



The Commotes of Llŷn – Medieval Administration

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

In the C12th / 13th during the reign of Gruffudd ap Cynan and Owain Gwynedd the cantref was divided into three commotes:

On the eastern side of Llŷn was **Cafflogion**, which contained the parishes of Llanbedrog, Llangian, Botwnnog, Mellteyrn, Llanfihangel Bachllaeth, Penrhos, Carnguwch and Deneio. The *maerdref* or administrative headquarters was in Deneio (Pwllheli nowadays). This was where rents and tolls would be paid in money or by doing work – transporting or repairing. The prince would come here at times, and there are names surviving in the town these days that remind us of that connection, such as Gadlys and Henllys. The commote was established by Afloeg, one of the sons of Cunedda from the Old North and the father of Eternus, patron saint of Edern.

Cymydmaen commote is at the far end of the peninsula and its administrative headquarters was Neigwl. The *maerdref* was on the flat land below Plas yn Rhiw. This commote is named after the yellow rock of Llŷn, *Maen Melyn Llŷn* which is on the sea cliff in Uwchmynydd (SH139252). It's at the far end of the peninsula and the

commote includes the parishes of Penllech, Llangwnnadr, Bryncroes, Llandywgning, Llanengan, Rhiw, Llanfaelrhys and Aberdaron.

Another commote was **Dinllaen**, and that's where the name Porthdinllaen comes from. The name in the early C13th was 'Dynthlayn', namely a fort (*caer*) + 'Llaen' (an Irish personal name) which referred to the coastal fort on Porthdinllaen headland (SH 275416).

The name Porthdinllaen suggests this was the main harbour for the commote, but the *maerdref* for the commote and the prince's court were in Nefyn. Dinllaen includes the parishes of Pistyll, Nefyn, Edern, Ceidio, Tudweiliog, Llaniestyn, Llandudwen, Boduan and Llannor.

There were a hundred *tref* units (individual farms) in a *cantref* (hundred) and names like Hendrefor and Llaur 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.



Development of Pwllheli



Pwllheli had developed as a trading centre with ships bringing goods from foreign lands long before the cobs were built and the harbour formed. The main industry in Pwllheli in 1786, as it had been for a century, was ship building – over 450 of them were built.

Fishing was successful and at one time there was great demand for Pwllheli oysters. A number of smaller industries developed associated with the sea, as well as tanneries. The town was famous at one time for its printing presses and a number of newspapers were published here.

In the late C19th Pwllheli was developing to be a very successful town and after the cobs were built there were areas of dry land to be developed. By 1882 the town had a sewerage system, and a water supply was provided for the Morfa.

Land there was bought by newcomers like William Potts and John Churton and their names are still there, on streets in South Beach. Developers came together to build houses and they were the ones who called it South Beach (Marian y De). One of the leading men in this was Edward Jones, who gave his name to Edward Street. There was a festival in Pwllheli on 6th December 1888, the shops and schools were closed and there was a procession through the town along the Cob to the sea shore to lay the foundation stones of the new development.

By the end of the century there were 26 houses and two hotels on the site, and ambitious plans to make Pwllheli into north Wales' most prominent seaside resort.

While this was happening at the eastern end of the beach, Solomon Andrews from Cardiff bought land at the western end and the 'new land' was completely transformed.

The Early Days



In the C13th this was a very small townlet – twenty families, two boats and a number of nets. The richest man was Iorwerth and he had three oxen, nine cows, two horses, four sheep, six measures of flour and four measures of wheat.

Even so, Pwllheli was the *maerdref*, which was the main town and administrative centre for the commote of Cafflogion (or Afloegion) and part of Deneio parish.

A number of place names in Pwllheli these days suggest strongly that the prince had a court here – Henllys (old + court) to the north (SH 37573594), Gadlys (castle bailey/ in the town centre (SH 37683517) and there was very probably a motte and bailey castle in the Penmount area (SH 37683517).

The majority of the population of Deneio lived on the higher ground to the north of the town and the rest lived in the older part around the Gors (marshland).

At that time the sea covered the area extending from what are now the lower parts of Stryd Penlan (Eng.: Penlan Street) and Stryd Moch (Eng.: Goal Street) to the present sea shore. The tide would come in over the Traeth area to the Gors (SH 376353) between Pentrepoeth (Eng.: North Street) and Stryd Fawr (Eng.: High Street) (where Asda is these days). This was the 'Pwll Heli' (seawater pool).

Carreg yr Imbyll (Eng: Gimlet Rock) (SH 3863430) was an island out at sea, and sand dunes gradually developed from it towards the west to Carreg y Defaid (SH 34223247) and east to Trwyn Penychain (SH 43583533). This established Pwllheli beach and Abererch beach.

At low tide, it would be possible to cross at Rhyd Glai and Rhyd Liniog (rhyd = ford) where Penrhydliniog (SH 37303488) is now, and there was also a ferry service.

The rivers of Penrhos, Rhyd Hir and Erch gradually merged and ran out to sea near Tocyn Brwyn and Carreg yr Imbyll.



Sand dunes were gradually closing in around the town but despite that it developed as a trading centre. Landing places were built for the ships, and cobs.

The Charter and the Rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr



The Normans probably influenced the administration of Llŷn in the C12-13th and Pwllheli was probably the main town of Cafflogion. But after the conquest by Edward I, King of England in 1282 he sent officers here: to value and to set taxes; collect fines from offenders; and charge fees for the right to grind corn.

Pwllheli and Nefyn belonged to the Black Prince in the mid C14th and the two towns were given as a 'gift' to one of his officers, Nigel de Loryng, in recognition of his service. Pwllheli had to pay him £14 a year.

Pwllheli was given a charter on 14 February 1355 and could then call itself a Borough. The residents were 'free men' with rights to hold a court of law, have a prison, and a fair twice a year – on Holy Cross Day (13 September) and All Saints' Day (31 October). They could also have a weekly market on Sundays. Caernarfon and Conwy got more rights than Pwllheli and Nefyn, but here the Welsh were given greater privileges than the English people.

The town had a mayor, and that tradition still continues these days. The new government wasn't popular amongst the local population and the King's officers had difficulty collecting the taxes due to them.

Because it was an alien government controlling Pwllheli, Owain Glyndŵr attacked the town in the early C15th. According to the records from 1409-1411 the town was destroyed and the residents had fled. One of the old streets in Pwllheli is called Pentrepoeth (Eng: North Street) and it was called that because Owain Glyndŵr had burnt it. Nefyn suffered in the same way.

Pwllheli – Building the Cobs



By 1770 there was a toll house serving the quay between the lower end of Stryd Moch (Eng. Goal Street) and Stryd Penlan (Eng. Penlan Street). Three traders from England were given the rights to build a quay along the area of the Traeth, and that prevented the sea flowing into the Gors (marsh) area, which then dried out. The names 'Traeth' (beach) and 'Pen Cei' (end/top + quay) are still used these days.

The sea retreated and marshes developed to the west and south towards the Morfa, which created common lands.

In 1811 there was a plan to build two cobs, to control the tide and get a better shape for the harbour. One was to be between Pen-y-lan and Morfa Mawr, namely Cob y Dref (town cob) (SH 37503490) and the other between Allt Fawr and Glan-y-don, namely Cob Glan-y-don (SH 38203520) on the eastern side of the harbour. With the rivers flowing more swiftly into the sea, the land behind them dried out.

This was when hotels like the 'Crown & Anchor' and 'Whitehall' were built – and a hotel owner advertised he had bathing huts for hire for the seaside. A new Town Hall was also built, substantial houses in Stryd Penlan (Penlan Street) and shops on the Stryd Fawr (High Street).

Pwllheli was developing quickly and public transport arrived here.

The railway reached Pwllheli in 1867, with a station at the eastern end of the town, less than 1km from Pen Cob. But there was demand for the tracks to be extended into the centre of town, which was a difficult task. A third cob had to be built, from Glan-y-Don to Pen Cob and forming a northern boundary for the harbour, Cei'r Gogledd (North Quay) (SH 37873521). The Cambrian Railway trains still run on this line, and have used the station at Pen Cob since 1909.

The rivers and the tide are controlled by floodgates, one near Lôn Abererch (Abererch Road) and the other at Pen



Cob, which keep the town from being flooded. That's where we can see Harbwr Bach (SH 37403480) (harbour + small) created by building the Cob Bach (SH 37303465) to hold floodwater and the river water at high tide.

This made it easier to travel through Afonwen and towards Porthmadog and Caernarfon.

Transport and Traffic



Pwllheli was becoming busier as a trading centre in the mid C18th. A turnpike road was built to connect Pwllheli with the wider world, and then people didn't have to rely so much on the sea.

The roads were built in this order:

1768 – from Caernarfon to Pwllheli

1803 – work began on opening the roads from Porthdinllaen and Pwllheli to Cricieth

1824 – opening the road from Pwllheli to Llanbedrog.

The stagecoach to Caernarfon came to run on these roads. The Tocia coach started running from Aberdaron in 1862, Tir Gwenith coach through Edern to Llangwnnadr in 1890 and others from Nefyn.

A car had been coming from Bangor every day carrying the post since 1822, and by 1881 it ran daily to Aberdaron. In 1840, John Williams from Bryncroes was distributing letters for a shilling each. The first bicycle arrived in Pwllheli in 1868 and the first motor car in 1903 – its registration number was CC97.

There was a great deal of discussion about opening a railway to Porthdinllaen, as a result of plans by William Alexander Maddocks in the first half of the yn C19th. Those plans were never achieved but the railway did reach Pwllheli yn 1867. At that time, the station was a good half a mile from the town, where the railway crossing is now.

In 1909 the line was extended to Pen Cob and the Cambrian Line ran, as it does these days, along the coast of Cardigan Bay and to Machynlleth and beyond.

The LNWR train from the direction of Bangor and Caernarfon ran to Afonwen where it joined the Cambrian, 7km from Pwllheli. In 1964 the line to Bangor was closed but the Cambrian still runs, along one of the most beautiful coastlines in Wales.

A tramway carrying stone from Carreg y Defaid was developed by Solomon Andrews to be a passenger tram, taking people between Pwllheli and Llanbedrog and it ran from 1897 to 1927.

The stagecoach service ended very soon after buses began running from Pwllheli in all directions. The bus service to Edern began in 1906. On Thursday afternoons, when the town's shops were closed, there would be bus trips around Llŷn.

Solomon Andrews



Solomon Andrews was a very successful businessman from Cardiff and when he was on holiday in Llandudno in the summer of 1893 he saw there was land for sale in Pwllheli. He went there on the train and saw the new development of South Beach. To the west there was open land, extending towards Penrhos and Llanbedrog.

He decided to buy the land that was for sale, and by 1895 the West End Hotel had been built, with stone from Carreg y Defaid. The stone was carried on a tramway that Solomon Andrews had set up to run along the sand dunes.

The West End area grew quickly but it wasn't only houses that he built. There was a Recreation Ground (the 'Recri') with leisure facilities such as tennis courts and a cycle racing track. There were also shops and the 'Assembly Rooms' which was a dance and concert hall. The West End was linked to the town by Ffordd Caerdydd (Cardiff Road) and a bridge, Pont Solomon, built to cross the afon Rhyd Hir. There was no end to his enthusiasm and vision, so much so that the council gave him the Freedom of the Town in 1897.

In 1896 Solomon Andrews bought the land along the coast to Llanbedrog, including the mansion at Glyn y Weddw. This was an enterprising development. The tramway was



extended from Carreg y Defaid to Llanbedrog and it was a special and very popular attraction.

In August 1899 Solomon Andrews arranged for 300 of his workers from Cardiff to visit Pwllheli on the train. They travelled to Pwllheli and back overnight, and had a whole day in the town.

There were all kinds of entertainment at the 'Recri'. In 1911 crowds came to watch an aeroplane fly from it. Unfortunately the plane couldn't climb high enough to get over the wall and was wrecked. This is the home of Pwllheli Football Club and by now also the site of the leisure centre for Dwyfor.

Pwllheli Tramways



Solomon Andrews opened a tramway to run all the way from Pwllheli to Llanbedrog and it was a very popular tourist attraction. At one time there were over twenty cars available on the tram – some for wet weather and in winter. A one way journey would cost four pence and when it was at its most successful it ran every half hour throughout the day in summer. It was very busy during the week of the National Eisteddfod in Pwllheli in 1925 and would be overcrowded on wet days.

The tram would begin its journey at the lower end of Ffordd Caerdydd (Cardiff Road), with the ticket office on the site of the 'Copi' shop (SH 37873521). The passengers would get memorable views of the mountains of Llŷn, Snowdonia, the headland of Trwyn Cilan and Ynysoedd Tudwal (Saint Tudwal's Islands) over the sea. Then in Llanbedrog they could visit the mansion house at Glyn y Weddw, with its gallery, tearooms and dance hall.

But in the autumn of 1927 a great storm damaged the tramway so badly that it could not be restored.

One of the tramcars was saved by being used as a chicken shed in Edern. Following a newspaper article in 1987,

Cyngor Tef Pwllheli (Pwllheli Town Council) and the British Horse Tram Enthusiasts organization came to an agreement to restore it and it was on display at the National Tramway Museum in Crich, England, for a while. By now it's on display at Plas Glyn y Weddw, Llanbedrog.

There was also another tram in Pwllheli – the Corporation Tram. It ran from Pen Cob and along the Cob to the South Beach. It was opened in 1899 and was fairly successful. But it made its final journey in 1920 and the tracks have been removed by now.

The Seal of Pwllheli



Nothing is known about any early seal or arms of Pwllheli. There is mention of a seal in 1836 showing a goat standing on its hind legs, but there is no evidence of it.

It is said another seal was found in Madryn, home of the Love Jones Parry family, in the 1850s but there is no further evidence of that either.

According to reports, that one showed an elephant with a castle on its back and palm fronds on both sides of it, and that is what is used these days in Pwllheli.

The seal that has been adopted in fact has no real connection with the town's history and is no more than 160 years old.

An elephant and castle also appear on the coats-of-arms across Europe, e.e. Dumbarton, Scotland, Coventry and Bolton, England and Catania, Sicily.



Pwllheli Street Names



The early population of Pwllheli lived around the marshy Gors area, and the town got its name from the *pwll heli* (pool + brine) where Asda is now. They also lived in Penrallt, where Deneio cemetery is, and the remains of Saint Beuno's Church.

The flat land where the town is now was either marshy or only dry at low tide. At that time, there were two roads linking the town with the outside world, Penlon Llŷn (Eng.: Lley Street) towards Llŷn and Penlon Caernarfon (Caernarfon Road) towards Arfon and Eifionydd. It was possible to cross the Rhyd Hir river and follow paths towards Llanbedrog at Rhydleiniog, called Penrhydliniog these days (rhyd = ford).

Pwllheli beach and its boatyard was near the current Y Traeth (Sand Street).

Pentrepoeth (North Street) linked Penlon Llŷn and Penlon Caernarfon. Stryd Fawr (High Street) ran as it does now but with the sea at one end where Penmount chapel is now. Stryd King's Head (King's Head Street) - named after a pub - ran from the Stryd Fawr and towards Pentrepoeth. Stryd y Llan (.:Church Street) was created after Saint Peter's Church was built (in the 1830s) to link the church with Stryd Fawr. Stryd Moch (pigs) (Eng:Goal Street) because that's where pigs were sold on market days and because

the jail was there; and it runs south to the Maes. Sgwar y Farchnad (Market Square) links the Stryd Fawr with Stryd Penlan, which ran down to Y Cei (quay), later known as Pen Cob (end + cob).

When there was a quay at the Cei, where Llys Penlan and Stryd Llygod (street + mice) are nearby – the ships at the quay would attract mice. This was Custom House Square, where the custom house stood.

After the cobs were built in the early C19th the level ground of the marsh between the town and the sea then dried out and Yr Ala (Ala Road) was built, running west from the Maes (field/open space). (Lôn Abererch (Abererch Road) runs east from the lower end of Penlon Caernarfon (Caernarfon Road). In the mid C19th Lôn Dywod (sand) (Eng.: New Street) was built to link Pen Cob and the lower end of the High Street. It was a sandy path before then. Pen Cob is referred to in English as Station Square.

Building the cobs meant it was then possible to go towards the sea. Houses were built at South Beach (*Marian y De* in Welsh, but that name is not used as often). At the western end of the beach Solomon Andrews had a tourism development coming along well. Ffordd Caerdydd (Cardiff Road) runs to that part of the town.

In 1862 Allt Salen (Salem Terrace) was developed, to give us the fifth road leading into the town (*Allt Salem* is hill + Salem). A number of council housing estates were built in the mid C20th by the council.



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