



Gatehouse

Gatehouse News

28 June 2013

**Developments of the
Gatehouse Website. The
comprehensive**

**bibliography and gazetteer of the
castles, fortifications and palaces of
medieval England and Wales.**

Neil Guy kindly let me know of and view a copy of a BA thesis by James Gareth Davies, a student of archaeology at Durham University, who has proposed two new possible castle sites in the Llŷn Peninsula North Wales. They are both small sites known in the archaeological databases but not previously considered to be possible castles.

[Castell Cilan](#) has been previously considered as a natural mound. James thinks there has been “defensive modification through scarping and construction of an earth bank” but does note the lack of a ditch and is doubtful of the site.

[Tyddyn Castell, Rhiw](#) is a walled oval enclosure of which James writes it “could be classed as a partial ringwork, with definite defensive characteristics sited in a commanding location; it is a likely earth and timber castle. The site has more in common with Irish rath's than Norman motte and bailey', therefore it is likely to be of Welsh origin. With known archaeology, a geophysical survey inside the enclosure and the surrounding fields is needed to identify and interpret the features, however only excavation can confirm whether it is Iron Age or later in date.” However in the Coflein record for the site David Leighton's notes from a site visit in 2000 read “Although the name suggests a defensive site there is no sign of a ditch or rampart. The present wall-bank gives the impression of a field or garden attached to the house.”

Clearly for both sites further physical investigation could prove useful although I feel

neither site would currently fit into the definition of a castle. There is a possibility Castell Cilan has been adapted to look like a small motte, possibly to reflect a military status of the local landowner. Tyddyn Castell could, of course, be an early enclosure adapted as a walled garden but please do look at the records and do feel free to let me know your own thoughts.

In drawing up the records I discovered the three volumes of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire *Survey and Inventory of Caernarvonshire* published in the 1950-60s are now freely available online via Google Books. ([Volume I: East](#); [Volume II: Central](#); [Volume III: West](#)) and I've taken the opportunity to download these for my own offline consultation but I have added links to the online copies for the relevant sites within Gatehouse.

Looking through the *Inventory* record for [Penrhyn Castle](#) I finally came across a primary source for the reputed licence to crenellate granted in 1438. I had been aware of this licence from mentions in some texts and online but none gave details beyond the year date 1438 and, very occasionally, mention of Joan widow of Gwilym ap Gruffydd, but as it is not recorded in the various *Calendars* of the royal rolls held in London I had to record this as only a possible licence.

However, with a proper reference, I was able to contact Bangor University who, very kindly, sent me photocopies of the original licence and a page of old notes on the licence. Seeing the licence does answer some of the questions about the reasons the earlier references were so obtuse.

Firstly the licence was granted by the Henry VI from Caernarfon through the office of the Justice of North Wales and, presumably, the record of it was kept there which would explain why it is not calendared. Because of the somewhat different place of origin from the usual licence it has a somewhat different

wording and strictly this is a licence to battlement, not crenellate, although there is no real difference between the terms. The licence is somewhat more detailed than usual and it states a payment for it of 3/4d (a quarter of a marc) was taken and that it was licence to build and complete a tower (*turriculus*) in the manor of Penryn with small battlements on top of the said tower (*cum parvo batellamento supra cacumen turriculi praedictem*).

Secondly the licence is granted to John Pykmere and his wife Joan. The histories of Penrhyn never mention John and the tower he and his wife Joan built is generally assumed to be the work of Gwilym ap Gruffydd son, also called Gwilym. John is an obscure figure but appears to have been ethnically English (possibly of a family originating in Cheshire) but based in Caernarfon and, since he was able to stand recognizance for £200, relatively wealthy. He was certainly not noble or even gentry, although he may have had similar or more wealth than many knights. There is just enough genealogy to be reasonably certain John was the third husband of Joan, daughter of Sir William Stanley of Hooton who's second husband was Gwilym ap Gruffydd and who's son by him was the above Gwilym.

The licence seems to specifically name Joan's heirs (*heredes suam Johanna*) rather than John and Joans' heirs.

I suggested in my piece, published in the *Castle Studies Group Journal* in 2009, 'English Licences to Crenellate further analysis' such licences may have many subtle functions, one of which was to be an adjunct to support possibly contestable inheritance.

Here I speculate that this licence mainly functioned

as some legal support for a situation where Penrhyn was a sort of 'dower' house for Joan and her new husband but was retained by Joan and her heirs by Gwilym over any children she had with John (they may have had a daughter so she was still fertile in 1438). Her son Gwilym was probably still underage in 1438. Given the status of women in the medieval world some sort of legal arrangement did sometimes have to be made to secure the position of women of property and their existing children when they did remarry.

I will consider asking Bangor for permission to publish a photograph of the actual licence online but for my transcription and a couple of translations please see the [record in Gatehouse](#). Please do also let me know if you have a better translation or more information, particularly regarding John Pykmere.

I do have to make special mention of the incredibly quick and effective service provided by the archive department of the University of Bangor and, especially Einion Wyn Thomas, the librarian.



Penrhyn Castle from Penlan

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