

Penvedu in montes: fourteenth century seigneurial mills in north Gower, Wales

Penvedu in montes: Mühlen im Gebiet der Lordschaft Gower, in Südwales

Penvedu in montes: Moulins dans la seigneurie de Gower, au Sud du Pays de Galles

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Recent research into the economy of upland areas of the lordship of Gower in south Wales has concentrated on reconstructing the economy of various manors in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A variety of approaches have been used: limited archaeological excavation, intensive landscape survey and the study of a wide range of historical documents (Kissock 2000, 223–48). The study of the settlement on Cefn Drum has shown that the small farmsteads were permanently occupied and that the fields which surrounded them were organised into a infield/outfield pattern with variations in the intensity of cultivation.¹ These farms were probably founded in a period of sustained population growth, which forced farmers out of lowland Gower on to the less favourable upland of places such as Cefn Drum.

Documentary sources exist for a number of mills, notably those owned by the Church or by the major lords, including the dukes of Norfolk, who held Gower for much of the period. One of the major ecclesiastical landowners was the bishop of St. David's who held the manor of Llangefelach, which lies close to Cefn Drum.² The accounts for Llangefelach mention only one type of grain: as one would expect, oats. These were to be sown at 8 bushels to the acre³ and then yielded only a meagre two-fold return. Hence each acre would give 16 bushels of grain at every successful harvest. From this harvest a tenth of the crop would go to pay tithes, 8 bushels per acre would have to have been set aside as seed corn and more would have gone to pay rent and as a payment to the miller to use the mill. In an agrarian regime without the starch from potatoes an adult requires at least ten bushels of grain a year and a child perhaps half this. When the allowances outlined above are

made, a figure of the produce of around 1½ acres is required to feed one adult for a year. Almost 5 acres of infield surround the two dwellings on the southern slope of Cefn Drum and this would be enough to feed 3 adults. If between 4½ and 6 acres of the outfield were also cultivated enough grain would be available for a standard family of two adults and two or three children.

On 13 October 1319 an inquisition was made into lands sold or granted away by William de Breos, lord of Gower.⁴ Amongst those acquiring upland was de Breos' steward John Yweyn. Upon his death, in 1322, Yweyn held a mill at *Penvedu in montes*, together with land elsewhere in the Gower uplands and in Hereford.⁵ *Penvedu in montes* appears to have been the farm known today as Pen-y-Fedw; *in montes* quite literally meaning in the hills. Here traces of a mill – known as Felin Wen (White Mill) are to be found (Fig. 1). The mill leat runs from the River Llan along its northern bank and through, what is today, a heavily wooded valley for a distance of over 1.2 kms. There is no unequivocal evidence for a dam or weir which would have separated the river and the leat. However a series of large stones (some up to 0.75 m. across) lying in the stream close to this point might be all that remains of this. Traces of the leat survive in broken sections. Close to the point it

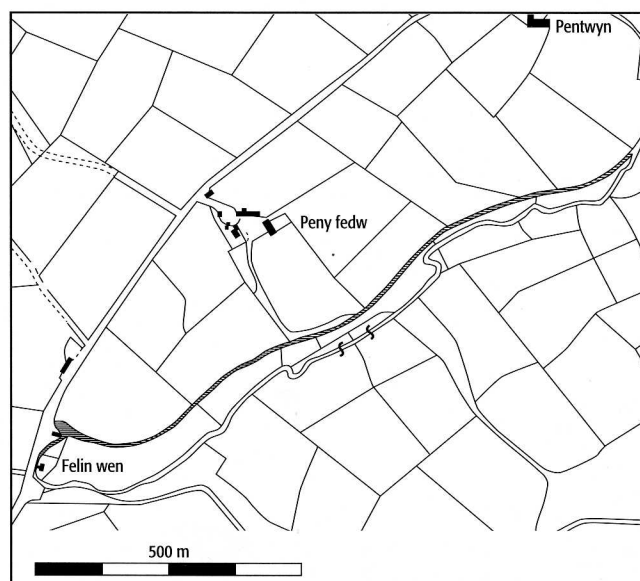


Fig. 1. The mill at Felin Wen, Pen-y-Fedw Farm as shown in the tithe map of 1838.

¹ The division between infield and outfield is made on the patterning which lies within the cairnfield which surrounds the farmsteads. The area close to them – wherein which there are a few, large cairns – is taken to have been more intensively cleared of stone than the area further away; here there are more, smaller cairns. The issue is explored further in Kissock 2000, 227–229, 231 and 243–244.

² British Library: Additional Manuscript 34125. Published as *An extent of the lands and rents of the Lord Bishop of St. Davids... Usually called the Black Book of St. David's*, ed. J. W. Willis-Bund, Cymmrodorion Record Society volume 5, London, 1902.

³ The traditional English measure of an acre is equal to 0.4 hectares, whilst a bushel is 36.4 litres.

⁴ Public Record Office (hereafter PRO): C145/83/12.

⁵ PRO: C133/73/4.

