

## The Commotes of Llŷn - Medieval Administration

During the Middle Ages, Gwynedd was divided for administration purposes into four 'hundreds' and Llŷn was one of them.

In the 12th / 13th C during the reign of Gruffudd ap Cynan and Owain Gwynedd the hundred was divided into three commotes:

Nefyn was the *maerdref* for the commote of Dinllan and the prince's court was here. The prince would visit his court in the maerdref at times, where rents and tolls would be paid in money or by undertaking work – transporting or repairing. The name in the early C13th was 'Dynthlayn', namely a fort (caer) + 'Llaen' (an Irish personal name) which referred to the coastal fort on Porthdinllan headland (SH 275416).

Dinllan includes the parishes of Pistyll, Nefyn, Edern, Ceidio, Tudweiliog, Llaniestyn, Llandudwen, Boduan and Llannor.

Cymydmaen at the far end of the peninsula includes the parishes of Penllech, Llangwnnadr, Bryncroes, Llandygnwg, Llanengan, Rhiw, Llanfaelrhys and Aberdaron. This commote is named after the yellow rock of Llŷn, Maen Melyn Llŷn which is on the sea cliff in Uwchmynydd (SH 139252) and the maerdref or administrative headquarters was in Neigwl.

In Deneio, Pwllheli these days, there was the maerdref of Cafflogion Afloegion (Cafflogion) and names like Henllys and Gadlys suggest a link (llys = court). The commote was on the eastern side of Llŷn and included the parishes of Carnguwch, Deneio, Llanfihangel Bachellaeth, Penrhos, Botwnnog, Mellteyrn, Llanbedrog and Llangian.

The commote was established by Afloeg, who was one of the sons of Cunedda from the Hen Ogledd (Old North) and the father of Eternus, patron saint of Edern.

There were a hundred tref units (individual farms) in a cantref and names like Hendrefor and Llawr y Dref were used. The Welsh nobleman lived in his own tref at one end of the estate, the pentref, which has given us the name Cefn Pentref, and Pentref in Botwnnog.

A holding of land which had been inherited was called a gafael and that gives us the name Gyfelan in Llangwnnadr.

Although Wales was under the English crown's control following the conquest by Edward I, the Welsh administrative system continued for some time. But Llŷn came to be administered as part of Caernarfonshire and soon Nefyn and Pwllheli came into existence.



## Nefyn in the Middle Ages



The first reference we have to Nefyn is that Gruffudd ap Cynan brought his boat to Nefyn beach in the late C11th. There was a motte and bailey castle here somewhere near Tŵr Pen y Bryn (watch tower at Nefyn) and it's more than likely there was an important townlet here.

In the spring of 1188 Giraldu Cambrensis spent a night at the monastery. With him was Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury, trying to gain Welsh support for the Third Crusade and to emphasize that the cathedrals were under his authority.

Edward I, King of England went on a tour in 1284 following his victory, in an effort to display his authority over Wales. He held a royal Tournament in Nefyn, and a number of place names are linked with it.

At that time Nefyn had 55 residents, but the number increased in the decade after that.

In 1279 the following were listed in the Tax Account:

Einion ap Addah – 9 oxen, 6 cows, 20 sheep, 3 heifers, 3 fishing nets

Ieuan ap Madoc – 4 oxen, a cow, a sheep, a heifer, a boat and 4 nets

Llywarth Crun – 1 cow, 1 net

Bleddyn Fychan – 6 oxen, 3 cows, 2 horses, a small boat and 3 nets

Tangwystl, wife of Addah – 2 cows, a horse, a heifer (3 years old) and 1 net

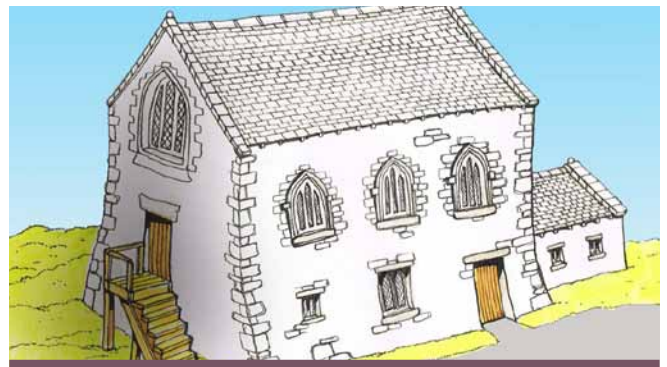
Dai Bach – 2 sheep, a heifer, 2 nets

There is an unofficial reference from that time to the townlet as the 'Borough of Nefyn' but it was only later in 1355 that it received a charter from the Black Prince.

Nefyn was by then taken to be an English town, and it soon suffered during the Owain Glyndŵr Revolt.

Because Nefyn had been given a charter and recognised as a town, although that was later lost, the Nefyn Town Trust was established and it remains active. No one dares refer to Nefyn as a village now!

## The Monastery and Giraldu Cambrensis



Close to the Maritime Museum are Stryd y Mynach and Bryn Mynach (mynach = monk) which suggests strongly this was the site of Nefyn monastery. This is the monastery referred to in the novel *Plant y Mynachdy* by Elisabeth Watkin Jones.

In the mid C12th Cadwaladr ap Gruffudd ap Cynan bestowed Nefyn church, the land between the two rivers where the church stood, together with land on the south-eastern slope of Mynydd Nefyn (Nefyn mountain) to the monks of Haughmond Abbey, near Shrewsbury.

The Augustinians received further gifts from Dafydd ap Owain in 1177 and 1190 and from Llewelyn ap Iorwerth in 1230.

This was an Augustinian order and at about the same time the monks of Enlli / Bardsey Island, Aberdaron, St. Tudwal's Island and Beddgelert joined it.

It was probably at Nefyn monastery that Giraldu Cambrensis and Archbishop Baldwin spent the night of Palm Sunday 1188 when they were on their journey through Wales.

Giraldu refers very little to Nefyn; only to say that the Archdeacon had found 'Merlin Sylvestris' there – a document referring to Myrddin Wyllt, one of the three bards of the Isle of Britain, from the C6th.

The Archbishop preached on the morning of Palm Sunday, and then went over the Eifl mountains and on to Caernarfon and Bangor.



In Nefyn, he heard about Enlli, learnt about the monks of the abbey, that the residents there lived long lives and that Deiniol, Bishop of Bangor was buried there.

## The Tournament



The Court of the Welsh Princes in Nefyn was the administrative centre of the commote of Dinllaen. We don't know where the palace was, but there is a Stryd y Plas (palace street) – and we know it was a two storey house. This was where Edward I and his retinue stayed when he visited Llŷn in 1284, and the ovens had to be made bigger for him.

Edward celebrated his victory over the Welsh, following the murder of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282, by holding a tournament in Nefyn.

In *Brut y Tywysogion* – The Chronicle of the Princes – we find the words 'y peris gwneythur torneymant en nefyn en llyn' – it was caused to make a tournament in Nefyn in Llŷn.

Edward's followers, barons and soldiers attended, and many noblemen travelled by sea to Nefyn to celebrate his success. There were extensive and expensive preparations for the celebration.

The tournament was a French tradition, full of festivity and military games. By the second half of the C13th, the soldiers and horses would wear steel armour.

But the celebrations also included popular traditions from the Arthurian Round Table. This was an attempt by Edward I to identify himself with the Welsh people.

Professor Bedwyr Lewis Jones says

*By now it was a contest between individuals and before an audience, rather than a contest between two factions ending in a wild, uncontrolled skirmish. There would surely be noble ladies amongst those watching; and*

*feasting and dancing had a very prominent place. It was a social event – the Ascot of the thirteenth century. It was a colourful spectacle of this type that was held in Nefyn in 1284.*

Translated from the Transactions of the Caernarfonshire Historical Society (34) - 1973

It's believed locally that the tournament was held on the land of Botacho Ddu, but there are also Cae Iorwerth (Iorwerth = Edward) near Nefyn and Cae Ymryson (field of the contest) in the middle of Ceidio parish (Tithe Maps 1839). It's very likely the location was near the palace, below Fron or at the foot of Garn Boduan.

## Nefyn's Charter



Edward, the Black Prince was authorised to administer from Caernarfon, and in 1349 he gave Nefyn as a 'gift' to Sir Nigel Loryng – one of his principal servants. Six years later, Nefyn was given the status of borough. The community were keen for this to happen, and prepared to pay £36 for the privilege. Then they could hold two annual fairs, on Ascension Day and at Whitsun. The smallholders within Nefyn would be treated in the English way, and the King or his representatives were to rule.

Nefyn kept its status as a borough until 1882, when it lost the title.

## The Owain Glyndŵr Rebellion







Owain Glyndŵr was agitated at seeing how loyal the residents of Nefyn were to the King of England. They also accepted being administered by people from outside, even though they had been forced to put up with it, as had happened with other similar towns.

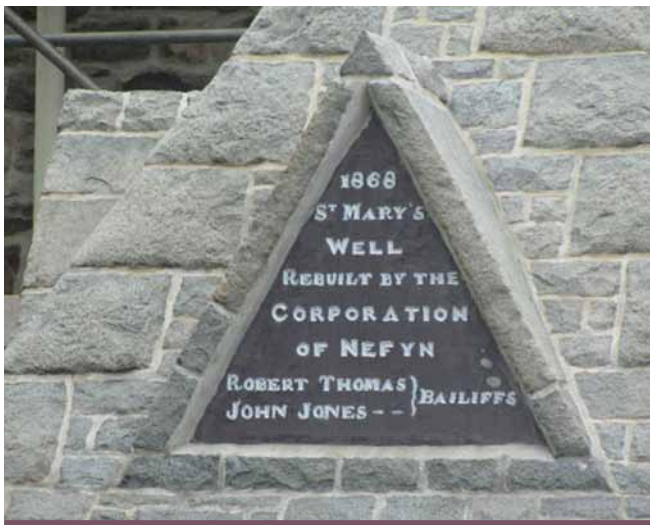
In 1400, Owain's men attacked Nefyn, burned the town completely and drove the residents away. In fact, thirteen years later the town was still in disorder, with no one even collecting any rents by then.

The economy of Nefyn was not restored.

Pwllheli got the same treatment.

(Owain Glyndŵr was a Welsh ruler and the last native Welshman to hold the title Prince of Wales (*Tywysog Cymru*). He instigated a fierce and long-running but ultimately unsuccessful revolt against the English rule of Wales.)

## Nefyn Town Trust



*Ffynnon Fair, Nefyn*

Nefyn kept its status as a Borough until 1882, when it lost the title. Even so, it remained part of Caernarfonshire Borough Constituency, that elected a Member of Parliament to London, together with the towns of Pwllheli, Caernarfon, Bangor, Conwy and Cricieth.

Nefyn also had its own Town Trust that owned houses and land. The Trust is responsible for looking after Ffynnon Fair (well of Mary), Stryd y Ffynnon and Tŵr Pen y Bryn (watch tower at Nefyn). It has the right to distribute its money amongst the community after meeting its duties.

## Twinning Puerto Madryn and Nefyn



Living conditions for people in Wales were very difficult in the first half of the C19th and so a movement began, to establish a Welsh Colony. It was possible to do that in Argentina and a deputation went over to discuss matters with the authorities.

Thomas Love Duncombe Jones Parry, Madryn became a trustee of the movement. He was an experienced person – a Member of Parliament and well used to mixing with national leaders in the clubs of London. With him went Lewis Jones, who was keen on emigrating, but it was Jones Parry who did the bargaining.

Following discussions in Buenos Aires in 1863 they were given permission to visit Patagonia to inspect the land on the banks of the river Chubut. It proved a difficult journey; they hired a ramschackle schooner for the voyage and had to make do with a crew of prisoners to sail it. It was stormy when they landed there, in a bay close to where the first group of settlers would arrive two years later.

They went to survey of the land and were satisfied with it. They made an agreement and returned home with favourable reports of the country.

The first group soon came together; ready to emigrate to the Welsh Colony. They sailed from Liverpool on the 'Mimosa' and arrived in their new land on 28 July 1865. They called the place where they landed Porth Madryn, or Puerto Madryn in Spanish.

It was called that as a tribute to Jones Parry because of his support for the venture and because he had sponsored the visit by the delegates.

The population of Nefyn has since grown to 2,500 whilst Puerto Madryn has developed into a busy port with over 60,000 residents.



The Madryn estate was the main landowner in Nefyn, and this was the nearest town to the family's home. So it was natural enough that Nefyn became twinned with Puerto Madryn although the population of that city is by now so much more than that of Nefyn.

## Trade in Llŷn



*Pen Cob, Pwllheli in the train and bus era*

Travelling over land was very difficult before the turnpike roads were built, from Porthdinllaen to Boduan and the branch towards Pwllheli and Porthmadog, in the early C19th. The turnpike road from Llanbedrog to Pwllheli was built in 1824.

In Llŷn, there would only be footpaths and tracks for donkey carts, but there wasn't much need to wander far because there were fairs in Aberdaron, Sarn, Nefyn and Pwllheli. At the fairs, farm produce would be sold, farmhands and maids would be hired, and stalls selling crockery and sweets would be popular.

There was a demand for cattle from Llŷn and the drovers would take them long distances to the big markets, following the drovers' routes. Animals from Llŷn would be gathered together in Sarn Mellteyrn, Botwnnog, or Llanengan and Llangian, and walked through Rhydyclafdy and Efailnewydd to Y Ffôr, crossing marshland at Pwllheli. They would meet others coming from the direction of Nefyn. Cattle would be shod in Efailnewydd to help them walk on the harder roads.

It was often much more convenient to travel by sea. The residents of Enlli / Bardsey would often be more familiar with the city of Liverpool than some nearby areas in Llŷn. There is mention of a girl from Uwchmynydd who would go around the area collecting eggs and take them on a sloop from Aberdaron to sell in Liverpool.

The biggest trading ships would come to the port of Pwllheli, which was the main port on the southern coast of Llŷn. Porthdinllaen harbour developed on the north coast. Ships could bring coal and limestone, unloading on the beach just as they did on other beaches. Local traders, carriers and farmers would meet them on the shore.

But the smaller ports were also busy, for example Porth Ysgaden, Porth Colmon, Porth Ferin.



### Follow the Story

Find out more about the area's industrial past by visiting Porthdinllaen - Once the location of one of the busiest harbours in Llŷn and now a village owned by the National Trust.