

Discover

Ysceifiog



Welcome to Ysceifiog

Ysceifiog today is a peaceful village that lies off the beaten track, but it had a long and fascinating history. The now quiet lanes were once important trade and transport routes and, for centuries, the village was a bustling place, with numerous pubs and shops.

The settlement has ancient roots. Finds of Stone Age flint tools, Bronze Age burial mounds, a gold torc (a neck band), the nearby Iron Age hillforts, Romano-British brooches, the possible remains of a Dark Age dyke and several medieval houses bear testament to its long history.

The present church stands on ground that has been used for worship for centuries. Reputedly, the first church was a simple wooden cell built in the 5th century. A larger church was built in the 11th century, but was rebuilt in the 19th century.

Ysceifiog's location on the border of England and Wales meant it was disputed territory for many centuries and has seen much unrest. It was one of the few places in Wales mentioned in the Domesday survey

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in 1086, recorded as Schiviau, as it was under Norman control and was part of the ancient cantref of Teigeingl that was annexed to Cheshire.

By Tudor times, the area was more stable and prosperous. Ysceifiog lay on an important pack-horse route between Chester and Denbigh and long trains of pack-horses would have passed frequently through the village. In the 17th century this route became part of the London to Holyhead Post Road and the village would have been a welcome stopping point for travellers.

Farming has always been the main land use although, in the 18th-20th century, the nearby lead mines on Halkyn Mountain provided work for many local men and others worked in the small local quarries.

Nowadays sheep and cattle still graze the fields but no industries remain and the main transport routes bypass the village. Walkers, naturalists and fishermen, coming to enjoy the natural beauty and tranquillity, have replaced the travellers and tradesmen stopping for refreshment.

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. A pictorial timeline telling the story of the village through time can be seen in the Village Hall. Access by arrangement (tel. 01352 720837).

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



Through the ages

2000 -1000BC

Bronze Age tribes settled in the area. Numerous burial mounds remain.

1st century

Roman invaders influenced the local tribes. Numerous Romano-British brooches found locally.

750BC- 450AD

Iron Age Hillforts built on nearby Penycloddiau and Moel Arthur.

5th century

A simple wooden hermit's cell may have been built on the site of the present church.

1086

Settlement of Schiviau (Ysceifiog) recorded in Domesday Book.



1400s-1700s

Pack-horse route passed through Ysceifiog.

Circa 1500

Several substantial Tudor houses built. A thimble, dated 1480, found by the ruins of Tan-y-Llan.

11th century

A larger church built.



1645

Gledlom, one of the oldest remaining houses in the parish, was built.



1682

Thomas Wynne from Bron Fadog sailed to America with Quaker, William Penn, who founded Pennsylvania.



Circa 1730
Fox Inn built.

1600-1658

John Jones of Gelli Lyfydy, collected manuscripts that became the basis of the National Library of Wales' collections.



1600

London to Holyhead Post Road opened to public use. Ysceifiog was a stopping point.

1837

Present church built.



2000-2007

Village Hall refurbished and community timeline display developed.

1946

Village School closed but later used as the Village Hall.

1817

New school built.



Travelling through



Ysceifiog has been a stopping point for travellers for centuries. An ancient trackway through the village may have been used since prehistoric times. It later became a route for pilgrims to St Winefride's Well at Holywell and weary pilgrims may have sought refreshment in the village. Reputedly, these included some of the infamous Gunpowder Plotters, who went on pilgrimage before their attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605.

In Tudor times, Ysceifiog was a stopping point on an important trade route linking the River Dee at Chester to inland Wales. Pack-horse trains of between six and



thirty mules, laden with heavy panniers filled with goods such as corn, coal and timber would have passed regularly through the village.

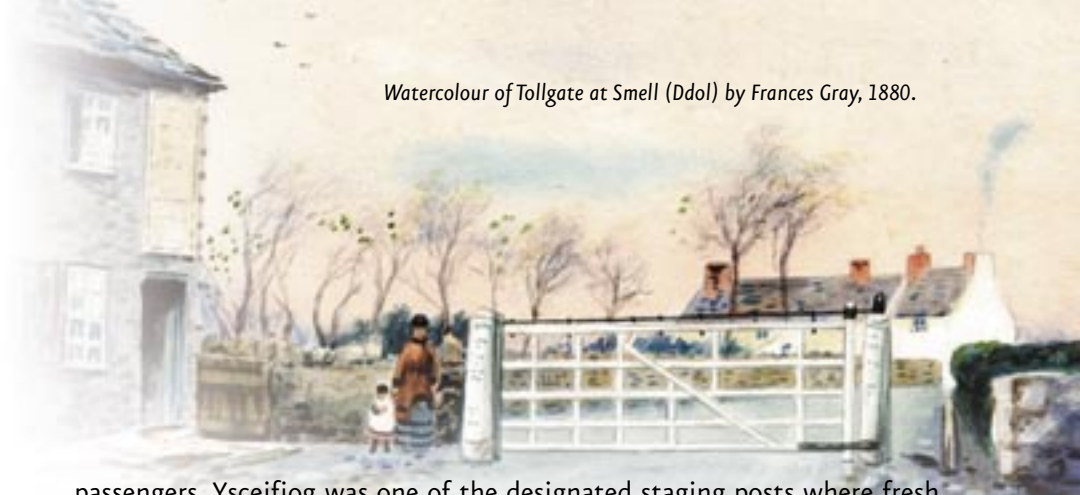
This route later became part of the London-Holyhead Post Road running from Northop, over Halkyn Mountain to Ysceifiog and then down to Afonwen and onto Denbigh. 'Skiviog' and Smell, a small hamlet west of the village, are shown on John Ogilby's map of 1675, reflecting the importance of the settlement.

The Royal Mail was carried on special stagecoaches that also conveyed paying



Section from John Ogilby's map

Watercolour of Tollgate at Smell (Ddol) by Frances Gray, 1880.



passengers. Ysceifiog was one of the designated staging posts where fresh horses were available and refreshments could be served speedily so the mail was carried as quickly as possible. A consortium of innkeepers between Chester and Holyhead ran other passenger coaches, offering accommodation and refreshments along the route and many other travellers would undertake the journey on foot, horseback or by horse and cart.

In the 18th century, Turnpike Trusts took over the maintenance of the important roads and travellers had to pay a fee for the upkeep of the roads. A toll cottage and gate stood at Smell but fell into disuse when the main road developed in the valley and a new toll cottage was built there.

The Post Road lost importance after the coastal route from Chester to Holyhead was replaced by Thomas Telford's new A5 that ran inland through Betws-y-coed during the early 1800s.

The Mold-Denbigh Railway opened in 1869, running along the valley to the south of Ysceifiog. It brought many new visitors from Cheshire and Merseyside who alighted at Caerwys station and walked to Ysceifiog Fisheries, to enjoy the lakeside and woodland walks.

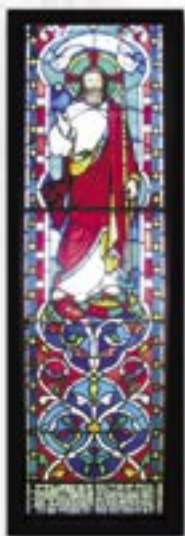


Church and chapel

Reputedly the first place of Christian worship was a simple wooden cell built for St Deiniol, the first Bishop of Bangor. The remains of such a cell were uncovered in the present church in the early 20th century, when heating equipment was installed. The second church was built in the 11th century.

In the early 19th century, William Davies Shipley, Dean of St Asaph, neglected Ysceifiog, earning it the reputation for being '...one of the three worst and most unruly parishes in North Wales.' During this period, the church building deteriorated so badly that it became unsafe and had to be rebuilt in 1835.

Several features of the earlier church remain: a lidded silver chalice from 1631 and a 14th century life-sized stone effigy of a priest, probably once the lid of a tomb. The oldest tombstone in the churchyard dates from 1611 and there is a stump of an old preaching cross, thought to date from the 15th century. It bears grooves from sharpening weapons, possibly made by parishioners who had to practice archery after worship.



Not everyone was attracted to the parish church. During the 18th century, itinerant preachers were drawing large audiences and Non-conformism gained support. As numbers grew, meetings moved from private houses to chapels. Fron Chapel, built in 1804, was the first in the village but was replaced by the larger Gorffwysfa in 1928.

The established church disapproved of the Non-conformists to the point of persecution, as this inscription on the tombstone of a local squire reflects:

'Here lyeth the body of the late Hugh Hughes, Coed-y-Brain. In the hopes of a blessed Resurrection he had the Honour in 1743 to serve the Public in the office of high sheriffe for his County. In private life his manner was constantly to attend the Public Worship as by Law established heavily to declare against the upstart Sect of the Brainsick Methodist that would take Men off from it ...'



John Owen (1733 – 1776)

John Owen, the pioneer of Methodism in Flintshire, was born in Ysceifiog. His farmhouse home, Y Berthen Gron, near Lixwm, became a centre for worship. As support grew, the first Methodist chapel in Flintshire was built near his house in 1775. He had been made a warden of Ysceifiog parish church against his wishes and is buried in the churchyard.

1792 etching by Moses Griffith of the second church



Working the land

Ysceifiog has always remained very rural in character. The marl soil, a sticky, lime-rich clay, is heavy but fertile and grows good crops and rich pasture.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, most people were involved in farming, even if they only had one or two fields or helped out at busy times like harvesting, potato planting and shearing. School attendance was low at these times as children also helped. Farms were more mixed then, each growing a variety of crops and keeping a few milking cows, pigs, chickens and horses for heavy work. Each farm took their corn for grinding at Pant Gwyn Mawr or Ddol Mills.

Herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and even pigs and poultry would have been familiar sights on the tracks around the village. The weekly livestock fairs at nearby Caerwys, attracted buyers and sellers from far and wide, many bringing their stock through Ysceifiog.

A drove-route from North Wales to the Midlands and southern England passed through Ysceifiog, which would have been used as a watering stop for cattle herds and their drovers alike. Local house-names like 'Drover's Tumble' reflect this history.



Working the stone

Following the Industrial Revolution, large-scale lead mining developed on nearby Halkyn Mountain, which widened employment opportunities for villagers.

"Most of the men were employed in the lead mines and children from 10 years upwards were also employed pumping water and washing the lead ore."

Blue Books report for Ysceifiog School, 1847

However, such income was uncertain and only paid piece-rate, with mines closing frequently. Most families still supplemented their meagre wages through work on local farms or their own smallholdings.

There were also several small local quarries extracting limestone, marl and tufa, a very soft limestone that was widely used in alpine gardens. Crushed limestone was burned in limekilns, adjoining the limestone quarries to provide lime for fertilising the soil and for building mortar. More recently, a sand and gravel quarry in the valley opened in the 1950s and is still working today.

In the early 1800s, cotton spinning provided alternative employment, mainly in the large Holywell mills. Others worked from home in the outlying villages, including Ysceifiog, teasing the raw cotton to prepare it for spinning. There are still ruined cotton-pickers' houses at Pen-y-Ralt.



Village life

Before widespread car ownership, most residents rarely travelled far from the village and the local shops and businesses catered for all daily needs. Until the 1930s, water was carried to the village from a well at the Ffynnon Fair, beside 'Drover's Tumble'.

There were three shops in the village at one time, along with a wheelwright and blacksmith. Liverpool House was the largest shop. Park Shop was built in 1882 and closed in 1918. It was a general shop and bakehouse. Today, it is two private houses. There was also a tiny sweet shop in Northgate Terrace.

From the mid 1800s, Liverpool House was run by Nathaniel Morris, who was a general draper, grocer, boot and shoemaker. From 1878, it also housed the village Post Office but before that a postman walked from Ysceifiog down to Holywell (a round trip of nine miles) to collect the post. After delivering it, he would sit in a wooden hut opposite the shop selling stamps and repairing shoes before returning to Holywell with the mail in the evening. The shop was later known as Sycamore Stores. The stores closed in 1990 and the Post Office in 2002.



Ale and poetry

At one time there were three pubs in the centre of the village, and a couple more on the outskirts, reflecting the demand from passing travellers and locals. Today only the Fox Inn remains (tel: 01352 720241). Built around 1730, it was named after the family of Ignatius Fox, an industrialist from County Kildare who married the heiress of one of Ysceifiog's local estates, Elizabeth Williams of Colomendy.

The Blue Hound, a very ancient building, was sited on today's playground. It had a pinfold where stray animals were kept and, later, where illegal cock-fighting took place. The pub was converted into cottages but these were demolished in 1974.

The Talbot, now a private house near the church, had been publican Samuel Edwards' family-home for generations. His attempt to buy the inn from his landlord, the Duke of Westminster, was thwarted by a higher bid from the rector, who did not like the idea of a hostelry so close to the church. Samuel was evicted and built a new home south of the village at Noddfa (meaning 'refuge').



Will Ysceifiog (1790-1855)

Born Will Edwards in nearby Caerwys, this carpenter and millwright had a natural talent for poetry and became a renowned bard, known as 'Will Ysceifiog'. He was prone to depression and drinking and spent time in lunatic asylums. He loved the tavern as much as the Eisteddfod and frequently composed englynys (short poems with a clear rhythm) whilst supping beer in a local pub! He is buried in Ysceifiog churchyard.



School days

In 1792, what is now known as School House in Ysceifiog may have been a charity school. In 1817 a new National School was erected adjoining School House and was extended in 1841, adding the larger room on the northwest side. Parents were meant to contribute a penny each week but local dignitaries, including the Duke of Westminster, the Earl of Denbigh and the Buddicombs of Penbedw, also gave donations.

The school was inspected as part of the notorious Blue Books report on the State of Education in Wales in 1847. Welsh speaking children were inspected in English, hence their knowledge was inevitably found lacking.

'... I found only three who could read with ease; and among 10 copy-books I only found one good specimen. There were only 2 scholars learning arithmetic; one pupil knew something of geography, and another knew a very little of English grammar; 7 repeated the Catechism; 3 could answer Scripture questions, but only one with intelligence. A few of the children present could speak English....'

Blue Books report, 1847

The prohibitive cost of modernising the school forced its closure in 1946 and the building became the Village Hall. Now local children travel to nearby villages for their primary schooling.



Pupils at Ysceifiog School, 1921



Wealth and grandeur

Substantial houses from the 16th and 17th centuries, like Gledlom, Pant Gwyn Mawr, Garneddwenfawr and Coed-y-Brain, suggest that the area was prosperous in that era.

The Wynnes of Bron Fadog, the Mostyns and the Dukes of Westminster, owned much of the land around Ysceifiog and must have had a great influence on the community, as landlords, employers and benefactors to the school and church.

Most notable in the early 20th century was the Earl of Denbigh who owned the 510 acre Ysceifiog Estate, including a number of farms tenanted to local families. In 1902, he created Ysceifiog Lakes for his family and guests to relax and enjoy shooting and fishing. He dammed the stream and, when the lakes had filled, established a fish farm. He built a large shooting lodge and entertained many grand guests, including Lady Grosvenor. The fisheries were renowned and even stocked a pond at Buckingham Palace! The surrounding woodlands were stocked with pheasants and managed by his gamekeepers for shooting.



Workmen employed to build the dam for Ysceifiog Lakes

Landscape and wildlife

Marsh marigold

The rolling countryside around Ysceifiog is a patchwork of grazed fields, edged with thick hedgerows and pockets of woodland, against the backdrop of the heather clad hills of the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A good network of footpaths, bridleways and quiet lanes enable easy exploration of the area.

The mixture of thin limestone soils, with pockets of sandier soils and marl on the lower ground create a variety of habitats. The low-lying areas are often boggy as the marl traps water resulting in many ponds and marshy areas.

Ysceifiog Lakes attract coots, moorhens, grebes, ducks and kingfishers. In spring, bright yellow marsh marigolds flourish at the water's edge, with bluebells and wild garlic in the woodland. Dippers and grey wagtails hunt for insects near the faster flowing streams. The adjoining wet woodlands are carpeted with an abundance of damp-loving ferns and mosses.

The old tufa and marl quarry beside Ddol Chapel is now a nature reserve managed by North Wales Wildlife Trust. Many natural ponds and marshy areas have formed, providing an ideal habitat for rare lime loving plants,

such as stonewort and marestail, and breeding sites for frogs, toads and newts, including the rare great crested newt.

The old marl workings are now hummocky grassland. Wildflowers grow well on the thin soils, including cowslips in spring; kidney vetch, St John's wort and a variety of orchids in the early summer; and, in late summer, the rare grass of Parnassus, which has a delicate white flower. The flowers attract numerous butterflies and other insects. Snails are plentiful too, due to the calcium-rich soils.

Many birds, including blackcap, nuthatch and bullfinch thrive in the woodland. The rare dormouse also lives in the woodland. These shy creatures are seen rarely but the discarded shells of their favoured food, hazelnuts, reveal their presence. Dormice gnaw a neat round hole in the side of the shell, whereas squirrels and mice gnaw the nuts in a different way. A series of dormouse boxes have been erected in the woodlands on either side of Ysceifiog Lakes to provide secure and sheltered nesting sites.

On a smaller scale, the churchyard and local gardens are also valuable wildlife habitats. Little owls are often seen in the churchyard.

Bullfinch

Kingfisher

Grass of Parnassus

Coot

Great crested newt

Dormice

Little owl



Gelli Loveday

Babell

Waen

Mynydd-lan

Pant Gwyn Bach

Bron Fadog

Drovers
Tumble

Ysceifiog Lake
Llyn Ysceifiog

Ysceifiog

Fox Inn

Church
Capel

Tan-lan

Gledlom

Pentre

Lixwm

Licswm

A541

Mold
Yr Wyddgrug

 Fishing/ Pysgota

 Pub/ Tafarn

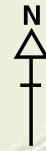
 Building of interest/ Adeilad o ddiddordeb

 Church or chapel/ Capel neu Eglwys

 Right of way/ Hawl tramwyo

 Rural Walks in Flintshire No 1
Cerdded yng Nghefn Gwlad Sir y Flint Rhif 1

 Flintshire Leisure Tour, Caerwys - Cilcain
Taith Hamdden Sir Y Fflint , Caerwys - Cilcain



Caerwys

B5122

Afonwen

Denbigh
Dinbych

Ddol Nature
Reserve
Gwarchodfa
Natur y Ddol