

Agriculture in Pencader

Written records of agriculture in the north Pembrokeshire area are found in the 13th and 14th century records of the Bishop of St. David's. However, in the long periods of time before that it can be reasonably certain that various agricultural practices existed and that over time agriculture developed to support the local population.

Prehistoric Subsistence

The practice of sowing and harvesting crops and domesticating animals spread from the Middle East into Western Europe, so that by about 5,000 BC Stone Age man had moved from the previous hunter-gathering existence to a more stable agricultural level of production. The Stone Age peoples have left behind their impressive burial chambers and must have had a considerable population to be able to build these chambers with their large standing stones and cap stones. This population will have acquired food presumably some from crops, some from animal products and some from hunter-gathering, fishing, shellfish, berries and nuts.

As time progressed into the Bronze and Iron Ages, metal tools became available and made some of the agricultural tasks easier. We know that the north Pembrokeshire area and the Pencader headland in particular, were important sites during the Iron Age. There is also some evidence of possible Bronze Age occupation. Iron Age forts existed on Garn Fawr, the western end of Morfa farm in Mathry parish, on the road leading to Jordanston (originally part of Pantycoch Farm), and generally in many areas of Pembrokeshire. From the evidence found at Castell Henllys between Newport and Cardigan we know that Iron Age man carried out farming activities growing crops, used animal products and made clothes from leather and wool.

Middle Ages

As time developed and population increased, so did the level of agriculture increase with the clearing of woodland continuation of crop growing and the importance of rearing livestock. We know that cattle in particular formed a very important part of the social arrangements and they are substantially referred to under the laws of Hywel Dda 910 to 950. In those detailed accounts of Welsh Law, cattle feature prominently as payment of fines, dowries in marriage, and tribute by one party to another. There is some evidence of cattle movement out of Welsh agricultural areas into England.

Under grants of land made by the Welsh Princes prior to the Norman invasion of Pembrokeshire, the area from St. David's to Fishguard was granted to the Bishop or

church leaders at St. David's under the original name of Pebidiog, later to be called Dewisland. It is not until the compilation of the Black Book of St. David's, recorded in 1326 that there is a record of the Bishop of St. David's properties in the St. David's diocese, which at that time stretched from St. David's through the border of Wales into Herefordshire. It did not include the areas covered by the Bishop of Llandaff in south east Wales and stretched far enough northward to meet the dioceses of St Asaph and Bangor on its northern boundaries.

The St. Nicholas area was an important part for the Bishops' property titled Villa Camerari with a steward in charge to look after the Bishop's local estate. The adjoining parish of Granston was termed Villa Grandi. Both of these areas appear in the Black Book of St. David's together with the parish of Llanwnda to the east. From some of those entries it is possible to identify a number of farm holdings which are still in existence today.

Villa Camerari (St Nicholas)

Trellys 1 caracute 2 bovates Rent 5/6d 4 pairs gloves 1 needle

Fonon Pedryllyaun (Ffynnon Druidion) 1 caracute Rent 3/4d 9 pairs of gloves 4 needles

Trefelgarn 2 caracutes Rent 5/8d 2 pairs gloves 1 needle

Mynydd Maildy 6 bovates Rent 3/8d

Landodreon (Landridian) 1½ caracutes.

Villa Grandi (Granston)

Llangloffan 4 caracutes Rent ½d at Pentecost and services -- collection of sheep every third year, keep and escort of prisoners, attendance at Court fine of 7/- (This entry is described as Freehold i.e. free of rent but still held by feudal service).

Trefwent (Tregwynt) 1 caracute 6 bovates Rent 8/6d

Trefsysillt (Tresysillt) 2 caracutes Rent 10/- (possibly the highest rent of the Pencaer properties).

Llanwnda Parish

Trefissac (Trefisheg) 1 caracute Rent 2/-

Llandogan (Capel Llandogan) 6 bovates Rent 3/4d and service together with-haulage of materials from Preskely (Priskilly) and Llwydarth (near Maenclochog)

Castell Wladws 1 caracute Rent 5/-

Kayrgowil (Carngowil) 1 caracute Rent

Trefhelyn (Trehilyn) 1 caracute Rent

Carnetoth (Carnecoch) 1 caracute Rent

Trefasser 6 bovates

Llanuohour (Llanwnwr) 1 caracute

Pencaderyk (Panteurig)

Penhesken (Penysgwarne) 1 caracute Rent 1 needle (According to historical record this property was held as a Knight`s fee, thus no monetary rent but Knight service as a feudal tenure).

Trefiartho (Treatthro) 1 caracute

Trefthlynmyn (Trelimin)

Trenewy (Trenewydd)

Trefenuak (Trefayog)

Rhos Rouwen (Tresinwen)

Felindref

Llanferran

The list includes other names that cannot be easily identified today.

Basic farming from the medieval period right through until the latter part of the 16th century did not change a great deal. Under both original Welsh law and the feudal system introduced by the Norman invasion, arable land was cultivated in strips or small areas. Because of the Welsh inheritance laws and the system of Gavelkind, holdings were split up into smaller and smaller areas.

Under the Norman system of strip farming the areas tended to be larger, but in both cases livestock during the summer growing period were kept away from the arable land. Large areas of common grazing existed on which livestock was pastured for the summer. In the later Middle Ages some efforts of manuring were carried out, sometimes by spreading marl (a type of clay material) or a system of feeding cattle and sheep through the winter on arable land which resulted in a certain level of manuring. The Norman feudal system continued the social hierarchy already existing under Welsh law. A manorial system of a knight, appointed official or a leading Welsh tribesman was the Lord of the Manor, and under this structure there were different types of land tenure down to those occupied on land but carried out agricultural duties probably on the lands attached to the manor (the demesne). We

have little specific evidence of the actual agricultural practices of the St. Nicholas area, but it is very unlikely that it did not change much from the general pattern of agriculture in the north Pembrokeshire area. There are some records of farming activity on church lands at the end of 13th century.

In the north Pembrokeshire area these records show (in acres):

	Oats	Wheat	Barley	Rye	Peas/Beans
Ramsey Island	17	10	3		
Pointz Castle	84	50	12	8	8
Castle Morris	47				
Trevine	79	15	2	5	

Yields were low, possibly a ratio between 1-3 or 1-5 (seed to harvested crop).

Products for trade

In its basic form, agriculture was a means of subsistence and in many years only a limited quantity of food was produced with very little left for sale. However, over time, surplus crops were exported and cattle sold to other areas and later from the 17th century onwards, to cattle dealers and drovers moving the animals over long distances into various parts of England.

Livestock including cattle, sheep, pigs, geese and poultry were sold in various fairs held mostly in summer and autumn in the localities. The nearest fairs to St. Nicholas parish would have been Mathry and Letterston. The livestock walked from the farms to the site of the fair and were traded by private bargain between the farmer and the purchaser. Early medieval records of Royal Charters allowed various boroughs i.e. Haverfordwest to hold fairs on certain dates. There were also at various times hiring fairs at which the agricultural working population both male and female looked for employment on farms in the locality.

The best records we have of late medieval and early 1600s farming come from George Owen of Henllys Farm, Newport and his extensive writings. He talks about the various crops grown, namely, wheat, barley, oats, rye, peas and beans, cattle and sheep kept, together with pigs, geese, and poultry. He also talks about the way in which grazing land was converted to arable land by means of cutting off the turf, allowing it to dry out, then putting it on fire and spreading the ashes. Not only was this system very labour intensive, but also over a period of five to seven years resulted in a complete loss of production and the land had to lie fallow for some period before further crops could be grown.

Other descriptions of agriculture in Pembrokeshire come from Charles Hassell appointed by the Board of Agriculture in 1793 to report on various counties including Pembrokeshire. He was very critical of ploughs, the lack of proper rotations and the condition of buildings. Edward Perkins born in 1840 in the St. David's area wrote down his memory of agricultural practice during his farming career. He was also very critical of ploughs:

"No better than those of Roman times—Agriculture had not changed since Queen Elizabeth 300 years earlier and no acceptance of new equipment and methods."

Progression the 1800s

There is no doubt that a period of agricultural prosperity with high prices, particularly for wheat came during the Napoleonic era from about 1795 through to 1820. From that time until the 20th century there were alternative periods of some profitable agriculture and much longer periods of decline and deterioration.

There were periods of much distress and poor agricultural returns. The period of the Rebecca riots in west Wales (1838-1843) were initially a reaction to the constantly expanding Toll Gates payments, causing the farming community expense and pressure. There were further underlying social causes, living conditions, low wages and increasing rents to powerful landlords. In 1846 the Corn Laws, under which the price of wheat was supported by import controls, were repealed. However, wheat and other crop sale prices were supported by the increasing demands from the expanding population particularly in large urban centres.

The last 25 years of the 19th century saw a serious agricultural decline caused mainly by large volumes of imported agricultural produce, particularly grain from the USA, Canada, and Australia. The result was that the price of wheat fell from 7/- a bushel in 1870 to 3/6d a bushel by 1890. Similarly prices of livestock and livestock products, butter cheese and meat also fell by 50% during that period.

As a consequence, a Royal Commission on "Land in Wales" was established in 1893 with 99 public hearings in Wales. The nearest hearing to St Nicholas was held in Letterston 6 miles south on the road for Haverfordwest.

Change basically came from the end of the 19th century onwards, with further legal control of agricultural tenancies, some improvement in agricultural prices and the influence of the introduction of machinery to replace hand labour. Much of this machinery came from UK manufactured implements but also many new machines manufactured in the USA. Tractors had not made an appearance in any numbers until the 1920's and up to that period the various types of agricultural horses together with some steam engines provided the power requirements of farming.

Agriculture in the 1900s to present

Over time, the county of Pembrokeshire including the St. Nicholas area saw agriculture develop both as a result of scientific improvements, government policy and the demands of greater production for an increasing population. This was assisted by mechanisation, much less physical labour and the use of substantial inputs, fertilizer, chemicals, etc. to improve yields, production levels and quality of produce.

One feature of the north Pembrokeshire area, including St. Nicholas from the 1930s onwards for some 50 years, was the growth of the early potato industry. The relatively light soils, mild climate, and spring growing conditions led to many farms growing early potatoes, which were harvested in the middle of May onwards through June and into July. These harvested crops were sold into the wholesale produce markets of the major cities and towns, London, Birmingham, Manchester, transported sometimes by rail, but from the 1950s onwards by lorry transport direct from the field to the marketing centre.

Today, the north Pembrokeshire area and St. Nicholas has a mixed farming economy. There are still milk producers in the area, some with substantial numbers of dairy cows (600 to 800), others at a lower level, 250 to 500 head of dairy cows. 2 dairy farms use organic production methods. In addition, there are substantial numbers of sheep, store and beef cattle, together with cereal crops and potatoes grown to be marketed all through the year.

The revolution of the dairy industry, particularly over the last 40 years, covers not only the accommodation and housing but also the feeding and dietary requirements and major improvements in management techniques. As a result, from about 1970 to the present day, the numbers of dairy cows kept on the holdings in Wales has declined substantially, but the yield per cow has doubled from approximately 4,000 litres per cow in 1970 to around 8,000 per cow today. The highest production levels of milk in the UK were in 1983/84 just before the introduction of milk quotas under the EU Legislation. This production level over 14 million tons of milk has only recently been exceeded but produced with half the number of dairy cows that existed in 1970.