

Discover Gwernaffield Pantymwyn



Welcome to Gwernaffield & Pantymwyn

These two villages on the edge of the Alyn Valley, a few miles west of Mold, owe much of their history and character to the underlying limestone.

The landscape of the Alyn Valley with its crags and caves, flower-strewn meadows, and the river itself that disappears each summer, are all a result of the limestone bedrock.

The once rich mineral veins in the limestone, primarily lead, but also spar and silver, attracted mining engineers and entrepreneurs, hoping to make their fortunes from the valuable minerals.

The first mention of Gwernaffield is in the 15th century and the name seems to be a mixture of Welsh with *gwern* meaning 'alder grove' and the Old English word *feld* meaning 'cultivated arable land', reflecting its rural borderland location. It was not until the lead mines opened in the late 18th century that the two villages started to develop to house the influx of miners. Pantymwyn, 'hollow of ore,' even derives its name from mining.

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The limestone itself was valuable and there were several small quarries where it was dug for local use. Most of the older buildings in the villages are built of this local limestone and it is still quarried commercially at Cefn Mawr Quarry.

The train service arrived in nearby Rhydymwyn in 1869 and, in the 1920s, Crosville began running buses from Birkenhead to Pantymwyn and Loggerheads. This made the area accessible for day trippers from Cheshire and Merseyside, drawn by the picturesque limestone scenery. Some stayed for holidays, camping on farms, renting rooms from local people or staying in wooden holiday huts and old gypsy caravans.

The popularity of the villages continued to grow during the 20th century. New houses were built and some of the early wooden holiday houses were converted into permanent homes.

Through the influx of 20th century tourists, Gwernaffield and Pantymwyn have gradually developed from their early roots as farming and mining communities, into the thriving communities they are today.

This booklet has been produced by the local community to celebrate the rich cultural and natural heritage of the area. Many thanks to all who have provided photographs or shared their memories and knowledge.

The booklet can also be downloaded from www.cadwynclwyd.co.uk or www.flintshire.gov.uk/tourism



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Looking back in time

429 Victory of the Christian Celts over Picts and Saxons in Maes Garmon field. Reputedly, loud shouts of 'Alleluia' by the Christians caused the larger heathen force to panic and flee.

1477 First recorded use of the name Gwernaffield.

1706 The Lords of Mold issued a mining lease for part of the area.

1824 Leete dug from Loggerheads to Rhydymwyn to provide water power for lead mining.

1736 Alleluia monument erected in Maes Garmon field to commemorate the battle.

1845 Several local mines amalgamated as 'Mold Mines' and worked successfully under John Taylor.

1871 Gwernaffield Church rebuilt.

1838 Gwernaffield Church and National School opened.

1899 Earliest reference to a performance by Gwernaffield Band.

1926-1960 Increasing numbers of day trippers and holidaymakers visited the area.

1926 Crosville began running regular buses from Birkenhead to Pantymwyn.

1939 Evacuees billeted in Pantymwyn and Gwernaffield.

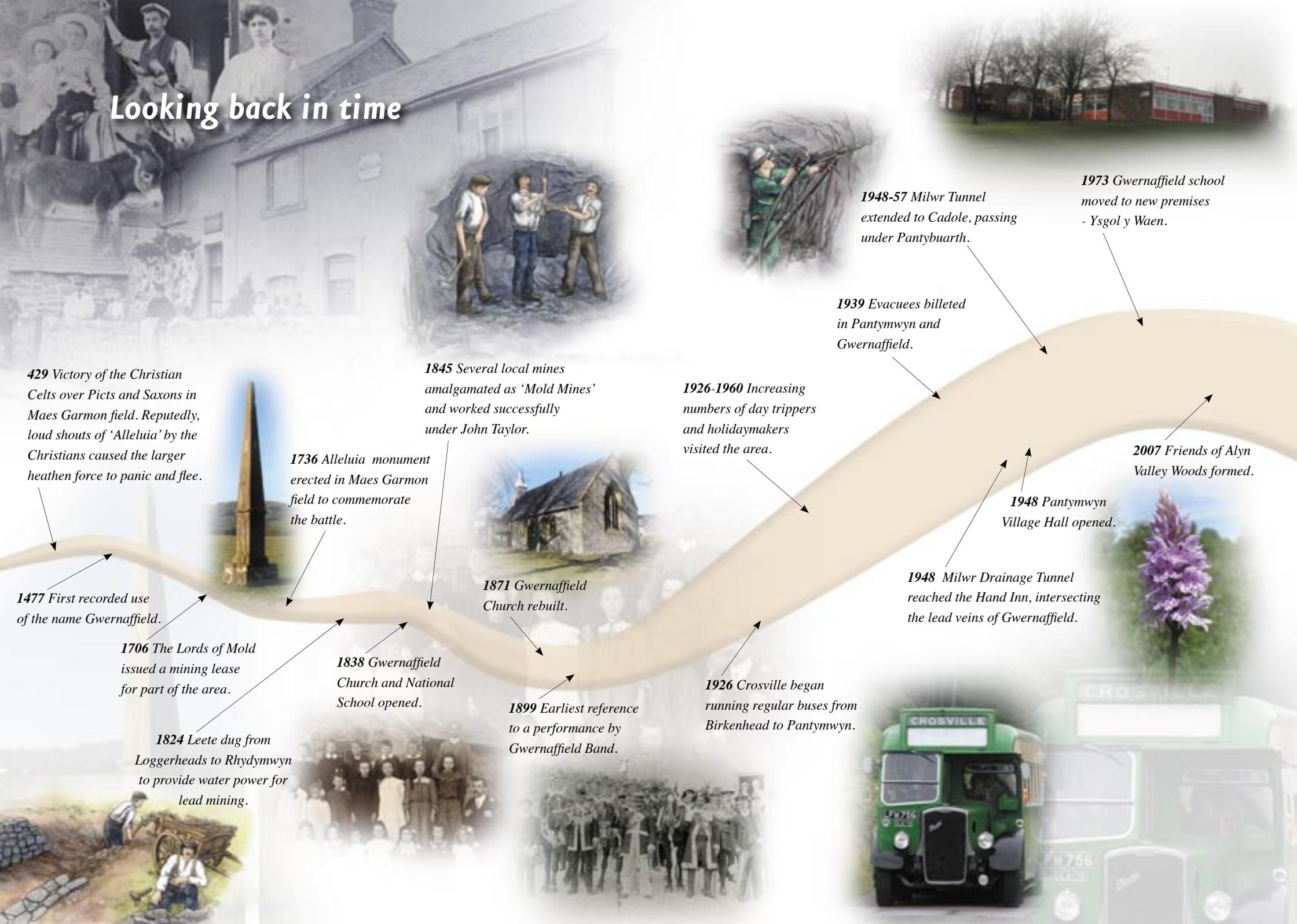
1948-57 Milwr Tunnel extended to Cadole, passing under Pantybuarth.

1948 Pantymwyn Village Hall opened.

1948 Milwr Drainage Tunnel reached the Hand Inn, intersecting the lead veins of Gwernaffield.

1973 Gwernaffield school moved to new premises - Ysgol y Waen.

2007 Friends of Alyn Valley Woods formed.



Lead Mining

Nowadays it is hard to imagine that this rural area was a centre of industrial activity in the 18th and 19th century. The lead veins near the surface may have been worked on a small scale in Roman times but it was not until the price of lead started to rise in the 1660s that local landowners began to take an interest. Mining gathered momentum following the technological improvements of the Industrial Revolution and the increased demand for lead for building and military use.

The two most important lead veins in the area are the Pantymwyn vein which runs east-west from the east bank of the River Alyn, past the Crown Inn through Pantymwyn, and the parallel Pantybuarth vein which runs eastwards along the southern boundary of the present golf course to the cross-roads near Pantybuarth.

Between 1823 and 1845 the renowned mining engineer, John Taylor, who built nearby Coed Du Hall, worked a number of the local mines, known as 'the Mold Mines'.



Former mine captain's house, Pen-y-fron

He invested large sums, building several water channels, called leats, to power waterwheels that pumped water out of the mines. The famous Leete Path, follows the route of one of these water channels, running northwards from Loggerheads for about three miles. Taylor's investments paid off and the mines flourished and expanded, producing over 7000 tons of lead ore between 1825 and 1845.

Devil's Gorge, the well-known beauty spot along the Leete Path, is the result of mining out a wide 'string' off the Pantymwyn vein that contained white spar. The western end of the Pantybuarth vein, the Cefn Bychan mine, was very successful in the mid 18th century when it was known as 'The Great Lead Work'.

However, despite these success stories, most mining remained speculative and investments returned little. The Bwlch-y-ddaufryn Vein ran eastwards from the golf course to Gwernaffield and, according to the 1860 Mining Journal, did not seem to have been mined profitably.

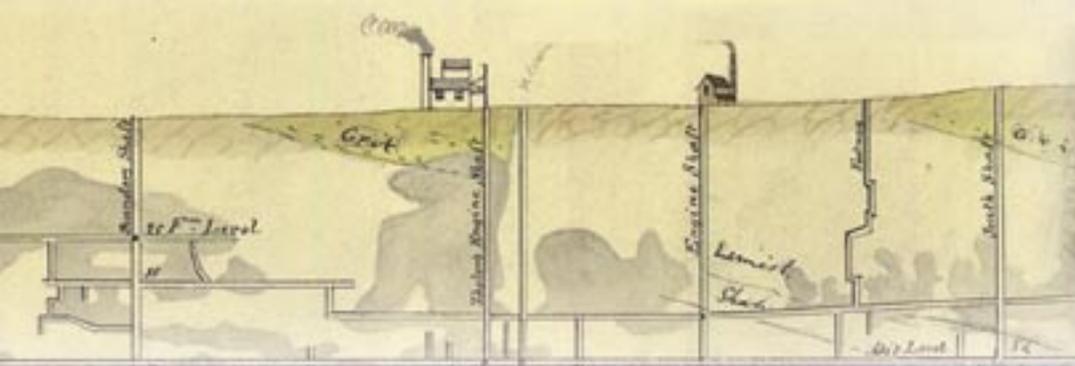
Abseiling in Devil's Gorge



"Seldom this mine produced a bunch of ore that would pay for finding the next."

Extract from The Mining Journal

SECTION OF PANTYMWYN MINE





A tough job

Lead miners worked in cold, wet conditions, sometimes in cramped tunnels and at other times perched precariously high up in a stope (a cavern made by mining). Accidents, including occasional fatalities, were not unusual.

Poor ventilation created dreadful working conditions in some mines. The high levels of carbon dioxide and reduced oxygen caused men to fight for breath and go red in the face, known as 'the damps'.

Lead poisoning, known by miners as 'bellan', was also common. Constipation and cramp, vomiting, poor appetite, weight loss, anaemia, muscle weakness and headaches were typical symptoms. There was no known cure but miners

attempted to ease the condition by taking bread dipped in sweet oil and taking no alcohol!

"An inquest, conducted by WM Davies, County Coroner, was held at the Hand Inn, Gwernaffield, on the 21st inst, on the body of WM Rees a miner, 35 yrs of age, who was killed by falling down a portion of the shaft of the True Blue Mine. He had fallen 24 ft down a ladder to the bottom of the shaft as an iron step of the ladder was loose. A verdict of accidental death was returned."

Account from a local paper Oct 31st 1874

Water problems

Flooding was always a problem in the mines, restricting access to the deeper veins and causing several mines to close. Inefficient water-powered pumps and, later, coal-fuelled steam engines,



were used to pump water from the mines but neither solved the problem. The owners of Rhual invested large sums in more efficient Cornish beam engines for their mines but did not see any return on their investments.

A more effective solution was the digging of long underground drainage tunnels which drained water from all the veins they crossed. In 1875 the Halkyn Tunnel was driven at 60m above sea level for a distance of 5 miles. It terminated just north of Pantymwyn, and regenerated the local mines.

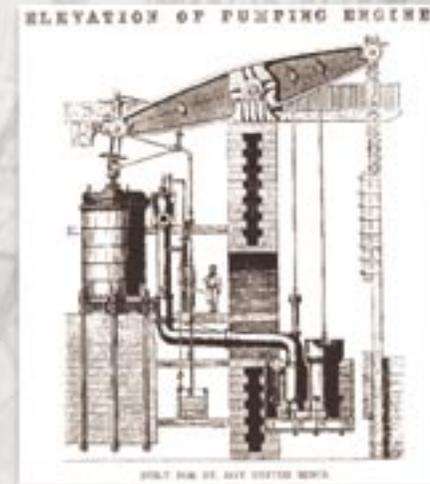
In 1897 work began on the second major drainage tunnel, the sea level Milwr Tunnel, running southwards from Bagillt. Lead prices fluctuated considerably, causing tunnelling to be stopped several times. Tunnelling reached the Pantymwyn vein in 1938 but work then stopped again as prices fell and most of the workforce was made redundant. It began again in 1948 when lead prices rose, advancing beneath the Hand Inn at Gwernaffield. A little further south a rich new vein was discovered and mined successfully for another 10 years. Tunnelling continued, eventually reaching Cadole in 1958. Prices then slumped but rose again in 1964, making deep mining along the most southerly veins viable. The Pantybuarth vein continued to be mined on a

reduced scale into the 1970s, making it the last lead vein to be mined in Wales.



Miners in the Milwr Tunnel

NB Most entrances and mine shafts have been filled or capped, but a few still remain as fenced-off open holes. Great care should be taken at such sites as they may be highly unstable.



Quarrying

The limestone was widely used for building, for the stone walls that edge the fields, and most of the older houses. An 1871 map shows several small quarries and larger ones at Pandy Quarry, below Pen-y-fron, and at Pantybuarth.

Limestone was also crushed and burned in limekilns to produce lime to fertilise acid land and for building mortar. The old maps show there were numerous kilns in the area, mostly situated near a quarry. Several of these old kilns still remain. Kiln Lodge on Cilcain Road is built on top of an old kiln!



Limekiln before Kiln Lodge was built.

Alternate layers of limestone and fuel – firstly charcoal and later low quality coal – were fed into the limekiln from above onto a bed of brushwood. This was then ignited from below through kindling holes. After burning, the lime and ash were raked out from the grate through an arched tunnel in the side of the kiln.

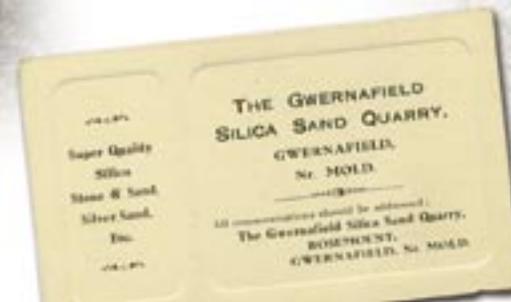
The bags of stone from Pensarn Spa Quarry were brought up the steep lane from the quarry by pulleys then loaded onto a wagon by the gate on Cefn Bychan Road.

The biggest quarry is Cefn Mawr Quarry, between Gwernaffield and Cadole, which opened after World War II to provide limestone for the large cement works at Padeswood and is still working today.

At Gwernaffield, the limestone dips beneath sandstone. Cae Rhug Silica Mine was created in these sandstone rocks, just north of Gwernaffield church, where silica sand and gravel were extracted from underground chambers. The quarry is marked on the 1871 map and continued working until the 1960s. A housing estate has since been built over the quarry entrance. Gravel was also extracted at Rhual between 1930 and 1954. In the early years, most was sent to Liverpool for use in the building of the first Mersey road tunnel.



Pensarn Quarry, circa 1920s.



Working the land

In contrast to the fluctuating fortunes of lead mining, the land above was always farmed and continues to be so today. The fertile clay soils on the lower ground were used to grow cereals, potatoes, lush grass and a variety of other crops. The thin limestone soils on the higher ground were less fertile and used for grazing.



Will Goodwin with one of his prizewinning sheepdogs



Pantygraig



Ffordd Hir, Gwernaffield

Miners often had smallholdings and others helped out on local farms to supplement their irregular mining pay. The account books at Coed Mawr Farm show that several miners paid a small sum to the farm in return for planting a few rows of potatoes. In addition most families would have had a productive vegetable plot.

Most of the landholdings were small, just 2-3 acres. For example, Thomas Jones farmed four fields at Pantygraig, Pantymwyn, from 1888, growing crops and keeping a few sheep,



chickens, a cow and a couple of pigs, mainly for family use. He was also a lengthsman, responsible for maintaining the roadside verges and ditches between Pantymwyn and Gwernaffield, cutting the grass with a long scythe.

In the early 20th century most farm-work was done by hand, with horses used to pull machinery. As many hands were needed at busy times like haymaking, harvesting, and shearing, neighbours used to help each other.

The large estates of Rhual, Hafod, and Gwysaney owned much land around Gwernaffield. Rhual, the oldest house in the parish, dates from 1634, and its 500 acre estate farm is still thriving. In 1964 the five small farms on the estate were amalgamated to form this larger farm, which now has a 300 strong dairy herd.



Rhual



Dairy cows at Rhual

Church and chapel

Until the late 18th century there was no fixed place of worship in Gwernaffield or Pantymwyn but, as the two villages grew, the demand for local places of worship increased. Itinerant preachers were drawing large audiences and Non-Conformism was gaining support within the mining community. At first, groups of devout folk met to pray in private houses but, as numbers grew, larger

venues were needed. The carpenter's workshop of Pen-y-fron mine was used for services until, in 1798, funds were raised to build a Welsh Presbyterian chapel and schoolroom at Llyn-y-pandy. By the late 19th century several chapels

of different denominations flourished, including two in Pantymwyn, one in Gwernaffield and one at Pantybuarth, in addition to Llyn-y-pandy. Bethel chapel in Gwernaffield is still going strong today.

Pen-y-fron chapel was built in 1825 but, by the 1960s, had lost most of its followers, like so many of the other chapels. By 1991 it was closed and derelict. Members of four families, whose relatives had been keen chapel supporters in earlier generations, took decisive action and rebuilt the chapel themselves. It is now a place of worship once more, holding regular monthly services.



Gwernaffield chapel

Pen-y-fron chapel before restoration

The late 17th century owners of Rhual were devout Baptists and itinerant preachers were regular guests. They built Rhual Baptistry, fed by a natural spring, for immersion baptisms. It is still occasionally used; two baptisms have taken place in recent years.

The first Holy Trinity Church, Gwernaffield

Holy Trinity Church, Gwernaffield was built in 1838. Archdeacon Thomas described it as "very plain and without architectural features", but it was greatly valued by the local community who were actively involved in the building project. Landowners donated large sums. Miss Gifford, of Nerquis Hall, gave land for the adjoining school. Mold Mines gave mine waste in lieu of sand, and numerous locals carried materials to the church site free of charge.

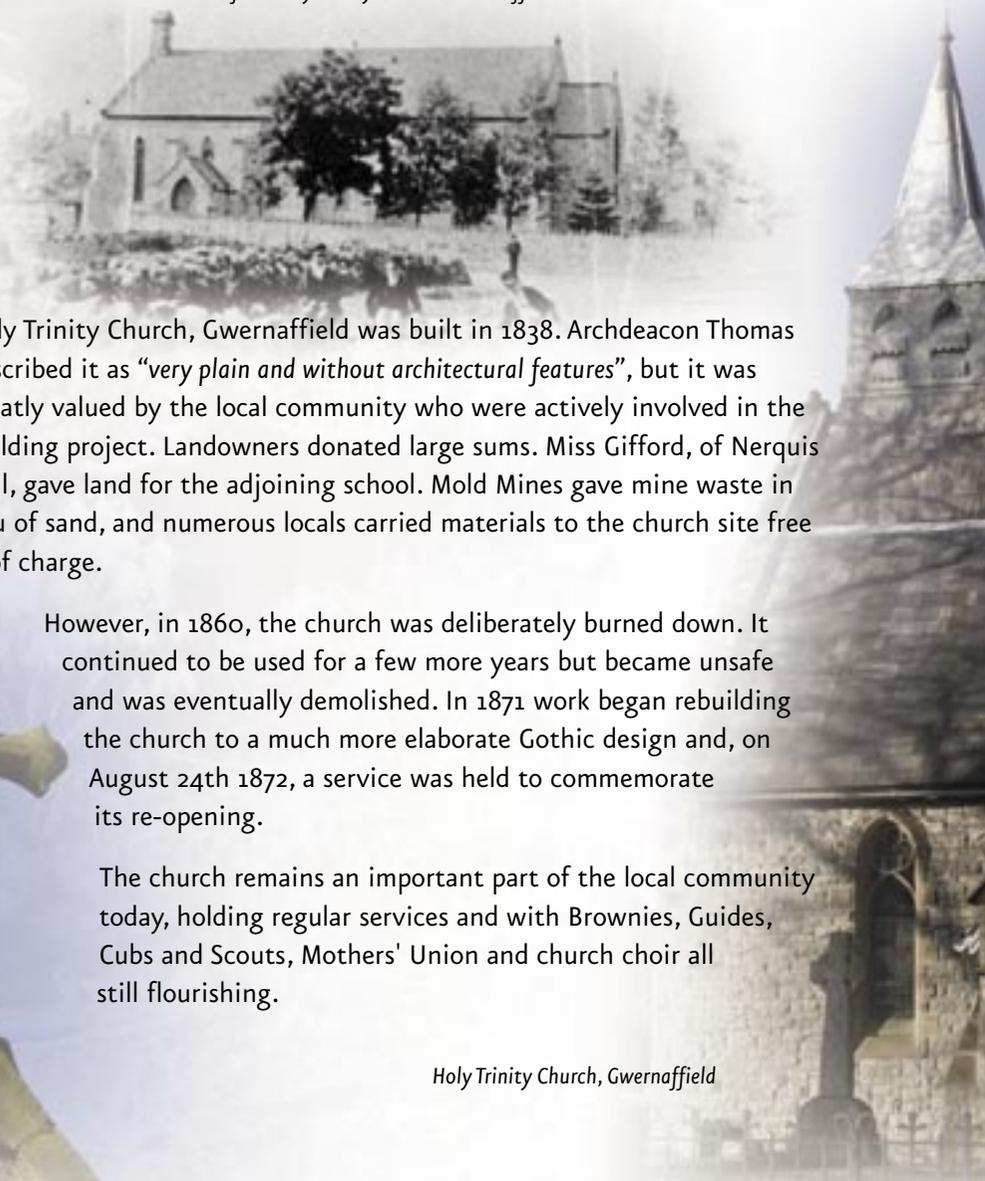
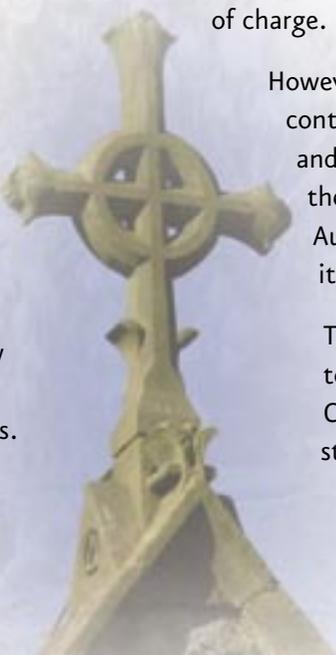
However, in 1860, the church was deliberately burned down. It continued to be used for a few more years but became unsafe and was eventually demolished. In 1871 work began rebuilding the church to a much more elaborate Gothic design and, on August 24th 1872, a service was held to commemorate its re-opening.

The church remains an important part of the local community today, holding regular services and with Brownies, Guides, Cubs and Scouts, Mothers' Union and church choir all still flourishing.

Holy Trinity Church, Gwernaffield

Pulpit in Llyn-y-pandy chapel

The team which restored Pen-y-fron chapel





School Days

The original school was built alongside Gwernaffield church in 1838. It was a simple stone building with one large room divided into two classrooms. Pupils from the 1950s and 60s have fond memories of warming themselves in front of the pot-bellied stove in each classroom. The original building is now the parish hall but one of the old school bells still hangs in a small bell-tower over the doorway.

The school served both villages and also children from the outlying farms. The children walked to school, which was quite a trudge for those from Pantymwyn! Attendance was often low due to the weather or at harvest time when many children missed school to help out on the farms.

“Dr Williams, the Medical Officer, ordered the school to be closed owing to an outbreak of scarlet fever in the village”

School log book, June 15th 1898

Outbreaks of contagious diseases, such as whooping cough, diphtheria and scarlet fever were common in the days before vaccination and were taken very seriously.

The owners of Rhual were generous benefactors to the school and involved pupils in events at the house.

“HRH Princess Royal visited Rhual. Children from school sang ‘Ar Hyd Y Nos’ and ‘Llwyn Onn’. The Princess thanked them and complimented them on their singing. A half-day’s holiday was granted in celebration of the event.”

School log book May 29th 1946

Princess Mary, the Princess Royal, with Commander and Mrs Heaton at Rhual, 1953.



An evacuee, John Walker, with friends at Woodgate, Pantymwyn



In 1939, following the outbreak of the Second World War, pupil numbers rose dramatically with the arrival of many evacuees. The docks on both sides of the Mersey were targets for enemy bombers so evacuees came from Wallasey, Bebington, and Birkenhead as well as Liverpool itself.

Some found it hard to settle and, by Christmas, had returned to Merseyside as the anticipated bombing hadn’t happened. However, following the heavy bombing in spring 1941, evacuee numbers increased again.

Some were so taken with rural life that they did not return to Liverpool after the war. Doris Hughes came with Butler Street School and afterwards only went back to Liverpool for holidays, eventually marrying a local man and settling permanently. Others came back and settled in the area in later life.

After the war many new houses were built in the villages and the old school became too small to cater for the growing number of pupils. A new school, Ysgol y Waen, was built and formally opened in 1973. It was the first purpose built community primary school in Flintshire, built in an open plan style and including a branch library and community room.



Della Matthias presenting flowers to Councillor Liz Baker at the opening of the new school.



Daily Life



Before widespread car ownership, few people travelled far from their homes. Several elderly residents remember riding their ponies to Mold or going by horse and trap. The introduction of the Crosville bus service in the 1920s widened opportunities for local people. On Wednesdays and Saturdays they were crowded with

locals going to Mold market. The evening buses enabled villagers to enjoy trips to the Savoy cinema in Mold and the more adventurous also made occasional trips to Liverpool to sample city life.

The villages were much more self-sufficient than they are today. Each had a good range of shops, catering for every need. A visit to the shops was rarely quick as it was also a social outing, meeting friends and catching up on village news.



The former Pensarn Stores, Pantymwyn

The Shawcross family of Mount Pleasant Farm, Gwernaffield, have been delivering milk around the villages since the 1930s.



Pantymwyn shop (later the Post Office), early 1900s.



Between the wars, Mr and Mrs Ledsham ran the village shop in Gwernaffield, on the main road near the church. The shop is now a private house but the large shop windows are still there. The Bwlch Stores, between Gwernaffield and Pantymwyn, was described as an 'Aladdin's Cave' where customers could get almost anything they wanted, from freshly sliced bacon and pats of butter to clothes, gas mantles, toys and pencils. Even wallpaper and paint could be ordered!

Pantymwyn had four shops. One of the earliest was the general stores on the corner of Pen-y-fron and Cilcain Road which was bought by the Rich family, who were local farmers, in 1898. The first floor door to which sacks of flour and other goods were hoisted can still be seen. They later built the present shop and, in 1935, were granted a licence to run the village Post Office from there.

Older residents also have fond memories of the little shop down Pen-y-fron and of Pensarn Stores, by the bus terminus in Pantymwyn, which was renowned for its home-baked bread and pies.

Maes Llan, by the Hand Inn at Gwernaffield, was formerly a butcher's shop.



Enjoying a pint

The pubs were a focal point of village life. Profits were not high so it was usually the women who ran the pub, whilst the men worked as farmers or miners to make ends meet.



The Goodwin family outside the old Crown Inn



The Goodwin family and friends



The new Crown Inn

Holywell Brewers owned the original Crown Inn at Pantymwyn. In 1903, Edward and Selina Goodwin became the tenants but during the 1920's, they bought it from the brewery. By 1931 the pub badly needed refurbishment but building a new inn was not much more costly than upgrading the old one, so the new Crown Inn was erected across the road. It was a lively place, with regular sing-songs around the piano, and was popular with both locals and visitors.

Until recently Gwernaffield boasted two pubs. The Hand Inn on the crossroads and the Miners Arms further down the road.

Reputedly quarrymen and miners liked to



Inside the new Crown Inn

slake their thirst in the Miners Arms, which was originally also the pay house for the local mines, whereas the Hand was the favoured venue for the farm labourers. Customers also brought their own stone jars to have filled with beer to sup at home.

Outside the Hand Inn, 1957



Once the mines and Cae Rhug quarry shut down, custom dropped and the village could no longer sustain two pubs. The Miners closed in 2007 and is now a private house but The Hand remains a welcoming local (Tel 01352 740581 for opening hours).



Miners Arms



Community Spirit

Local people have often worked together campaigning, fundraising and physically labouring on projects for the benefit of the community.

Pantymwyn Village Hall was a true community project. The village was growing steadily and needed its own hall. A village collection raised funds and, in 1948, a group of local residents located an old army hut in the Midlands, and brought it to Pantymwyn. Local volunteers then laid foundations and erected the hut on land given by the Goodwins, landlords of the Crown Inn.

Children were delighted when Gwernaffield Playing fields were opened in 1959 after years of fundraising and campaigning by villagers.

As the communities grew many local clubs and groups formed, with something for all ages and interests. Youngsters flocked to join the Brownies, Guides, Cubs and Scouts. The Brownies were so popular that, in the 1970s, it was split into two packs. There are still enthusiastic Brownie and Cub packs today.

The Mothers' Union, formed in 1920, and the Women's Institute (Pantymwyn WI formed in 1948 and Gwernaffield WI in 1952) met not only for social events but also to benefit the community.



Volunteers digging the foundations for Pantymwyn Village Hall



The Official Opening of Gwernaffield Playing Fields

The WI provided a baby food clinic for young mothers and later gave funds from this to form a playgroup.

Gwernaffield Football Team flourished before the Second World War, playing hard fought matches against other local sides. The home fixtures were played at Mount Pleasant Farm and the field is still known as 'football field' to this day.

"The members of the Gwernaffield and Colomendy Church Sunday Schools, headed by the Gwernaffield brassband, under the leadership of Mr J. Clarke, marched to Rhual for their annual treat"

Extract from the County Herald, 28th July 1899



Gwernaffield Football Team, 1930s or 40s



Sunday School treat at Rhual, circa 1900

Gwernaffield Silver Band

The band has been going for over 100 years, leading processions through the villages and playing at church services, concerts, garden parties and carnivals in both villages. In the early 1900s, it was frequently mentioned in the press, reflecting the important contribution it made to village life.

The band still thrives today, playing a variety of music but still including traditional brass band marches. As one of the few remaining marching bands, it is in demand to lead processions across a much wider area and also regularly takes part in competitions. New members are always welcome. Tel: Martin Bishop on 01352 740900 for more information.



Gwernaffield Silver Band marching, July 2009



Gwernaffield Brownies, 1963

High days and holidays

Over the years, national and local events have been celebrated with great enthusiasm. Events have ranged from bonfires and street parties to

commemorate the end of World War II, the Coronation, and the Queen's Jubilees, to more local celebrations such as the opening of the playing fields, new school, or village hall.

Eagerly anticipated was the Annual Carnival, with a procession, a Carnival Queen, fancy dress competitions, sports, stalls and sideshows.

For several years, Ysgol y Waen PTA organised a popular Donkey Derby. Liverpool F.C. and England footballer Kevin Keegan, who arrived by helicopter, was the special guest at the first event in 1975.



Mona Williams wins the decorated bike competition!



Pram Race



Tug-o'-war

The shows and carnivals have been adapted to suit the times as the years have gone by. There is no longer a procession along the main road due to modern traffic conditions, but community spirit remains strong and the Pantymwyn Show and Gymkhana is a popular event in August.

Pantymwyn also boasts a particularly scenic golf course, with stunning views west to the Clwydian Range, northwards to the Dee Estuary and Merseyside and eastwards across the Cheshire Plains. Mold Golf Club moved from Padeswood to Pantymwyn in

1928, building a 9 hole course and a clubhouse on farmland. The course has since been extended to 18 holes and the club continues to flourish, celebrating its centenary in 2009. Visitors are welcome with prior booking. Tel: 01352 741513 for more information.



Mold Grammar School Dance in Pantymwyn Village Hall



View to Moel Famau from the Golf Course.



The Donkey Derby



Kevin Keegan arrives to open the fete



The Mount Pleasant Dairy dog competes!

Day trippers & Holidaymakers

Local people have always appreciated the beauty of the Alyn Valley and enjoyed exploring it via the network of footpaths, including the famous Leete Path which follows the route of the earlier watercourse dug to provide water for the mine machinery. Many older residents recall the freedom they had as youngsters, playing in the woods and river, and exploring the cave entrances.

However, from the late 19th century, it also became a tourist attraction. The opening of the Mold - Denbigh line in 1869, gave a train link to the Pantymwyn area, via the station at Rhydymwyn.

It brought many day trippers, particularly walkers, and holidaymakers from Cheshire and Merseyside. The introduction of the Crosville bus services from Birkenhead to Pantymwyn and Loggerheads in the 1920s made the area even more accessible to visitors.

Local people realised that there was money to be made by providing facilities for the growing number of visitors.

Several cafés opened, including the Windmill café opposite the bus terminus in Pantymwyn, Miss Reason's café in one of the wooden chalets in Cefn Bychan Woods, and a café along the Leete Path, where Alyn Kennels now stands.

Several farmers allowed visitors to camp in their fields and in the 1930s a cluster of wooden holiday chalets was built at Coed Mawr Farm, Pantymwyn. These were replaced gradually by caravans and, over time, it developed into the formal caravan park it is today. Most of the caravan owners still come from Merseyside and there are several generations of the same families, who return year after year. Old railway carriages and wooden chalets were also erected in Cefn Bychan Woods on an ad hoc basis.



Mr Rich at Coed Mawr Caravan Park



Tan-y-graig café on the Leete Path



Rhydymwyn Station



"I remember idyllic holidays spent with my mum, dad and younger brother around Pantymwyn. Sometimes we would camp on a farm, bringing our bell tent and equipment with us on the bus, and later rented an old railway carriage in Cefn Bychan Woods. I remember the sing-songs in the Crown Inn while we waited for the last bus back to Birkenhead." Derek Parsons

Under your feet!

Deep below Pantymwyn lies an amazing complex of caves and passageways. The tunnels and shafts are man-made for mining but the cave systems are natural, produced over millions of years by the flow of water underground through the limestone. Flintshire's longest known cave system, 263 feet deep and 1.3 miles in length is Ogof Hesp Alyn (this translates as, 'Cave of the dry River Alyn', which probably refers to the proximity of the cave entrance to a section of river that dries up in summer). There are two other nearby caves, Ogof Hen Ffynhonau (Cave of the Old Springs) and Ogof Nadolig (Christmas Cave).

Limestone is slowly dissolved by water so, over time, small cracks in the rocks develop into larger holes. In the riverbed the water disappears down these larger holes, called swallow holes, and during the summer,

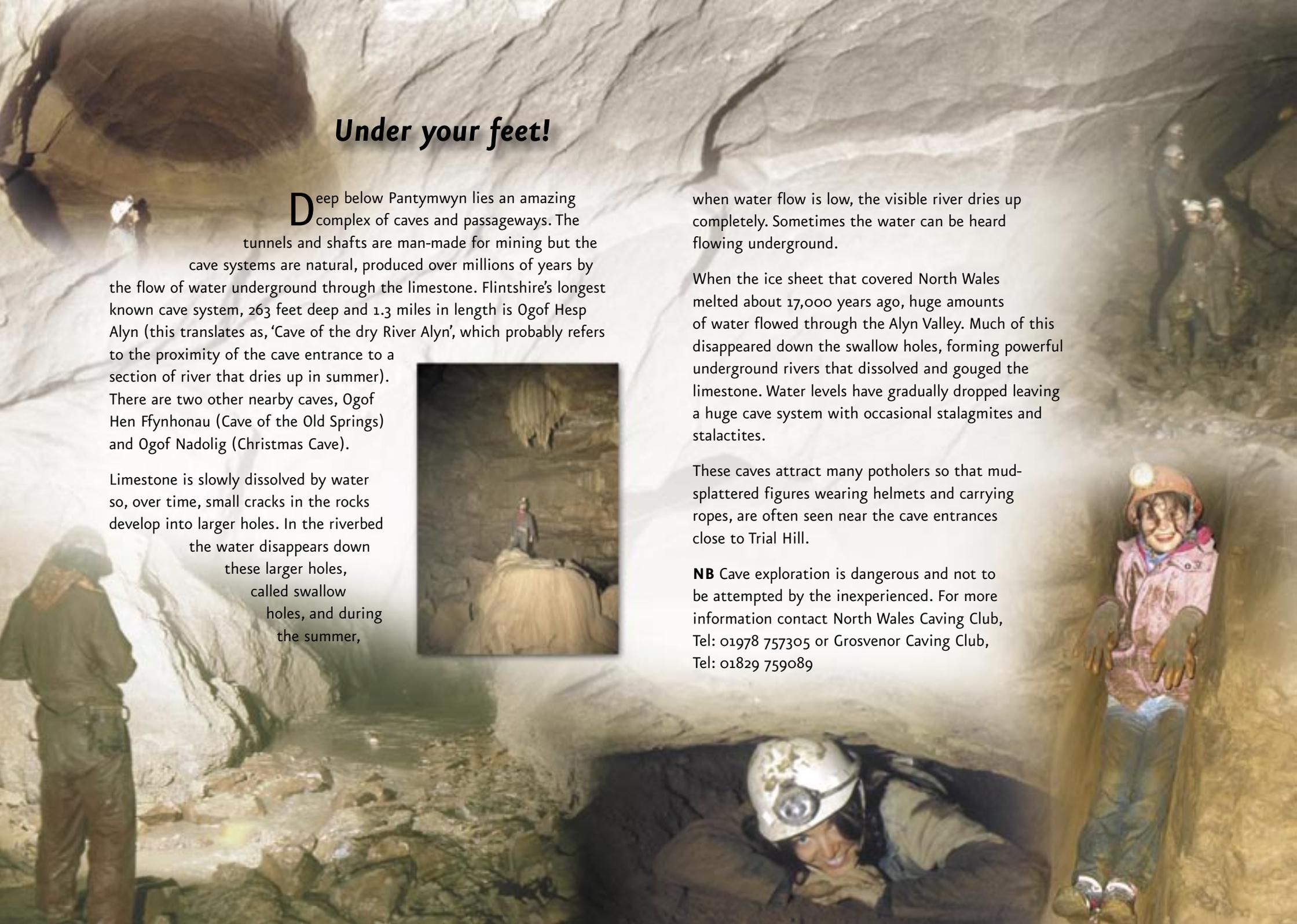


when water flow is low, the visible river dries up completely. Sometimes the water can be heard flowing underground.

When the ice sheet that covered North Wales melted about 17,000 years ago, huge amounts of water flowed through the Alyn Valley. Much of this disappeared down the swallow holes, forming powerful underground rivers that dissolved and gouged the limestone. Water levels have gradually dropped leaving a huge cave system with occasional stalagmites and stalactites.

These caves attract many potholers so that mud-splattered figures wearing helmets and carrying ropes, are often seen near the cave entrances close to Trial Hill.

NB Cave exploration is dangerous and not to be attempted by the inexperienced. For more information contact North Wales Caving Club, Tel: 01978 757305 or Grosvenor Caving Club, Tel: 01829 759089



A place for wildlife

The limestone landscape of the Alyn Valley is a superb place for wildlife, with its mixture of open limestone grassland, scrub, mature woodland and river. It lies within the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is one of only five such special landscapes in Wales.

Greater butterfly orchid

Wild flowers thrive on the thin limestone soils of the **Seven Stiles** area of Pantymwyn, also known as **Pantymwyn Pastures**, situated between Cilcain Road and Pen-y-fryn Road. During late spring and summer the grassland is dotted with cowslips, birdsfoot trefoil and ladies bedstraw, devil's bit scabious, knapweed, betony and fragrant wild thyme. Orchids also thrive here. Early purple orchids are the first to flower from May onwards. Then pink flower spikes of common spotted orchids are plentiful from June, but you may also notice fragrant orchids and the less common, butterfly orchids and green-winged orchids.

The abundant flowers and grasses provide shelter and food for numerous insects, with nectar for butterflies and foliage for caterpillars. Twenty different species of butterflies have been recorded here.

Early purple orchid



Bullfinch

Meadow browns and gatekeepers are particularly common and the rare dingy skipper, whose caterpillar feeds on birdsfoot trefoil, is also found.

Large skipper butterfly



Small groups of trees and scrub, consisting mainly of blackthorn, hawthorn and gorse, add to the wildlife value of the site, providing nesting and roosting sites for birds and additional food sources. Seed-eating birds such as finches are attracted to the grassland and scrub, including the brightly coloured bullfinch, a nationally declining species which breeds successfully here.

Rabbits abound and areas of longer grass provide homes for field mice and voles. Birds of prey, such as buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks, are a common sight overhead, while animals like badgers and foxes hunt below.

Other valuable areas for wildlife in the parish are **Tower Wood**, which lies between Cefn Bychan Road and Mold Golf Course, and the woodland, scrub and limestone grassland to the northwest of Cefn Mawr Quarry.

In addition the valley can boast several other uncommon birds and animals. Otters have returned to the River Alyn, peregrine falcons have bred in local quarries and rare lesser horseshoe bats live in caves and mine tunnels in the Alyn Valley.

Peregrine falcon



Alyn Valley Woods



Green-flowered helleborine

Alyn Valley Woods stretch from Loggerheads to Rhydymwyn, and are designated a Special Area of Conservation in recognition of their international importance. Ash and oak are the dominant trees with a shrub layer of mainly *hazel* and *hawthorn*. In the spring the woodland floor is dotted with colour, first wood *anemones* and *violets*, and later, carpets of *bluebells* or pungent *wild garlic*. There are several less common plants too, including *green-flowered helleborine*, *stinking hellebore* and *spurge laurel*. One of the most unusual is *toothwort*, a pale plant that lives parasitically on the roots of *ash* and *hazel*.

The woodland is home to numerous birds and animals. Birds nest and bats roost in holes and crevices in the mature trees. Invertebrates, including beetles, larvae, millipedes and woodlice, live in the dead wood and fallen leaves. These, in turn, are food for birds, including *greater spotted woodpeckers* and *nuthatches*. Mammals, such as *mice*, *voles*, *badgers* and *foxes*, also benefit from the food and shelter that the woodland provides. Many fungi live on the dead wood and recycle nutrients back into the woodland soil.



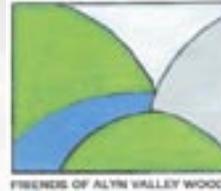
Spurge Laurel

During spring the woodland is full of birdsong as the breeding season begins. The bird population is swollen by migrant birds, including *pie d flycatchers* and *spotted flycatchers*,

Nuthatch



chiffchaffs and *willow warblers*, which are attracted by the plentiful supply of insects. In summer the woodland glades are a good place to see butterflies such as the *speckled wood*.



Friends of Alyn Valley Woods

Local enthusiasts formed this group in 2007 to conserve and enhance the flora and fauna of the Alyn Valley Woods, associated meadows and other nearby woods. It aims to promote the conservation value to local people, and to enhance liaison and cooperation with local landowners.

The Friends organise a regular programme of events, including talks, guided walks and practical conservation tasks, such as erecting nest boxes assisted by Gwernaffield Brownies. Members also undertake survey and monitoring work.

One of the biggest ongoing tasks, started in 2009, is the control of Himalayan balsam growing along the river bank. As its name suggests this tall pink-flowered plant is native to the Himalayas but was introduced to Britain in 1839. Since then it has become a serious problem as it is very invasive, spreading rapidly along riverbanks where its dense foliage suffocates the natural vegetation. During summer 2009, over 100 volunteers, including Trinity Famau Scouts, spent 450 hours tirelessly pulling up the plant before it sets seed. More help is always welcome. Volunteers can come along to an event and learn more about the local environment. For more information please contact Gill Dobson tel: 01352 741459 or e-mail: gilldobson@tiscali.co.uk



Wren



Toothwort



Gwernaffield & Pantymwyn

Y Waun a Phantymwyn



-  Pub/ Tafarn
-  Parking area/ Maes parcio
-  Building of interest/ Adeilad o ddiddordeb
-  Church or chapel/ Capel neu Eglwys
-  Golf course/ Cwrs golff
-  Right of way/ Hawl tramwyo
-  Rural Walks in Flintshire No 19/
Cerdded yng Nghefn Gwlad Sir y Flint Rhif 19
-  Flintshire Leisure Drive, Cilcain - Nercwys
Taith foduro Sir Y Fflint, Cilcain - Nercwys
-  Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol Bryniau Clwyd