

THE LIME BURNERS OF GWYNFE

by Wendy Bedford

In the area of Gwynfe, between Llangadog and the Black Mountain, the censuses of 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 reveal a number of men who described their occupation as *Lime Burner*. It is well known that there had been lime kilns on the mountain throughout the eighteenth century, and probably before that, owned and operated by individuals, producing lime both for local farmers' use and for wider distribution and collection. The introduction of road tolls from 1779 resulted in increases in the cost of transportation to a prohibitive level. There appears to have been an era in the middle of the nineteenth century – after the 1844 abolition of the Turnpike Trusts and before larger quarry owners became established in the area - when there was an opportunity for local aspiring entrepreneurs to successfully exploit the limestone resources of the Black Mountain. In the early nineteenth century the main route over the Black Mountain was the present day A4069, and it was greatly improved just before the toll gates were removed. Until the extension of the railway network made line-side quarries more economic than quarries relying on traditional road transport, it was commercially viable to supply large quantities of lime from the mountain by road to destinations in west Wales.

The census records, available from 1841 to 1911, show in ten-yearly snapshots the changing occupations of local people involved in quarrying and processing limestone and other minerals.

In the 1841 census only one person, Levi Evans, can be found in the Gwynfe area recorded as having an occupation relating to lime. He lived at Gellifawr near Pont Aber and was a *Lime Carrier*. In 1841 the toll gates were still in place so carting lime was still a costly activity. Up the road towards Llangadog at Pontarlleche Gate the census records that the Toll Collector was 25 year-old Ann Jones, living in the gate-house with her 5 year-old son, David.

It is very likely that there was lime burning on the Black Mountain before 1841, but there is little documentary evidence to suggest who was doing it. It is also likely that more people were involved in the business than are represented in the census data.

In the 1851 census five *Lime Burners* have been found in the area:

Levi Evans (age 68, Pont Aber House)

Rees Williams (age 54, Farmer of 9 acres at Glanllynant)

John Davies (age 40, Publican at Pont Aber Public House)

Morgan Morgan (age 48, Ynysclydach)

Thomas Thomas (age 30, Danyralltucha).

Four of these five were close neighbours in and around Pont Aber on the road between Llangadog and the Black Mountain. The fifth, Rees Williams lived about two miles to the west, beyond the hamlet of Capel Gwynfe. There was also Joseph Griffiths in Capel Gwynfe, who described himself as a *Limer* in 1851. That could mean he was a lime spreader or simply that he was in the same lime business as the others. By 1861 he called himself a *Lime Burner* too.

In the 1861 census, seven men are described as *Lime Burners*:

Rees Williams (age 64, Glanllynant)

Thomas Thomas (age 40, Llwyncelyn)

Lewis Williams (age 75, Pantyrhedin)

John Williams (age 46, Pysgotlwyn)

Joseph Griffiths (age 40+, Cappel, Capel Gwynfe),

William Thomas (age 38, Danyrallt, brother of Thomas Thomas)

Herbert Morgan (age 17, Ynysclydach, son of Morgan Morgan).

In this census there were also five local men described as *Quarryman*: Thomas Evans (age 53, Pantybedwuchaf), David Thomas (age 49, Pantglas), Morgan Jones (age 48, Penyrheol), Morgan Jones (age 43, Gellifawr) and Morgan Morgan (age 58, Ynysclydach).

In the 1871 census the number of *Lime Burners* found was down to four:

Morgan Morgan (age 68, Llwyncelyn)

Herbert Morgan (age 26, Green Cottage)

William Griffiths (age 33, Bryncappel, Capel Gwynfe)

David Jones (age 31, Fforchyddeunant)

John Thomas of Pantycelyn, east of Pont Aber in the parish of Llanddeusant, was a *Limer*.

In the 1881 census the only *Lime Burner* that can be found is:

[13]John Thomas (age 59, Pantycelyn, Llanddeusant)

In 1881 there are a number of *Lime Kiln Labourers*, and in 1891 *Labourers in Lime Works*. By 1901 and 1911 there are only lime workers working in the Lime Works at Llandybie, and a number of men working in the sand quarries and the Silica Works nearby.

It is tempting to speculate that around 1845 a plan was hatched in the Pub in Pont Aber, between the landlord John Davies and some of his customers, to get together to lease a limestone quarry on the Mountain, to use existing kilns or construct new ones to produce lime for distribution by road, and consequently to make a lot of money. Perhaps the older ones, Levi Evans and Rees Williams were able to contribute their experience from previous work in the lime trade. Others may have been able to put up some capital, while the Thomas brothers from Llanwrda supplied plenty of youthful enthusiasm and muscle.

From the information that can be gleaned, it was, for most of them, a worthwhile venture that lasted for a few decades, and some of the participants appear to have considerably improved their financial standing during this time, *possibly* as a result of being Lime Burners.

Here is what is known about each of the men identified above:

Levi Evans was born in Breconshire in 1782. He was a widower and *Lime Carrier* in 1841, living at Gellifawr with children of teenage upwards. He is recorded as a *Lime Burner* in 1851 at Pont Aber House (on the edge of Llanddeusant parish), and he continued to work at the lime kilns at least until the age of 79.

Rees Williams was born in the Llangadog area in 1797. His activities as a *Lime Burner* are recorded in 1851 and 1861. He farmed his small acreage at Glanllynant throughout this period, from 1841 to beyond 1871, and died in 1881 at the age of 84.

John Davies was born in the parish of Llanddeusant around 1801. In 1851 he was a *Publican, Limeburner*, residing at Pont Aber Public House (Llanddeusant).

It seems very likely that this was the John Davies referred to on an 1847 map of part of the Black Mountain, which shows the location of John Davies's Quarry and Kiln. It has not been possible to trace him definitely in censuses before and after 1851. There was a John Davies at Pantybedwuchaf of similar age who was a *Lime-filler Labourer* in 1881 and lived to the age of 94.

Morgan Morgan was also born in the Llangadog area, in 1803. He may have been the 40-year old Agricultural Labourer who was lodging at the Griffin Inn in 1841. By 1851 he was a *Lime burner*, married and living in Ynysclydach with a young family, which included his son Herbert Morgan, then aged 7. By 1861 Herbert had also become a *Lime Burner*, while Morgan described himself as a *Quarryman*. In 1870, when Herbert got married, and also in the census of 1871 (Morgan at Llwyncelyn, Herbert at Green Cottage), they were both *Limeburners*.

In 1881, Morgan was a 'retired labourer' aged 78, while Herbert had become a 'farmer of 105 acres' at Maesadda. By 1891 Morgan was a widower 'in receipt of parochial relief,' but he was living in his son Herbert's pub, the Telegraph Inn in Llangadog Town, and presumably continued to do so until he died in 1893, aged 90.

Herbert Morgan moved from the Telegraph Inn to the Black Lion in Llangadog and in 1901 was a 'Coal Merchant and Assistant Overseer' employing a servant. In 1902 his wife Mary died. He remarried, to Rachel, in 1906 and in 1911 they were living in Primrose House, Llangadog Town. In the 1911 census he described himself as a 'Collector of Taxes,' and his son Richard had taken over the Coal Merchant's business. Herbert died in 1915 aged 71, leaving an estate worth £3,013 15s. 8d.

The Thomas brothers, Thomas Thomas and William Thomas, were born in Llanwrda in 1821 and 1823 respectively. In 1841 Thomas Thomas was an *Agricultural Labourer* living on Rees Williams's farm, Glanllynant. In 1851 the Thomas brothers were living next door to each other, each with a wife named Elizabeth, in Danyrallt ucha and Danyrallt canol near to Pont Aber. Thomas had become a *Lime burner* by 1851, while William was an Agricultural Labourer.

By 1861 they were both *Lime Burners*, Thomas having moved to Llwyncelyn. He was widowed and, in 1858, was remarried to Margaret Morgan, daughter of William Morgan, *Mason and Publican*. (William Morgan's public house in Capel Gwynfe was called the Carpenter's Arms when Margaret had lived there, but was renamed the Masons' Arms by 1861, by which time all four of William's sons had become Masons.) One of the witnesses at Thomas's wedding in 1858 was Rees Williams.

Lewis Williams was born in Llangadog in 1786. He lived in Pantyrhedin in all three census years 1841, 1851 and 1861 when he was in turn an *Agricultural Labourer, Labourer* and a *Lime Burner*.

John Williams was born in the Llangadog area in 1815. After his time as a *Lime Burner* around 1861 while living at Pysgotlwyn (Cysgodlwyn?), he moved to Pencaedu where he was farming 15 acres in 1871. In 1881, a widower, he was working as a *Lime Kiln Labourer*.

Joseph Griffiths and William Griffiths were probably relatives. They were brought up on the neighbouring farms of Glanmeilwch and Cwmmeilwch, having been born in about 1818 and 1838 respectively. In 1851 Joseph had moved to the hamlet of Capel Gwynfe and was a *Limer*, while William was still a young lad living on his father's 120 acre farm with his, mostly older, brothers and sisters. By 1861 Joseph was definitely a *Lime Burner*, and William took up the occupation during the following decade. 1871 finds William as a *Lime burner and Farmer* living in Capel Gwynfe close to, or maybe at, Joseph's old address, with wife, young family and mother-in-law. His new wife Anne was the daughter of a Butter Merchant, Daniel Lloyd.

Joseph Griffiths, married and moved to Brongar, Llansadwrn to become a *Farmer of 96 acres* by 1871. By 1881 he had retired from farming and moved to Tanycoed, Llanwrda, where he died in 1891 at the age of 73, leaving an estate of £974 11s. 4d.

William Griffiths also became a farmer, in fact a *Farmer of 260 acres*. In 1881, at Glantoddeb, he had a large family, and three servants. Then the still growing household moved to Brynchwith where William was a *Farmer and Sand Merchant* in 1891 and a *Farmer* in 1901. In 1911, just William and Anne were living together at Bryncaerau with William as a *Silica Merchant*, having left their only son John Lloyd Griffiths to manage the farm at Brynchwith. William Griffiths died in 1915 at the age of 77, leaving an estate amounting to £3,485 13s. 7d.

David Jones was born in 1840, son of Morgan Jones, who was a *Farmer* (1841, Llwynyneuadd) and subsequently a *Labourer* (1851 Capel Gwynfe) and a *Quarryman* (1861 Penyrheol). In 1871 Morgan (now a widower, and a *Labourer* again) was living at Fforchyddeunant with his youngest daughter. David was also at home, unmarried, and had become a *Lime burner*.

John Thomas from Llanddeusant, born 1822, was a *Farmer of 68 acres* at Cwmllechach, Llanddeusant in 1851, then a *Farmer of 51 acres* at Gwarallt, Llangadog just north-west of Pont Aber in 1861, having become a widower in between. In 1871 he was a *Limer* and in 1881 a *Lime Burner*, residing in both census years in Pantycelyn, back in Llanddeusant parish, to the east of Pont Aber. Then he was in Cwmdy, Llanddeusant in 1891 and 1901, a *Farmer* again, with his widowed daughter as *Housekeeper*. He died in 1904 at the age of 81.

The above account is a bare outline of the lives of the *Lime Burners*. It is impossible to fill in the details of the lime burning business or the daily lives of the men involved, and how they interacted with each other, from ten-year census data alone. If any of them got rich from their activities on the Black Mountain, it was the ones, like Herbert Morgan and William Griffiths, who came in later, following a near relative into the business, but it may be that they just married well. Whatever their fortunes, it does appear that most of the *Lime Burners* survived to live to a good old age.

GRID REFERENCES

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