

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have been used: limited archaeological excavation, intensive landscape survey and the study of a wide range of historical documents (Kissock 2000, 223–48).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

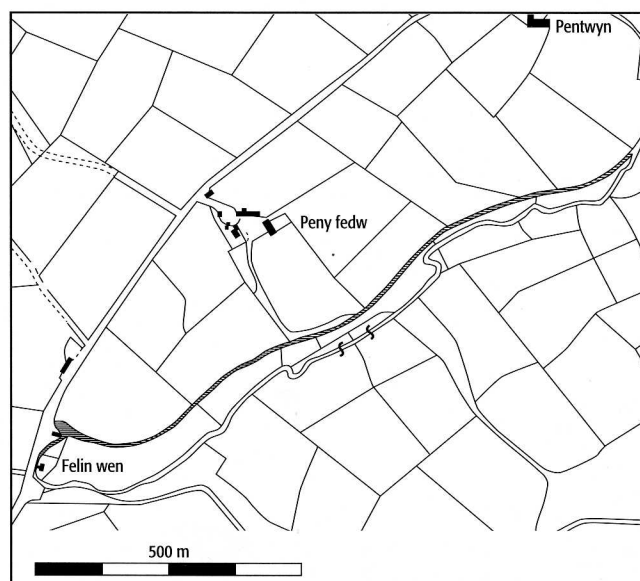


Fig. 1. The mill at Felin Wen, Pen-y-Fedw Farm as shown in the tithe map of 1838.

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.



Fig. 2. Felin Wen might have looked like this in the fourteenth century. This example from the Luttrell Psalter, drawn c. 1340, shows a small water mill with leat and wheel clearly visible. Fish traps are shown in the leat and an eel and a fish can be seen entering them. © British Library, Additional Manuscript 42130 f. 181.



Fig. 3. The restored mill at Felindre. The leat runs behind the structure to turn a wheel which lies on the right hand side of the building as one is facing it.

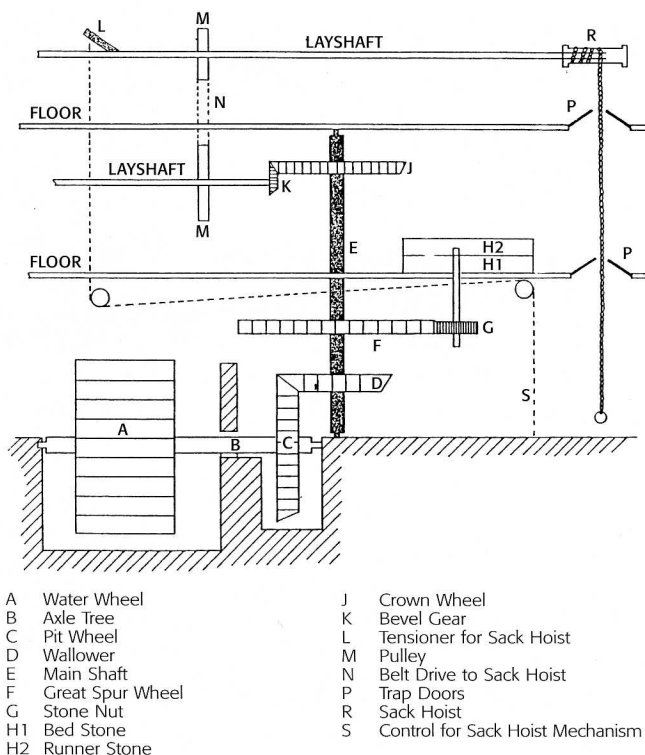


Fig. 4. The possible internal structure of the mill in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Prior to this, mills such as Felin Wen, would have been far simpler consisting of the water wheel (A) and pit wheel (C), a gearing mechanism (D) and the stones themselves (H1 and H2).

diverges from the river it is wide (up to 4 m. in places) and deep (3 m. at its maximum). Nearer to the mill the leat is shallower and narrower at around 1 m. and 2 m. respectively. No trace of the original mill structure can be seen today; the pond has been filled in and a large house built in place of the mill building itself. It is probable that in the fourteenth century it was little more than a simple wooden structure such as that shown in the *Luttrell Psalter* (Fig. 2). Many years later (and Felin Wen remained in use until at least 1918)⁶ a more sophisticated structure is likely to have been built and the mill re-equipped. Close to Felin Wen at Felindre (derived from the Welsh *felin*: a corn mill and *tref*: a village) a mill has been restored to look as it might have done c. 1700 (Figs. 3 and 4).

In the second decade of the fourteenth century Wweyn had had mills built where he insisted that the men of Treynmeybon Meurig and Thalggharth in Trayn Mawr were to grind their grain.⁷ The men who owed this suit of mill may not necessarily have come from one village or one settlement - instead they are likely to have been part of one kinship group, possibly a *gwely* (literally meaning a bed; the *gwely* would have comprised all the great grandsons of one man). Indeed Treynmeybon Meurig means the lands of the sons of Meurig and the records of the bishop of St. David's show that the *gwely* was still a common form of social organisation in hereabouts in 1326. Welsh social organisation seems to have

⁶ Ordnance Survey map, 25": 1 mile, second edition, sheet Glamorgan XV.1.

⁷ Hereford Capitular Archives: 1523 and 1768.

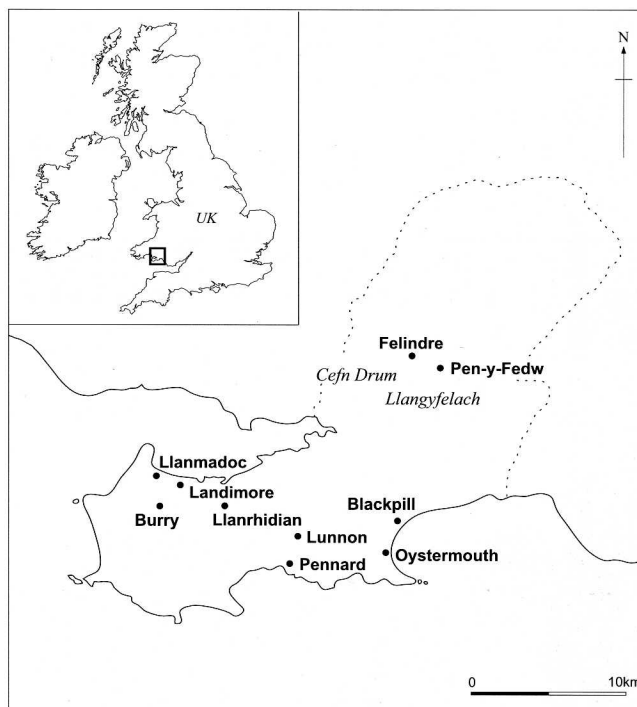


Fig. 5. Gower mills in the fourteenth century.

existed alongside the demands of the English lord of Gower and his steward. On to traditional models of social organisation a new pattern of obligation was swiftly being imposed. This superimposition was not easy and in the opening years of the fifteenth century it was challenged here, elsewhere in Gower and throughout Wales. Fuelled by discontent which included bitterness against mills as symbols of lordly domination and abuse, the rebellious supporters of Owain Glyndwr made mills an exceptionally favourite target.

Other Gower Mills (Fig. 5)

The lordship was not restricted to the peninsula. It contained an equal sized area of inland, upland. The records point to several mills here. The bishop's own watermill stood in the manor of Llangyfelach. It was worth 4 marks: £2 13s. 4d.⁸ The bishop's tenants owed a variety of services in respect of the mill. They were to carry millstones and other materials to the site, to construct and then to thatch the mill house, to repair the mill pool and to clean the weirs as and when necessary. These services were worth 12d. a year to the estate.⁹ It has been suggested that this mill was destroyed during the Glyndŵr uprising, as nothing is known of its existence beyond the fourteenth century (Taylor 1997, 14). Another mill existed in Llangyfelach in the fourteenth century; the Cuckoo Mill. Here, the

⁸ The British £ sterling was formerly divided into 20 shillings (s.) each of which was then divided in 12 pence (d.). Hence the £ sterling then comprised 240d., each of which was worth considerably less than the current £ of 100p.

⁹ This suggests that between 8 and 12 days labour were involved. In 1337–38 labour services were being sold at 1d. a day at Oystermouth and at 1½ d. in Lunnon and Pennard.

lord received an income of 2d. a year from Jorwerth ap Payne and his heirs for the “passage of a certain brook over the Lord’s land to their mill”.

A watermill in Llanmadoc in the north of the Gower peninsula was worth £1 2s. 6d. in 1308, this had risen to £2 by 1338. The earlier survey records the proportion of the previous year’s harvest still in the barn there.¹⁰ It comprised two quarters of small corn, 16 quarters of barley, five quarters of beans, three quarters of peas and 14 quarters of oats. All were still in pods or unthreshed (possibly suggesting that they were only to be used as animal foodstuffs – although this cannot be demonstrated).

At Pennard manuscripts refer to the existence, in 1323, of two mills, one a fulling mill. David Brus (the reeve of the manor) stated in his return that in 1338 two mills stood in the manor of Pennard. The fulling mill, which seems previously unknown, was worth £2 in 1337–38 and perhaps 18s. in 1366–67. It had disappeared by 1399. The location of this mill is uncertain. However, it is likely to have stood somewhere on Pennard Pill. The reason for the closure of the mill might lie in the unusual circumstances which affected the manor of Pennard. Sand, blown in off the beaches, covered large areas of the manor’s arable. This may have forced cultivation of former pasture land and the consequent displacement of flocks. Hence, a fulling mill able to function in the 1360s may have had difficulty in procuring local wool supplies later in the century.

The second mill in the manor of Pennard, that at Parkmill, was worth 13s. 4d. in 1337–38. In 1366–67 it was worth £3 13s. 4d., however by 1369 this had fallen to £2 per year.¹¹ For the period between Michaelmas 1399 and the summer of 1400 the sum of £1 10s. was received. The accounts of Roger Bassett, the reeve, run only as far as 9 July. As rents were traditionally collected at the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (25 March) and at Michaelmas (29 September) only the first payment would have been received. Hence it is probable that in a full year the mill would have brought in a total of £3. The mill also required considerable maintenance in 1399–1400. A thatcher and his apprentice received 7d. for a day’s work on the roof, with a further 3d. charged for three new rafters and 11d. paid for the necessary rushes and reeds used. The mill was re-equipped with a new corn measure, sieve and pick to dress the millstones costing 6d., 2d. and 6d. respectively. A further 4d. was spent on scouring the mill leat. The crops ground at the mill and their value in 1399–1400 are also recorded. Three quarters and two bushels of barley sold at 8d. a bushel (or 5s. 4d. a quarter), bringing in 17s. 4d. Wheat, depending on its quality, sold at either 8s. or 4s. a quarter; three bushels of the better wheat – probably destined for bread – brought in 3s. whilst one quarter and four bushels of the poorer crop were worth 6s.

Nearby in Lunnon there were two mills in 1366–67 – a watermill worth £3 6s. 8d. and a fulling mill worth £1 6s. 8d. By 1399–1400 there was just one mill, held by John Bronn for £3 6s. 8d. Once again, as in Pennard,

a fulling mill seems to have gone out of use in the later fourteenth century. No reference to a corn mill in Lunnon exists in the earlier account rolls and its omission can only mean one thing: it did not exist then. If a mill had existed it would have been a source of revenue and, perhaps, expenditure for the manor and as such would most certainly have featured in the accounts. The reeve of Lunnon sold substantial quantities of grain in 1337–38. The total value of sales was £11 4s. 6½ d. The nature of the grain is not specified, however throughout the reeve is careful to note that dry measures – *hopae* – have been used to weigh the 49 quarters sold at 3s. 5½ d. a quarter, the 32 quarters and 7 bushels sold at 1s. 8d. a quarter and finally 6 bushels sold for a little over 8d. a quarter.¹²

Over the whole year 1399–1400 a mill at Oystermouth was worth £1 18s. 5½ d so recorded Thomas Griffith, the reeve. Once again this is the first mention of a mill here; again the interpretation of the omission must be the same – there was no mill at Oystermouth in 1337–38, nor had one been built by 1366–67. Prior to the construction of this mill the tenants probably used the independent (as opposed to the later seigneurial) mill at Blackpill. As with Lunnon there were large sales of grain in Oystermouth: £6 4s. 2d. of the manor’s income came in this form. Oats are the only named crop. Other entries refer simply to *blae mixt*. This would have been probably have been drage (a barley and oat mixture); the remains of a crop of which were found during the archaeological excavations at Llanelen in north Gower (Kissock 1996, 125). The expense of maintaining the mill was also a major item in Oystermouth. In 1399–1400 it required a new cogwheel (costing 8d.), new stays (1s. 4d.) and a new spindle (1s. 8d.) together with the repair of the sluice gates costing 4s. The total of 7s. 8d. is put into perspective when it is noted that the only one other structure in the manor needed repair in the year: 7d. was spent on the pound for stray animals.

Brief details are known of mills at Llanrhidian and Landimore. In the accounts of 1399–1400 Upper Mill, Llanrhidian, was held by Richard Scurlage at an annual rent of £2 10s. and the Stonemill (at Kittle, Landimore) was in the hands of John Colyn and was worth £4 a year. John Langton (possibly deceased by 1399) had held a fulling mill worth £1 10s. and a corn mill worth £1 16s., by the time of the drawing up of the account roll the latter was in the hands of Philip Longe. William Lipa had held one twelfth part of a mill for what is described as the ancient rent of 1s. 2d. He may have been dead too, for his share had passed to Philip Donhouse who was paying a revised rent of 10s. a year. Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, leased a share of half a mill – at the Nether mulneplace – to Meuric ap Philip at Llanrhidian on 5 May 1375, the other shareholders in this enterprise were Richard Scurlage and John Beaumont.¹³ On 17 July 1400 Richard Mansell was found old enough to receive his inheritance

¹² A quarter comprises 8 bushels, hence the total raised was only 6½ d.

¹³ National Library of Wales, Department of Manuscripts: Penrice and Margam 402.

¹⁰ PRO SC6/1202/3.

¹¹ PRO: C135/1/19.

from Richard Scurlage; this was a mill worth £2 13s. 4d. in Llanrhidian.¹⁴ During the interim period the mill had been in the hands of the Earl. Scurlage himself seems to have been granted the mill by John Dou and Thomas Excestre on 21 October 1361.

There are a number of references to the existence of other mills in Gower in the fourteenth century. The de Breos inquisition mentions that John de Landymor held a mill at *Aberwassa*, which in the reign of Edward I (who died in 1307) had been worth 6s. a year. The same source notes that John de Horton had lands, including coal veins at Clyne, and a mill at Blackpill, John Voil had acquired two acres of land on which to build a fulling mill and John de Sutton owned a quarter share in a mill at an unspecified location. In 1323, of a cornmill and a fulling mill stood at Burry along with two mills in Landimor, one in Pennard and a further fulling mill.¹⁵ The inquisition *post mortem* into the possessions of Thomas de Beauchamp, revealed that he had not only the mill at Pennard (see above) but also a mill at Blackpill worth £1 a year.

Discussion

The detailed fourteenth century histories of the mills presented above allow certain major changes to be observed. First, corn mills were still being built in the fourteenth century; in north Gower they had the aim of serving and exploiting the area's Welsh tenants. Second, in some manors the grinding of grain within the manor replaced large sales of grain.

Both of these observations are counter to those found in England over the same period. The Black Death of 1348–49 was responsible for the demise of between a third and a half of the population. This led to a shortage of labour and, in turn, to higher incomes for the general population. From the 1370s onwards the prices of grain and many other commodities fell. Both combined to lead to two decades of relative prosperity for the masses in the 1370s and 1380s. These factors also served to make demesne agriculture less profitable and, in some areas, unviable. One consequence of this is that lords ceased to build mills as the costs of repairing them were prohibitive; it has been argued that this period was a watershed – and perhaps an actual “crisis” – in demesne milling (*Holt 1988*, 164–165). Demesne mills ceased to operate, some capacity was shifted from manorial mills to independent ones and some corn mills were converted to a variety of industrial functions, including the fulling of cloth (*Holt 1988*, 169). This was clearly not the case in Gower; here mills were being built and (if John de Horton's mill at Blackpill of 1319 is the same as de Beauchamp's one there in 1369) – being transferred to seigniorial control.

Explaining this is difficult. It is possible that the impact of the pestilence in Gower may have been less severe than it was elsewhere. Notwithstanding any possible reduction in population the account rolls note

that *terra wasta* was being taken, enclosed and cultivated in the manor of Oystermouth in 1399–1400 and a study of field patterns has pointed to other enclosures being made hereabouts in c. 1377 (*Weeks 1998*, 22). Perhaps it was in hope of realising the potential of expanding arable land and grain production that the mills of Oystermouth and Lunnon were built.

The mills of Gower, apparently flourishing in the spring and early summer of 1400, were unaware of what lay in store. General restlessness and resentment, which included bitterness against mills, millers and millowners – all symbols of lordly domination and abuse – the supporters of Owain Glyndŵr made mills a remarkably favourite target. The buildings were burnt, the metal spindles and pivots were seized and the millstones broken up (*Rees 1924*, 276; *Davies 1991*, 432). Perhaps it was these events that led to a real crisis in the history of Gower's mills?

Abstract

This paper discusses the archaeological and historical evidence for a number of mills in the lordship of Gower in south Wales. It argues that mills were symbols of lordly power and were an instrument used for the exploitation of the impoverished Welsh farmers of the region. As such they were resented and targeted in the troubled years of the early fifteenth century. In this respect the history of mills in Wales differs from the history of mills in England, where decline seems to have set in much earlier, in the middle of the fourteenth century.

Résumé

Cet article évoque les traces archéologiques et historiques de plusieurs moulins de la seigneurie de Gower, au sud du pays de Galles. On y voit que les moulins, symboles de la puissance du seigneur, étaient les instruments d'exploitation des fermiers gallois de la région, qui vivaient dans une grande pauvreté. En tant que tels, les moulins cristallisaient tous les ressentiments et furent pris pour cible au cours de la période turbulente du début du quinzième siècle. A cet égard, l'histoire des moulins au pays de Galles est très différente de celle des moulins anglais, dont l'amorce du déclin fut, semble-t-il, plus précoce, dès le milieu du quatorzième siècle.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Veröffentlichung diskutiert archäologische und historische Zeugnisse für eine Anzahl von Mühlen im Gebiet der Lordschaft Gower in Südwales. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Mühlen Symbole der herrschaftlichen Macht der Lords darstellten und als Instrument zur Ausbeutung der verarmten walisischen Bauern in dem Gebiet eingesetzt wurden. Infolgedessen wurden sie in den unruhigen Jahren des frühen fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts gehasst und angegriffen. Die Geschichte der walisischen Mühlen unterscheidet sich in dieser Hinsicht von der Geschichte der Mühlen in England, bei denen der Niedergang in der Mitte des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, also sehr viel früher, eingesetzt zu haben scheint.

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