Linden (6), Irene Jane (4) and baby Rosena Rachel who is just 3 Months old.



Fig. 12 (Left) Thomas Rosser with his wife Cecelia Mary (nee Edwards) at the time of their marriage in 1894 and (right) Thomas Rosser in early middle age (Colin Powell)

Thomas Rosser had married Cecelia Mary Edwards locally in 1893. Cecelia, now Mrs Rosser, had been born to Thomas Edwards a 48 year old wood labourer (born at Michaelstone y Fedw) and his second wife Mary aged 34 at Cwrt y Llaca near Rhiwderin. Cwrt y Llaca was a tied Tredegar Estate cottage, later renamed Parkwood House that was reserved for workers on the estate's woodlands. Thomas Edwards died in the 1870s leaving his wife a widow with four children, two boys and two girls to bring up. Mary (b. Mary King at Llanvaches in 1871) was obviously a strong and resilient woman and she would remain at Cwrt y Llaca making ends meet by working as a char woman and taking in lodgers. At the time of the 1891 census Mary is a 45 year old widow, her one remaining son William is 25 and employed as a general labourer, and youngest Mary Jayne is 17. Also resident is George Hoskins a 40 year old woodcutter lodging with the family.



Fig. 13 Mary Edwards, Cecilia Rosser's mother, pictured outside of Cwrt y Llaca around 1914 (Colin Powell)

Thomas and Cecilia had their first child David Linden in 1895 at Lower Machen, their eldest daughter Irene Jane in 1897 at Bassaleg and the youngest Rosena Rachel in 1900 also at Machen, the first and last being almost certainly home births but the second child may have been a difficult pregnancy which is why Cecilia is likely to give birth to Irene in her mother's home. Cecilia and her children would always keep a very close link to her mother -especially when her children attended Rhiwderin School and for periods of time the children would spend long days at the home of their grandmother and uncle and aunt, Edward and Mary-Jane Fairfax. Rosina actually appears on the 1911 census as a resident of Cwrt y Llaca, briefly renamed Pwll Llaca, and it is likely she would spend much of the week there during the school term especially during the winter time when the

short jaunt down from Cwrt y Llaca to Rhiwderin might be a more attractive proposition than long dark and hazardous walk to and from Penrhiw-gwial.



Fig. 14 Irene Rosser, third from the right in the back row, at Rhiwderin School (Colin Powell)

The Arrival of the Morgans

1901 also marks a new era at Penrhiw-gwial as a new family called the Morgan's have arrived and taken residence in Number 2 Penrhiw-gwial cottages. This family is headed by David Morgan, a 49 year old woodman who had been born at Malpas, his wife Ann (48) had been born nearby at Bassaleg and their two teenage children: daughter Mary-Ann aged 16 and known as Polly; and son Thomas who is 13 years of age and still at school. Both the children had been born at Machen. David Morgan was a son of William and Ann Morgan who were tenants of the Samuel family at Pen-y-fan farm Rogerstone from 1871 until after 1901. William Morgan had previously farmed at Malpas and with his wife Ann had a family consisting of 10 children. This may not have been that large at the time but his wife Ann appears to be still giving birth at the age of 50, although she did subsequently go on to live past the age of 95.

In 1881 and 1891 David Morgan, along with his wife and later their children had lived in a cottage on Pen-y-park lane, and it is likely that David was one of 6 men employed as agricultural labourers by the Yorkshireman David Tweedy who was farm bailiff at the 300 acre Pen-y-Park farm. At this time the elder son, 9 year old William, is still with his parents, but 10 years later he is working away from home. David Tweedy had relocated to Aberdare by 1894 and his death, and that of his wife Hannah, were registered at Merthyr Tydfil in 1899. In 1892 Pen-y-Park farm was tenanted by the John family and so it seems that David Morgan relocated to

another Tredegar property around that time before moving to the cottage at Penrhiwgwial around 1899. This is confirmed by the electoral register which gives the last entry for John Edmunds in 1900. Subsequently David Morgan, along with Thomas Rosser, appears on every electoral register up to and including 1911.



Fig 15 The Stoney Bridge at Pontymister. This would have been walked across regularly by generations of occupants of Ochryth including Polly Morgan on her way to and from the cottage at Penrhiw-gwial



Fig. 16 Looking up the River Ebbw towards the Pontymister works from the Ochryth side of the Stoney Bridge.

Swine Fever in Newport District.

At Newport County Police-court on Saturday, David Tweedy, farm bailiff to an Aberdare farmer, and Mr Lance Ernest Woodruff, foundry proprietor, Vedw House, Machen, were summoned for removing swine from an infected area. The evidence showed that six pigs were consigned by railway from Bedford to Mr Woodruff on the 7th April, and that on the 23rd Tweedy removed one of the pigs from Mr Woodruff's. Tweedy afterwards told P.C. James he did not know whether or not he had done wrong. Bedford was an infected district, and Supt. Parry said that a case of swine fever had broken out at Abercarn in consequence of other pigs from Bedford. The Monmouth County Council have issued a long notice, which the magistrates' clerk, after regarding it in terror for some seconds, said would require a learned pig to construe it. This notice declared that to check the spread of swine fever, no pig should be moved in the county from one place to another, unless it had been in residence in one piggery for 28 days.—The Bench found that the giant strength of the law was £20, but as this was the first prosecution under the orders, fined the defendants 20s each only.

Fig. 17 Following his move from Lower Machen to Aberdare David Tweedy maintained his agricultural links to the locality as this report from the Cardiff Times dated 12th May 1894 illustrates (NLW)

The 1911 Census provides a lot more detail on the two Penrhiw-gwial Cottages and their occupants. In number one Thomas Rosser, now aged 43, is employed as a painter's labourer in railway shops. His wife Cecelia is 40. In 1911 Thomas and Cecelia's eldest child David Linden is now aged 16 and working as a sheet catcher in the galvanising works at Pontymister; Irene Jane the middle child is 14 years old but the youngest Rosena Rachel (now termed Rosina) is absent and as previously mentioned was with her grandmother and uncle and aunt at Cwrt y Llaca. In place of Rosina her mother's niece Mary Hannah Edwards (17) is now resident with her family at Penrhiw-gwial and employed as a domestic servant. The Rosser's cottage is described as having four rooms, including the kitchen but excluding the scullery, landing, lobby, closet and bathroom although it is extremely unlikely that either of the cottages ever had this last facility.

At number two David Morgan is aged 59 is employed as a woodsman on Viscount Tredegar's Estate. His wife Ann is 58 and their family consists of William a 29 year old woodsman's labourer, daughter Mary Ann aged 26 who is assisting at home and the youngest son Thomas aged 23 and described as a quarry workman. The Morgan's cottage consists of 5 rooms so it was obviously the larger of the two properties at Penrhiw-gwial. Thomas was described as a quarryman at the time of his enlistment as an infantryman for the South Wales Borderers on the 8th September 1914 at the beginning of his service in World War One. David Morgan and Thomas Rosser continue to feature on the electoral registers for the Penrhiw-gwial cottages as both were 'occupational voters holding a dwelling house'.



Fig. 18 Ann Morgan of Pen-y-fan farm Rogerstone. She was the mother of David Morgan of Penrhiw-gwiall (Phillip Jenkins)

After World War 1, and the 1918 Representation of the People Act, women of thirty years of age and older were entitled to vote in Parliamentary elections. The register for 1923 (autumn) is now more detailed and lists David, Annie & Thomas Edward Morgan and Thomas & Cecilia-Mary Rosser at Penrhiw-gwiall. The Morgan's daughter Mary-Ann (Polly) was absent at this time as she may have been away working in service. This was often the case with young unmarried working class women between the wars. Annie Morgan appears on the register for the last time in the October of 1925 and David and Thomas are on their own without female company until the return of Polly by the time the 1929 register, which would have been compiled in late 1928. David Morgan also appears for the last time on this register. After this Thomas Edward & Mary-Ann Morgan, the unmarried brother and sister, are alone in their cottage in the woods.

Thomas & Cecilia-Mary Rosser appear in their cottage at Penrhw-gwiall for the last time on the 1937 Monmouth Electoral register entry for Lower Machen. Thomas

would have been 69 and his wife 66. The Rosser's then moved to 124 Newport road in Cwmcarn where Thomas passed away in March 1938 aged 70 and Mrs Rosser followed her husband eight years later, passing away in March 1946, aged 75. The Rossers' cottage must have been demolished by the Tredegar Estate soon after they left as there is nothing remaining by the late 1940s Ordnance Survey map of the area, however the family remained in the locality and continue to be present to this day.

ROSSER Thomas of 124 Newport-road Cwmcarn **Monmouthshire** died 14 February 1938 Probate **Llandaff** 28 July to Thomas Edward Morgan roadman. Effects £190 5s. 3d.

Fig.19 The 1938 probate entry for Thomas Rosser. Interestingly Thomas left his effects to his former neighbour at Penrhiw-gwial (ancestry.com)

ROSSER Cecilia Mary of 124 Newport-road Cwmcarn Abercarn **Monmouthshire** widow died 27 February 1946 Administration **Llandaff** 6 May to David Lynden Rosser steelworker. Effects £218 11s.

Fig. 20 The 1946 probate entry following the death of Cecilia Mary Rosser. Mrs Rosser left her effects to her son David who was resident at 144 Newport Road Pontymister Risca. (ancestry.com)

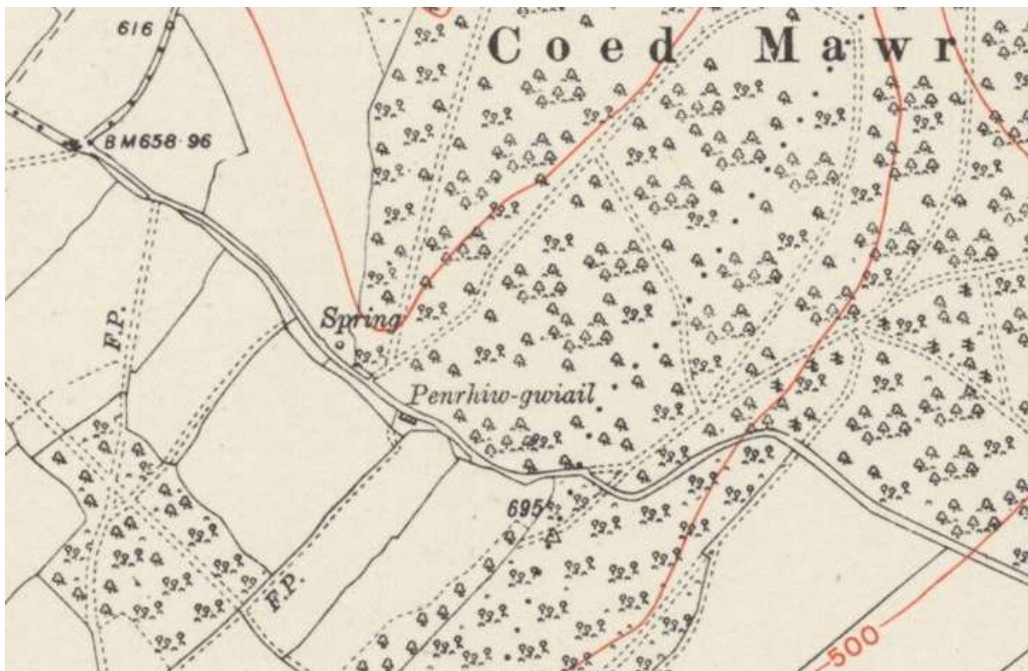


Fig. 21 Irene Jane Rosser (born 20 Jun 1896) married Charlie Powell Ochryth Risca in the last quarter of 1927. At the time of the 1939 census register her and her husband resident at 27 Trafalgar St Pontymister. (Colin Powell)

The Last Days of Polly Morgan's cottage

By the time of the 1939 census taken at the beginning of the Second World War only the Morgan's cottage was still occupied. Thomas Edward Morgan, who had served with the South Wales borders during World War One, was then aged 52 and employed as a roadman by the local council while Polly (Mary Ann Morgan) was aged 55, born on 22 September 1884, and engaged in unpaid domestic labour as her brother's housekeeper. Thomas appears for the last time on the 1954 electoral register listing for Lower Machen and his death was registered at Newport in June of 1954 when he would have been about 66 years old. From this point on Polly would have been alone at Penrhiw-gwiall.

Many Risca and Pontymister people fondly remember Polly in her later years. John Taylor, a former resident of Risca who now lives in Canada, recalls "I used to go to Polly's every Saturday morning in the early 50s with my aunt who drove for Dawson's the grocer to deliver her groceries. The first time I went I was scared to go in the house as I thought she was a witch. Then one day Polly came out to see me and she gave me some sweets I was OK after that and always went in the house to see her. Inside the house on each side of the fireplace were high back wooden benches known as settles. There was a big pot hanging over the fire that got me thinking of the witch thing again and there was also a gentleman there most of the time but I didn't get to know who he was. Polly and he were very nice people and I used to see Polly getting her Argus from Jack Jones. The last time I saw her she was being pushed in a wheelchair in Pontymister. It was around 1950/2 when I used to go to her house, it must have been around 1959/61 when I saw her in the wheelchair, I remember someone told me it was her daughter pushing her."



Monmouthshire XXVIII.SW (includes: Graig; Machen Lower; Risca; Rogerstone.) Revised: 1948 Published: 1953 no longer shows the Rosser's cottage which had been demolished and Polly Morgan's cottage stands alone at the edge of Coedmawr (NLS)

Carole Newnes remembers “my dad knew Polly Morgan, although I think he was much younger. He used to tell me that she walked down into Risca every day to get the groceries and then walk back up.” Sheila Dix said that “I remember her coming down to Chapel on a Sunday! I was a girl but she seemed to be from a passed time, so old fashioned. I thought of her walking back up the wood path in the dark!” Phil Jenkins backs this up and recalls that “my mam said she would wear old lace up Victoriana boots.” Anne Jones who lived at Tafn y coed near Old Pontymister farm remembers that “Polly used to call in to our house every week on her way back from shopping in Pontymister. Her brother Tom and my Grandfather (also a Tom Morgan, no relation) were friends, working on the Tredegar estate. I was fascinated by something "very dangerous" in her shopping which she always left at the front gate - it was her filled up battery (accumulator) which she relied on for her wireless!”

The last entry on the electoral register for Polly and for Penrhiw-gwiall was 1958. At that time a couple called Maslin were living with her at the cottage. The couple were Joseph H Maslin and Ada E. Maslin and it has not possible to date to find any information on these two people. It could be that Ada was William Morgan’s daughter and therefore Polly’s niece. William was Polly’s elder brother who appears with the Morgan family on the 1911 census and it may be that Ada had become concerned with her elderly aunt living alone at Penrhiw-gwiall after her brother Tom’s death. By 1958 Polly would have been in her early seventies and the walk to and from Risca and Ponymister would have become more difficult as the years passed, especially during the wintertime.



1940s wireless radios like this would have been Polly’s link with the outside world



Old radios (wirelesses) used to run on accumulators. These were early rechargeable batteries. This was in the days before electric and battery operated radios in the 1940s and early 50s. The accumulator was like a large square shaped glass bottle with a handle on the top for carrying it. Inside were the battery components surrounded in acid that made the battery work. Radios had two accumulators. It ran on one while the other was being charged. The accumulators, which were very heavy, had to be refilled every week. One of Polly's weekly errands was to take the accumulators down to Pontymister get them charged up.



The wooden settle was once staple cottage furniture, typically placed at the fireside in the main living room

It seems likely that after 1958 the Maslins managed to encourage Polly to move with them down to a house in Pontymister and that, by the early 1960s the years had taken their toll and she had become frail, and reliant upon her niece to take her out in a wheelchair. It may be the case that Polly was encouraged to move down into the valley as long as her house was maintained in case she might want to return and this may have been the situation for a number of years. Whatever the case Mary-Ann, fondly remembered as Polly Morgan went on to live until the age of 86 and her death was registered at Caerleon in December 1970. After this her house would have been left to decay, with roof tiles becoming loose and falling away, the window glass getting smashed by vandals or broken by flying tree branches during storms and the rain eventually got in, Eventually the fabric of the building rotted with the roof and the floors collapsing until only the external walls remained. Eventually in 2007, as Ralph Collins alludes in his book, the remains of the building were demolished with only a few low walls left standing among the rubble. These remains are now all that is left to remind us that Polly Morgan once lived here.



The last remains of Polly Morgan's cottage (photo by Phil Jenkins)

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