

ANGLESEY MILLS IN 1943

John Crompton

In 2010 Mr David Wilson, a member of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society, discovered a copy of a report by T O Williams, dated June 1943 and submitted to the Rural Industries Bureau which was compiling a report on rural industries on which post-war policy would be based. Knowing George Lees' interest in the mills which made up some of the report's content, he passed it on, and George subsequently passed it on to the author as potential content for the Welsh Mills Society newsletter. The author, however, was intrigued by the wider implications of the report, and felt that some further investigation would be of interest.

The Rural Industries Bureau was established in Autumn 1921 by the Development Commission, a permanent Royal Commission itself established under the Development and Road Improvement Funds Act 1909, to advise and administer a Development Fund which was to be voted annually by Parliament to benefit the rural economy of England. The Commission Trustees were appointed by the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries from the ranks of the great and good, and sat under the chairmanship of The Viscount Hampden GCVO, KCB, GMG (former Speaker of the House of Commons); their task was to consider applications made to the Development Fund on a wide range of non-urban issues which at first included forestry and transport (for which responsibility was transferred to the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Transport in 1919), agricultural research and education (transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1946), and fishery harbours (similarly transferred in 1955). The Development Commission lasted until 1988, when it amalgamated with the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA), to form the Rural Development Commission (RDC).

The Rural Industries Bureau was founded following an enquiry on behalf of the Development Commissioners into how rural industries could be developed through information and advice; its brief was to provide an advisory service for rural craftsmen. The Bureau itself had 40 council members, who employed 6 technical and advisory staff, 5 area officers and

4 administrative staff; one wonders just what the council members did, other than talk! The emphasis was very much on assisting rural craftsmen in providing services for agriculture, which was done through training visits and by publishing magazines and an extensive series of advisory booklets. In 1928 the Bureau published a “Memorandum on Rural Industries, containing a Suggested Programme of work for Rural Community Councils”; it was estimated that there were c.13,000 rural businesses employing 34,000 people with a gross output of £30 million value.

From 1927 until 1939 there was ‘Rural Industries’ a quarterly magazine for country trades and handicrafts, and the long list of booklets includes titles on costing, book-keeping and oxy-acetylene welding for blacksmiths, guides to woodworking machinery (a special on the use and maintenance of wide bandsaws) and binder and baler knotters. One particular concern was about modernising small internal combustion engines and electrical generation in areas which didn’t have mains electricity. The generality of their range of concerns about rural depopulation was perhaps best exemplified by a booklet on “Earning your Living in the Country; a Guide to School Leavers and Others”.

The typescript report on Anglesey by T O Williams appears to fall outside this range of Bureau publications, and is probably a surviving draft, clearly part of a much wider series as his covering letter shows:

To the Chairman and members of the Committee.

Sirs,

I beg to submit the following report of a survey made to the condition of rural Industries in the County of Anglesey.

The object of the survey was the request of the Rural Industries Bureau for a report to be included in the report of Mr. J.G.B. Hamilton who was commissioned to prepare a full report of Rural Industries in England and Wales in which the post war policy of the Rural Industries Bureau will be based.

I must acknowledge the secretary Mr. J.O. Jones for the interest and patience shown, timely advice, and every assistance to undertake the work in addition to our usual responsibilities.

Hoping that this report will assist yourself and members to appreciate the service and task before us with the Rural Industries in North Wales.

Yours,

(signed) T. O. Williams

June 1943.

It seems that English is not Mr Williams' first language, since his spelling has some interesting variations which have been corrected from this point onwards.

Leading the report are comments on the island's blacksmiths, very much in line with the traditional work of the Bureau. There were 39 in the county, some part-time and others too old or indifferent to be interested in progressing the craft. As there was only one instructor for the whole of Wales, only 11 were qualified and receiving tuition, and a further 18 were waiting. There was only one apprentice in the county, a serious matter since in 25 years' time Williams reckoned that there would only be 14 blacksmiths at work. He recommended that finance should be available to build better workshops equipped with power tools, in order to attract young men to the trade.

Then follow sections on Binder classes (helping smiths to deal with "field troubles" and repairs); and wheelwrights, there being 23 of whom 15 "*were now rendering a fine repair service to agriculture, which could be improved.*" Later there came sections on saddlers (3), basket makers (none, but some of the fishermen were making their own lobster pots), mat-making (there had been a thriving industry in weaving mats from marram or sea grass but it was much reduced), and the one surviving woollen mill, Pandy Llywenan.

The following section reproduces Williams' typescript relating to corn mills, with a commentary on the individual mills. It should be noted that none of the windmills were still being driven by wind.

CORN MILLS

During our survey we have found that the County has 15 mills their condition and possibilities are as follows.

Gardner, Valley.

This is a modern mill driven by 40 H.P. diesel engine producing only oatmeal which is sold locally and exported from the Isle of Anglesey. It has the reputation of being one of two mills to produce only oatmeal in the principality. It employs 10 men and has been working for over 80 years. They also do little gristing work with two sets of stones. No help can be given here except with exemptions of 2 members of staff and apprentices at a later date.

Little is known about the mill at Valley. The “over 80 years” noted by Williams suggests that it was established c1860, and it was probably steam powered in its earlier years. It was located next to the railway line at SH 29047935, and served by a private siding from the goods yard at Valley station. The first edition map of 1889 shows a square plan building with an outshoot and a separate building adjacent. By the date of the second edition, 1910, the premises had been extended but were recorded as disused. In recent times it was a furniture warehouseⁱ, but it has since been demolished and by September 2009 there were houses on the site.

Roberts. Cemmaes Bay.

This is a windmill converted to be driven by a 24 H.P. Diesel engine has 3 sets of stones and Barley Flour Dresser. Trade- Corn gristing for farmers, in normal times produces barley flour. Has a fair steady trade all the year. Also the Official Distributor for Balanced Rations for the district.

No help can be given here unless one of his sons could be induced to enter the trade, Roberts is 62 years of age and is a competent mill-wright the only one in Anglesey but owing to health reasons cannot undertake any repairs of this nature.



PLATE 1: (Felin Cemaes, 1929) Rex Wailes' photograph of Felin Cemaes, 1 April 1929.

The windmill had been built in 1828, and John Richard Roberts had bought it in 1918ⁱⁱ. His father, Isaac Roberts had been a well-respected millwright, and his son must have inherited some of his skills. When Rex Wailes visited the mill on Easter Sunday 1929 he wrote that “inside it was full of pigeons and fish meal, and I spent no longer than I could help in it”ⁱⁱⁱ. He appears to have thought that the mill had ceased working, but his photograph shows sailcloth wrapped round one of the stocks, so presumably it was still occasionally used. At some unknown date the diesel engine was brought into use, and the mill was clearly in regular work in 1943, but it stopped in 1946. “Balanced Rations” may have had a more restricted meaning than the phrase has today, when it is often used to promote healthy diet for humans; presumably the Official Distributors were concerned with animal feeds.

Williams Felin Hywel. Llanddeusant.

A two storeyed building well built, and well arranged for use. Has three sets of stones, and flour Dresser, driven by an overshot water wheel 17'. Has a steady trade of com crushing for fanners who undertake the deliveries. In normal times produces barley flour for customers on request. He is also the Official Distributor in this district, for balanced rations and flours. Williams is 44 years of age and is the fourth generation in this mill and is quite a good type of rural craftsman. He should be advised and assisted to better his equipment and to train a younger man in the trade.



PLATE 2: Felin Hywel, photographed on the author's first visit in July 1975.

There was a mill on this site in 1352, and the Williams family (not, as far as is known, related) had owned it since the early C18th, so “4th generation” must be an underestimate. The central part of the building probably dates from the C18th, and there are C19th extensions; the in-line layout of the three pairs of stones driven from a layshaft suggests that the mill was re-equipped in the mid C19th. The business continued successfully through the 1940s and into the 1980s, by which latter date the product was restricted to animal feedstuffs for the local farmers. There were restorations in the early 1970s and again in 1985, but the mill ceased work sometime around the late 1980s or early 1990s, the last water-powered corn mill to work in Wales.

A toll board survived in the mill in later years, strangely not noticed by Williams who recorded that the toll notice in Melin-y-Bont was the only one he had seen.

Owen. Felin Esgob. Llandyfrydog.

This mill has been idle for some time apart from the little com crushing done by Owen for his own use as farmer. Being a farmer he was unable to work same with the result he lost the trade which used to be the reputation of this mill. The equipment is 3 sets of stones, flour Dresser in bad repair, also the building in and out need repairs as well as the overshot water wheel which supplies the Power. The pond and mill race are leaking. It was stated as reason for the closing of the mill that the Land Lady is unwilling to repair, I can now state that Rowlands, Frogny has taken over the mill in co-junction with his own mill for his son since January last, and farmers are appreciating this by bringing their corn to be grinded which justifies this move in the interests of the farming community of the district.

Felin Esgob existed at least as early as 1425, when it was leased to the Bishop of Bangor. By the C19th it was owned by the Bulkeley family, and a lease of 1817 required the lessee to build a new mill of at least £300 value; probably the present building. It is now known when it ceased working, but it seems that the water supply was quite limited. In 1975 work had started on conversion to a dwelling, but the project lapsed until 2003 when a new owner completed it. The waterwheel has been restored and the pitwheel, wallower, and tall upright shaft have been retained.

Rowlands. Frogny Mill. Bodffordd.

A three storeyed sizeable mill with three sets of stones and flour dresser driven, by water wheel and the best water supply in the country. Trade is corn gristing for farmers who do

their own delivery and in normal time produces barley flour for his customers. The Official Distributor of balanced rations in the district, Rowlands is 65 years of age assisted by his son age 17. He is a keen and enterprising type of tradesman, who soundly believes in the future of rural mills. He is anxious to extend his trade possibilities by taking over another mill in the county in the interest of his son. I advised him about two mills, which were vacant and would help the food production and agriculture by taking over one of them. The outcome of this is the taking over of Felin Esgob with satisfactory results and I consider that every support should be given him to maintain his services to agriculture and to further the training of one young miller in the county.

The mill building was clearly of mid-C19th date, although a mill at Bodffordd is noted in 1352. The present mill is sited immediately downstream of a narrow, resistant band of rock which crosses the valley of the Afon Cefni, and the “best water supply in the county” was engineered by damming the very narrow gorge to a height of some 6 metres (20ft) to create a deep pond some 480 metres (1600ft) long, and excavating a new relief channel. The work was shared with a windmill on the crest of the ridge, which was out of use by the 1890s and which became a dwelling for the miller. The watermill ceased work in 1948, and it was converted to a dwelling in the early 1970s, the machinery being laid aside in the garden where it remains. Both the wind and watermill were further renovated in the early years of the C21st.

Hughes. Felin Bont Bryndu.

A very well built windmill with three sets of stones and Flour Dresser, which used to be driven by sails, and water wheel which supplemented the power at unfavourable periods.

This mill used to be a reputable mill for work and trade was carried on until 6 years ago when the present tenants took over. There are no sails today, but repair could be made to the pond so as to secure a good supply of power. The equipment is intact and no use made of the mill except to drive a small keepler installed for own use.

It is here that I saw the only toll notice I have yet seen as follows :-

Am falu Pegaid o Wenith a'i beillio - 6 chwart.

" Pegaid o Haidd a'i beillio - 6 chwart.

" Pegaid o Haidd (neu.unrhynw beth i foch) - 6 chwart

Am grasu a Silio Pegaid o Siliad a'i wneud yn flawd, Neu rnyion - dau gibynaid.

Although there is some uncertainty about what is meant by some of the terms, a translation into English would be approximately as follows:

*SUM OF TOLLS THAT WILL BE LEVIED AT MELIN-Y-BONT
BRYN DU*

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <i>For Grinding a Peck of Wheat and Dressing</i> | <i>6 [quarts or quarters?]</i> |
| <i>For Grinding a Peck of Barley and Dressing</i> | <i>6 “</i> |
| <i>For Grinding a Peck of Barley or [Wheat/ anything?] for Pigs</i> | <i>6 “</i> |
| <i>For Roasting and Dressing a Peck of Hulled Oats – Two half-bushels – and preparing as Flour or Groats</i> | |



PLATE 3: (Felin-y-Bont 1929) “Felin Bont”, photographed by Rex Wailes on 30 March 1929.

The windmill dates from 1825, probably replacing a much earlier water mill on the site. It was a very rare example of a mill where the same set of machinery could be driven by either wind or water; the waterwheel was probably added in the 1840s.^{iv} Rex Wailes was fascinated when he visited at Easter 1929, and spent several hours at the mill, taking numerous photographs. The latter show that whilst the sail frames were still in place, there were no sail cloths, and the gallery which gave access for setting the cloths had been demolished. The sails and two of the five pairs of stones were removed soon after, and the mill continued to work by water power until, Williams suggests, 1937, after which belts and a shaft transmitted power to adjacent buildings to drive butter churns, a grindstone and turnip cutter until c1941. The “keeper” is probably a kibbler for breaking the husks of oats. In 1973 the mill was gutted by fire and the remaining machinery collapsed into the basement, smashing the waterwheel. It remained derelict until 2006-07, when it was converted to holiday accommodation.

Felin Faelog. Bryndu.

No trade for many years. The windmill built in 1789 is damaged beyond repair, no possibilities whatever.

The date of building is recorded on a stone plaque, now rather eroded. The mill was already derelict when Rex Wailes saw it on Good Friday (March 29th) 1929, but later he wrote that it was worked by an engine. It must have become derelict in the 1940s or 1950s, and so it remained until 2004, when work to convert it to a dwelling began.

Felin Treban. Bodorgan.

No trade here for the last 3 years. Have not seen the interior but appears to be in good structural condition. In order to be able to produce work, repairs are needed to the kiln, mill race and troughs and the water wheel needs a new axle and base stand. Since survey the mill has been sold to a new occupier who is not likely to work it.

Little is known about this mill, and Williams’ note that it worked until 1940 is useful. The author saw the exterior in 2009, and noted that an iron axle, with worn journal, was in approximate place over the wheelpit, but there was no outer pedestal support. The axle hole was roughly blocked, and it was not possible to guess whether this was a replacement axle being

brought in, or the old axle partly removed. Of the wheel and launder there was no sign.

Jones. Stanley Mill. Trearddur Bay.

There is no trade here since the structure was damaged by storm 4 years ago. It has 3 sets of stones, flour dresser which needs repairs the fittings are in good repair. Unfortunately the needed repairs to the building including the sails and adjoining, rails etc. would mean an expense of about £400 which the occupant could not undertake although the loss of this mill is severely felt in this district. Jones is now employed as a joiner in a neighbouring camp.

This was the last mill to work by wind in Wales, having been built c1826. Rex Wailes note that it was “a small mill and very dirty, but in fair order”. It was back-winded by a storm in November 1938, and the cap and sails crashed to the ground. Wailes assisted in a campaign to restore the mill, working through the SPAB Wind and Watermill Section and persuading a millwright, Thomas Hunt of Soham, Cambridgeshire, to visit Anglesey and provide a quotation for repairs (which he did, £388^v). There was considerable enthusiasm, but the war intervened and nothing was done; the broken sails lay where they had fallen and machinery within the uncapped tower rotted away. It was converted to a dwelling in the early 1960s, with an extra storey providing a viewing gallery.

Richard Williams. Felin Gwalchmai.

No trade since the death of Mr. T. Williams 5 years ago. The mill is a windmill with no sails attached, has as equipment 3 sets of stones which were driven in later years by an oil engine which has been disposed of. The building and equipment needs repairs and the question of power must be tackled before anything can be done here. Williams is able to work the mill having spent some time with the miller, but owing to part deformity in his arm he would be unable to tackle heavy work such as stone dressing etc. In view of the extra cultivation the demand for this mill remains.

The mill probably dates from the early C19th. It was still worked by wind in 1927, but then the cap and sails were removed and a diesel engine was installed, working through a shaft into the base of the mill. Somehow Rex Wailes missed it on his visit in 1929. The author obtained access in 1975 (with permission) by crawling through the tunnel through which the drive shaft had passed. Some of the transverse beams remained, still supporting a bedstone, and they remain in good condition.

Felin Seler. Aberffraw

This mill is the property of Sir George Meyrick and is in state of bad repair as the estate will not attend to same. The tenant is John Lewis, farmer, who worked the mill constantly until 5 years ago when he lost the miller. The breast water wheel (17') should be replaced and the two sets of stones need repairs and dressing. There is a demand for this mill, and the matter should be dealt with at once in order to assist with feeding stuffs for farmers in this district.

Nothing is known about the origins of the mill, though it is likely to be on an ancient mill site. The surviving building is of mid-C19th date. There is very little fall available, hence the low breastshot wheel. Clearly no action was taken, and a report dated 1954 noted that the wheel had been taken out of its pit and was lying in pieces on the ground. Inside the hurst frame survived in good condition in 2006; the site is now a builder's depot.

Felin Plas. Bodorgan.

This mill is vacant through the death of the miller some time ago. A well built building in good state of repair with 3 sets of stones, and flour dresser driven by a 17' 6" breast Water Wheel as there is some difficulty re ownership it is not likely to work now. Up to date the miller who used to be the tenant at Treban Mill has taken over.

This large, 3-storey mill probably dates from the later C19th, and it was still working in 1954, the second last water mill to work on the island. Water was impounded in a large, brick-walled pond, and the very long tailrace passed under the river on its way to a sufficiently low discharge point. In June 2007 the building was in process of conversion to two dwellings .

Rowlands. Felin Llynnon. Llanddeusant.

This is the only Windmill in Wales intact as the nearest Windmill is in Derbyshire 200 miles away. Although the mill has not been working for 20 years. I must admit that the equipment of 3 sets of stones are in fair state of repair. But Rowlands is not likely to work the mill owing to ill health; but would be prepared to let, provided repairs were undertaken by some authority.

Felin Llynnon was built in 1775-76 at a cost of £529 – 11s – 0d. It was badly damaged in a storm in August 1918, after which the cap could not be turned and it could only be used in a south-west wind. By the time of Rex Wailes' visit in 1929 it had ceased work, but he reported that it was in good, workable

condition, and in 1936 he provided a very detailed and dimensioned description which was published in the Royal Commission's Anglesey Inventory. In the succeeding decades the mill was recommended for preservation several times, but nothing was done and the internal timbers gave way, allowing the machinery to collapse. At last, in 1978, Anglesey Borough Council bought the mill and restored it over a period of six years. It is now open to the public, demonstrating flour milling and selling its products.



PLATE 4: Felin Llynnon in July 1975, probably much as Williams would have seen it

John Griffith. Felin Gwna. Bodorgan.

A small sized mill with two sets of stones driven by an overshot water wheel with gristing work as trade. As I have not seen the miller who is 50 years of age who also farms some land adjoining I cannot recommend any thing here.

This mill is reputed to have been built in the mid-C19th, although the site itself may be centuries older. When the author examined it in 1975 it was not working, but complete and in good condition; but by 1980 the slate roof had been stripped and decay was setting in. By 2006 the roof timbers and timber hurst frame had collapsed, and the machinery lay amongst the brambles in heaps. The wooden launder had disappeared, but the waterwheel frame and iron axle were in situ and sound.

Foel Co-operative Gaerwen.

This is a co-operative Farmers association who undertake some gristing work to members at their modern mill. They are also Official Distributors for Balanced ration Fertilizers, lime, and buyers of oats, barley etc. We may be able to assist re. exemptions and with technical advice at a later date.

The author has no information on this milling facility.

The author cannot resist concluding with the last entry from the report which, although having nothing to do with water or wind power, nevertheless reflects the times in which this report was written.

SPECIAL CRAFT.

This report would not be complete without mentioning another type of trade which is made by a man in his own house from local material. I must admit that we cannot owing to the fact that he does not produce serviceable articles or meeting a local demand by utilising local material be considered as a rural craftsman

Mr. H.E.Selvod of Rhosneigr makes models out of shells collected on the shore to serve as ashtrays, but owing to their material being fragile although it must be attributed that a great skill is needed to produce these models. It is mostly a tourists' and visitors' curiosity trade, sold at places like Blackpool, Morecambe, London, Bournemouth, and Bangor.

He should be induced to produce serviceable ware, but as he is able to sell all his products I doubt whether he can be entertained at all, I consider this as a cottage craft.

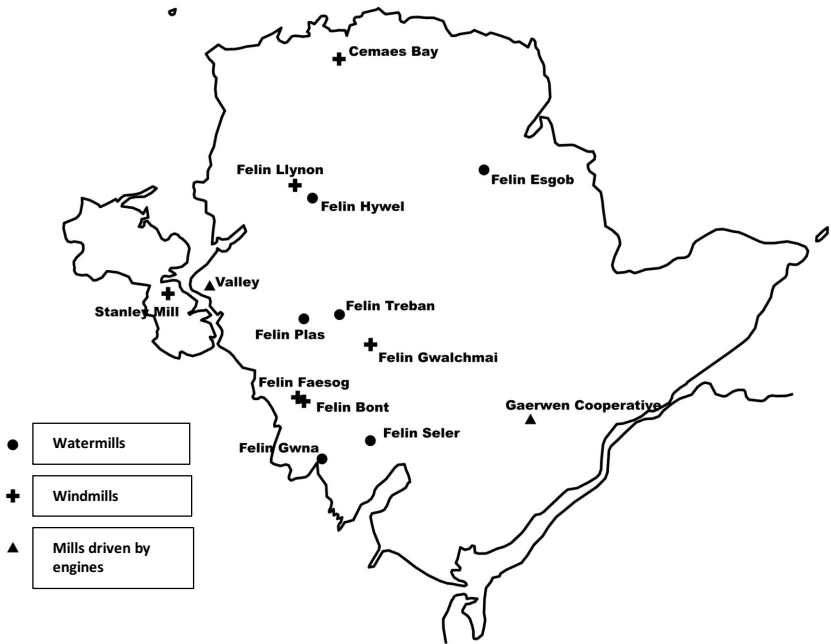


Figure 1: Anglesey’s mills noted by T O Williams in 1943

ⁱ Private communication from Mr George Lees.

ⁱⁱ This and some other information on the windmills is taken from Windmills of Anglesey, by Barry Guise and George Lees, 2nd edition, published by the authors 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wailes’ diary of his visit is in the uncatalogued Rex Wailes Collection in the Science Museum Library. A transcript with commentary was published in *Melin* 26, 2010, pp 31 -49.

^{iv} In 1845 men were employed to “open the river to Melin-y-Bont”: Bangor University Archive, Bodorgan Manuscripts, GB 0222 BOD.

^v See Welsh Museums Society Newsletter 101, pp 7 – 9.