

# "A Capital Mansion House"

## A Short History of Castell Malgwyn

### The Penygored Company (c1772-1791)

The history of the Castle Malgwyn House is linked to the Penygored Tin Works, which stood on the river bank below the mansion. Originally, iron was worked at the Coedmore Forge, across the river in Llechryd, but this closed down before 1750. In 1772, Walter Lloyd, the owner of Coedmore, and a trio of London businessmen obtained an Act of Parliament for permission to cut a 'canal' across the glebe lands of Manordeifi parish. This 'canal' took water from the Teifi just below Manordeifi Church and ran westwards, cutting off the bend of the river and bypassing the weir near Llechryd Bridge. It has been filled in for almost 200 years, but the course can still be seen as a depression in the fields and the bridge built to carry the road over it from Llechryd is still standing.

When the 'canal' crossed the parish boundary into Cilgerran, it merged with the Morgenau stream, which was diverted from its original course, and the joined waters ran into the Teifi just to the north-west of the mansion. Today, the Morgenau runs underground along two channels for about 25 yards before entering the river. These subterranean channels were the original by-pass sluice of the Tin Works. The main channel continued towards the west emptying out through a stone arch, which is still standing in the river bank. This would have been the mill-race, the channel that turned the water-wheel that powered the works, and the main buildings - the rolling-mill and the tin-house - would have stood to the south and south-east of the channel.

In 1780, after a series of cash injections from more London businessmen, the original partnership dissolved and the works were sold to John Halliday and George Daniel. Halliday was a Somerset man and was M.P. for Taunton from 1775 to 1784. During the last two years, his fellow-member for the town was Benjamin Hammet, who had founded a bank in London with his father-in-law, Sir James Esdaile. Hammet appears to have been involved with the Tin Works as early as 1785, when they were advertised for sale in the General Evening Post, but it was in 1791 when he bought out Halliday and his partners and became sole owner.

## Sir Benjamin Hammet (1791-1800)

Like most of the other owners of the Penygored Works, Sir Benjamin Hammet was not a local man. His early years are shrouded in mystery and even in the year of his death in 1800, two conflicting accounts of his youth were published in London.

The City Biography, written while he was still alive, said that *"Sir Benjamin Hammet is the son of a barber at Taunton, and was educated at the charity-school in that town"*. It then goes on to say that *"he was afterwards a footman in the family of the late Mr. Hopkins, commonly called Vulture Hopkins, the noted usurer"*. His sudden rise to fortune was attributed to the fact that *"he married his mistress's sister, a daughter of the late Sir James Esdaile, who advanced him money to erect the buildings in the Minories, called America-square, the Circus, &c. and he afterwards became a partner in Sir James's banking-house"*.

The Gentleman's Magazine was somewhat more sympathetic when it published his obituary later in the year. After agreeing that *"his origin was humble"*, it goes on to say that *"after having filled the subordinate situation of a porter in the shop of a bookseller on Fish street hill, he became the architect of his own fortune"*.

A different version was passed on by J.R. Phillips in his 'History of Cilgerran' in 1867. *"The life of this Sir Benjamin"*, he tells us, *"if what has been related to me be true, is a curious one"*. Phillips agrees that Hammet was a native of Taunton and *"of humble origin"*, then tells the story of how *"at an early age he was apprenticed to a draper to learn that 'art and mystery'"*. *"In the neighbourhood"*, he continues, *"lived a very rich family, whose only hope rested on one daughter."* The mother of this family, apparently, did all her drapery shopping where the young Hammet worked often accompanied by her daughter. One thing led to another and, after initial objections from the young lady's father, the couple were eventually married.



Sir Benjamin Hammet (c1736-1800)  
From a portrait in Taunton Municipal Buildings.

Now, we know that Ann Esdaile, the younger sister of Sir Benjamin's wife, Louisa, married John Hopkins, the cousin and heir of John 'Vulture' Hopkins, in 1760. She was around 15 years old at the time and some sixty years younger than her husband! However, we also know that Benjamin Hammet was already trading from the "*Corner of Talbot Court, Eastcheap*" in 1758, and that he had subscribed to 'The Tradesman's Assistant' three years earlier. Hammet was, therefore, already on the way up when Ann Esdaile married.

Perhaps the answer lies in the 1849 edition of Burkes Landed Gentry. In the supplement, inserted as part of the entry of the Beadon family, Benjamin Hammet is described as being the youngest son of "*a son of the Rev. Francis Hammett*", who "*settled in Taunton as a serge-manufacturer about a century and a half ago*". His two elder brothers were Francis a "*barrister-at-law, who acquired considerable celebrity and fortune as chamber-counsel*", and John, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, who married into the Musgrave family of West Monkton and passed on their fortune to his daughter.

With his two elder brothers being given such a good start in life by the un-named serge-manufacturer, it is more than likely that Benjamin was sent to London by his father to represent the family business. It is during his early years in London that he met Louisa Esdaile, who may well have come into his establishment in Talbot Court or, later, in Change Alley off Lombard Street, where he was doing business by 1761.

Hammet's land development began around 1770, when he pulled down some slums around the Minories and built a series of new streets, one of which still bears his name. Ten years later, he extended the idea to his home town and, as a trustee of the Market House Society, he cleared out the old and decrepit centre of Taunton and built another a new street that was named after him.

In 1781, he persuaded his father-in-law to found the bank of Esdaile Hammet & Co. at 21 Lombard Street, and was voted in as MP for Taunton the following year. From then on, his star was in the ascendant. He was Alderman of Portsoken Ward from 1785-98 and Sheriff in 1788. King George III knighted him in 1786, and eleven years later he was elected to be Lord Mayor of London. However, he refused to serve on grounds of ill health, and the city crier was despatched to Castle Malgwyn to fetch him back to London. Back in the City, he again declined the honour, but his excuses were not believed and he was fined £1,000 for avoiding the duty.

Apparently, Sir Benjamin found the air at Castle Malgwyn more to his liking than that in London, for the city crier reported "*his health to all appearance being in a much better state than I could have expected from the tenor of his letter to the livery*". Back in London, Sir Benjamin told his colleagues, "*Since my arrival, I find myself so much indisposed, as to be under the necessity of leaving town immediately*".

It was probably because of this that he had had the mansion built on the spur overlooking the Works around 1795. Despite its situation next door to the factory, he obviously found it more enjoyable than living in London. The house was built on the site of an old farm called Penygored, like the Works, "*from its proximity to the weir across the river belonging to Coedmawr*", but the size of the new building compared with others in the neighbourhood, gave it the name of *Ty Mawr Y Gwaith*, the 'Big House of the Works'.

Sir Benjamin, however, called it Castle Malgwyn, taking the name from the farm across the way, that was also part of his estate. This farmhouse "*occupied an elevated spot, where Maelgwyn, the son of Rhys ap Gruffydh, Prince of South Wales, having found an ancient British earthwork encampment, strong by nature, and well placed, to keep in check the growing power of the Normans and Flemings in those parts, took a position, and strengthened it with fortifications better calculated for defence against the modes of attack then practised*".

In the ten years, at the most, that he owned the estate, he changed the face of the countryside. After constructing the 'Big House', "*he found it both inconvenient and unpleasant to have the public road passing right in front of his house*", so he applied to the parish authorities to divert the road at his own expense. At the time that he built the mansion, the road from Llechryd Bridge to Cilgerran turned off the Llechryd-Cilfowr road and ran westwards about fifty yards up the slope. It forded the Morgenau just in front of the mansion, traced a huge arc across today's south lawn to reduce the gradient for the waggons, then ran along the ridge of the Teifi to Cilgerran.

Sir Benjamin had a new road built that passed south of the bulk of his estate skirting the hill of Cefn-y-garth. In doing so, he had to construct two bridges, one across the canal, just to the south of Llechryd Bridge, and the other over the gorge of the Morgenau in the south. Both of these bridges still exist and both have plaques on them commemorating Sir Benjamin Hammet.

'Castle Malgwyn Bridge' over the old canal, is just outside the gates of today's hotel and has a plaque on either side with the date 1799. 'Hammet Bridge', over the Morgenau Gorge, is a much bigger structure and the iron plate is visible from the roadside. It has the following inscription, "*Hammet Bridge was erected and Garnon's-Mill Road made at the sole expense of Sir Benjamin Hammet, Knt. Opened Aug. 21st, 1800*".

According to J.R. Phillips, the new road was opened on that date and “*Sir Benjamin drove his carriage along the road amid the shouts and joyful acclamations of hundreds, who greeted the worthy knight with deserved cheers*”, but the obituary quoted above tells us that he died on 22nd July 1800, so perhaps the explanation is that Sir Benjamin’s drive along the road was somewhat earlier than the official opening.

## John Hammet (1800-1811)

Compared to the popularity of his father, John Hammet does not seem to have been particularly well liked in the locality. We are told that the main reason for this is the fact that the Tin Works closed down around 1806, just six years after he had inherited them. Phillips tells us that “*it does not appear that it was exactly a passion for the grand and sublime that actuated them to level the tin-works, but that, on the contrary, they were incited to it partly by a splenetic feeling they engendered against the people of Cilgerran for this reason. It appears that at a Court Leet a few of the burgesses (and not the jury unanimously) presented to them a part of the hill on the south bank of the Teivi. Such a presentment was of course void, and was abrogated by the jury at the following court. A law-suit was the result in which the burgesses proved victorious; and in order, therefore, to be revenged on the Cilgerranites (many of whom worked at the tin-works), and seeing that the works were not very flourishing and profitable at the time, they caused the concern to be demolished and subsequently left the neighbourhood*”.

Actually, the Hammets did not leave the neighbourhood until after John's death in 1811. In fact, despite the fact that he doesn't appear to have got on well with the burgesses, he still seems to have spent a lot of time and money here. Charles Price, a local landscaper, was extending the Pleasure Grounds in May 1806, but papers in the archives of the Royal Bank of Scotland show that John Hammet's time at Castle Malgwyn was not an easy one. A bill from a local solicitor shows that he took action “*against Chas Mason and others for a riot*” in 1808 and another bill dated August the same year shows that he had recourse to hiring “*Cunstabes*” for “*watching wear by night*”. This was the fish-weir that he had leased from “*Mr Lloyd of Coedmore*” earlier in the year and shows that the local gentry were having troubles with this structure some 37 years before the Rebecca Riots which finally destroyed it.

All in all, it looks as if John Hammet had different plans for the estate to his father. The solicitor's bill also itemises cases for eviction of tenants and pulling down cottages, so it appears that he was following the trend of the times and enclosing the estate by moving people off it. It would seem, then, that it was not merely the argument over the “*hill on the south bank of the Teivy*” that made John Hammet unpopular.

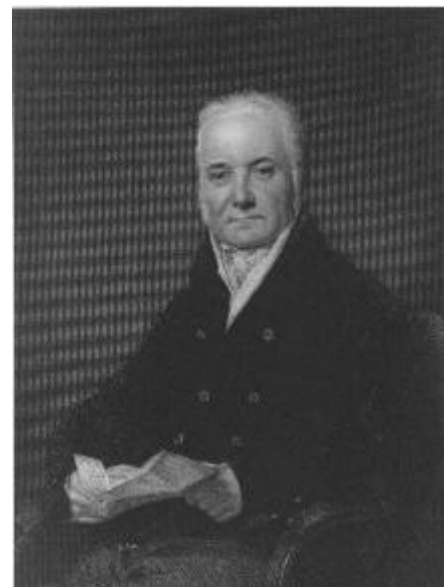
## The 'Interregnum' (1812-1824)

John Hammet died unexpectedly in 1811 at the early age of 44 and the following year, everything that was movable was put up for sale and the estate itself was advertised to be let. We don't know yet if anybody took it up, but the estate appears to have been left vacant for some time, as it was not until 1824, around the time of Lady Louisa Hammet's death, that it was sold “*in pursuance of an order of the Court of Chancery*” to Abel Anthony Gower, of nearby Glandovan.

## Abel Anthony Gower (1824-37)

Abel Anthony Gower was already an old man when he bought Castle Malgwyn. Why he did so is not known, for he appears to have continued living in the family mansion of Glandovan, while he let Castle Malgwyn out to others. He was born in 1748 in Glandovan, which had come into the family when his grandfather, William Gower, MP for Ludlow for 27 years, married Jane Stedman of Strata Florida. The Gowers, whose name may have originally been pronounced “Gore”, shared a common ancestor with the Dukes of Sutherland, but despite their aristocratic connections, the Gowers were a family of merchants.

Abel Anthony was the founder and senior partner in the firm of A.A. Gower, Nephews & Co. of Coleman Street, in the City of London and his brother, Robert, also lived and worked there. They were 'merchants' who seem to have been involved with anything that would make a profit. They had mining interests in Spain and Mexico and other countries around the world, and they were even involved with a sugar plantation in Mauritius.



Abel Anthony Gower (1748-1837)  
From an engraving in the NLW.

The ‘Nephews’ involved in Abel Anthony’s business were Robert Frederick and Abel Lewis, the sons of Robert Gower. He had died young and Abel Anthony, who had no children of his own, had looked after them from an early age. When he died in 1837, his estates were split between the two - Robert Frederick, the elder, inheriting

Glandovan, while Castle Malgwyn went to his brother. During the ownership of Abel Anthony, Castle Malgwyn appears to have been let out to a Mr. Davies and very little money, if any, was spent on the estate.

## Abel Lewis Gower (1837-49)

It was with the ownership of Abel Lewes Gower, that money began to be spent on the estate once more. Within a few years of inheriting Castle Malgwyn, Abel Lewes had brought in Ambrose Poynter to design and build the stables that are still standing on the river's edge, linking them to a new lodge and gates with a new drive that ran along the embankment separating the Teifi and the now disused 'canal'. The old drive had run along the route of the old high road some fifty yards further up the hill.



The Old Drive c1870.

Although he did a great deal of building around the estate, Abel Lewes still had his problems with the locals. In 1843, the salmon weir next to the stables came under threat during the Rebecca Riots. As mentioned above, the weir had originally been leased from the Lloyds of Coedmore in 1808 by John Hammet and had passed on with the sale of Castle Malgwyn to the Gowers. On 24th July 1843, Abel Lewes posted notices around the neighbourhood.

*"Being informed that the people, styling themselves Rebeccaites, were assembled on Llechryd Bridge, on Tuesday night, the 18th instant, with the declared intention of destroying the SALMON WEIR, now in my occupation; and having been informed that altho' their nefarious and unlawful designs were, upon that occasion, frustrated by the arrival of a military Force, yet, that they have intimated their determination to repeat the attempt, I hereby give notice, that upon the commission of any such aggression upon that or any other part of my Property whatsoever, or upon the Property of any of my neighbours in this District, I will immediately discharge every Day Labourer at present in my employment; and not restore one of them until the Aggressors shall have been apprehended and convicted.*  
*ABEL LEWES GOWER*  
*Castle-Malgwyn 24th July 1843"*

However, on September 13th of the same year, the rioters attacked the weir and completely destroyed it. Abel Lewes immediately offered a reward of £100 for information leading to the conviction of the rioters, but there is no evidence of anybody claiming it. We also know nothing as to whether he kept to his threat of sacking all of his labourers. All we do know is that the weir was never repaired. According to J.R. Phillips, the *"gentlemen of the neighbourhood subscribed to make good the loss"* and *"also prevailed on Mr Lloyd, for the peace of the neighbourhood, not again to reconstruct it, which has not since been done"*. Later on, Abel Lewes tried to convert it into a footbridge by raising the pillars and throwing planks across them, *"but owing to the accumulation of water above the quarries, it is now almost always submerged, and has become quite useless"*.

In 1845, Abel Lewes became High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire and in early November of that year he threw a splendid ball at the house. The Carmarthen Journal of 14th November tells us that *"A magnificent ball took place at this splendid mansion, on Tuesday last, the residence of the high shieriff of the County of Pembroke, A.L. Gower, Esq. Tickets to the amount of 200 were issued, and the merry dance was kept until a late hour. The entertainments were on a magnificent scale, and first rate musicians, we believe, from the metropolis were engaged for the occasion"*.



Castle Malgwyn Gardens c1875.

He was also credited with the construction, *"at an immense cost"*, of *"one of the finest gardens in South Wales"*. These were situated next to Castle Malgwyn Farm, on the Manordeifi side of the estate. The Head Gardener's Cottage is still standing and was once occupied by William Hutchinson, a Scotsman who was

recruited from the Glasgow Botanic Gardens around 1846. An article in the 14th January 1876 edition of the Cardigan and Tivyside Advertiser describes how *"A recent number of the Gardeners' Chronicle contains a life-like portrait, accompanied by a biography, of Mr. William Hutchison, who for the past 30 years has been the highly respected and honored(sic) head gardener of the Castlemalgwyn estate, near this town"*. It goes on to say that *"Mr Hutchison's successful operations in this locality are so well known as to need no comment, for those who have had the pleasure of wandering through the delightful parks and gardens of Castlemalgwyn must have at every turn recognised the deep, painstaking, and masterly abilities of an eminent man, and such indeed must be Mr Hutchison before he would be found worthy of a place in the portrait gallery of eminent British gardeners published in the columns of the organ of his profession"*.

Abel Lewes Gower, therefore, was not one to hold on to his money, but in 1847 the family firm *"failed"*. According to 'The Cambrian' of the 17th September 1847, *"Much excitement was occasioned on Saturday morning by the announcement of the failure of Messrs. Gower, Nephews, and Co."* It goes on to say that *"The immediate cause of the stoppage is said to be the suspension of Messrs. Gemmel, of Glasgow; and as regards Messrs. Gower, they were extensively engaged in trade with Spain, Italy, South America, and China, and were specially connected with the copper trade, Mr. Gower being at the head of the Governor and Company of the Copper Miners of England"*. Although this did not actually leave him pennyless, it may well have contributed to his early death two years later at the age of 53.

## Mrs Elizabeth Gower (1849-1876)

After the death of Abel Lewes in 1849, Castle Malgwyn passed to his widow, Elizabeth, who *"for many years after her husband's death, remained in a state of indifference"*. Elizabeth Logan was born in Montreal in 1809 of Scottish parents, but six years later the family moved back to Edinburgh, leaving only the eldest son to carry on the family bakery in Canada. She met her future husband through her uncle, Hart Logan, who had a 'counting-house' in Cross Street, Finsbury. The Gowers were business associates and had common interests in the copper mining industry of South Wales. Her elder sister, Agnes, also benefitted from Hart Logan's business contacts, marrying Alexander Stewart in 1818. It was the children of Agnes Stewart who were to fill Elizabeth Gower's solitary life after the death of her husband and eventually reawaken her interest in the estate.



Elizabeth Gower (c1809-1876)

From a portrait in the collection of Richard Morris, Castle Malgwyn Farm.

In 1852, Agnes Stewart's eldest daughter, Helen, married Morgan Jones of Llanmiloe in Carmarthenshire, and moved to Penylan in Llandygydd, just across the river from Castle Malgwyn. Ten years later, her sister Margaret married Henry Brenchley, the brother of Thomas Harman Brenchley of nearby Glaneirw. This suggests that Elizabeth had many visits from her neices and that at least two of them had met future husbands through the local gentry. By the time that Phillips was writing his 'History of Cilgerran' in 1866, he could say that Elizabeth Gower *"now takes great pleasure in improving and beautifying the grounds"*.

*"A picturesque (though rather inconvenient) carriage-drive is now being constructed across Cefn-coed-y-garth, leading to Cilgerran, which commands one of the loveliest panoramas the eye can feast on; and preparations are about to be made for enlarging and remodelling the mansion, which, I have been informed, is to be of the castellated style of architecture, so that its name, Castle Maelgwyn, maynot be inappropriate"*.

In the Glandovan Collection in the National Library of Wales, there are plans of the house, dated *"22nd September 1866"*. These are marked *"131, George Street"* and are from the offices of William Burn in Edinburgh. One of her brothers, Edmund Logan, was living in Edinburgh at this time and spent some time with her at Castle Malgwyn, so he may have arranged for the plans, but it is probably the arrival of another of Agnes Stewart's children that really re-awakened her interest in the estate.

'The Cambrian' of 19th November 1869 announced a birth. *"On the 15th inst., at Castle Malgwyn, Pembrokeshire, the wife of Lewes Gower Stewart, Esq., late H.M. Engrs, of Purley, Berks, of a daughter"*. The daughter was baptised a month later and given the names Louisa Butler. Now, Louisa Butler was the maiden name of Lewes Stewart's sister-in-law in more ways than one. She was not only the sister of his wife, Marianne Victorine, she was also the wife of his elder brother, James. The names suggest that the baby's aunt was the godmother and that, therefore, Marianne Stewart had come to Castle Malgwyn for the birth of her child to be with her sister.

James Stewart was born in 1830, the second surviving son of Alexander and Agnes Stewart. He had joined the East India Company and obtained a commission in the Madras Horse Artillery, being present during the Indian Mutiny as a First Lieutenant. In 1857, just before the mutiny, he married Louisa Charlotte Butler, the daughter of William Butler of the Madras Army but they do not appear to have had children until 1866, when they had returned to Britain. There is an enigmatic entry in the International Genealogical Index regarding a James Logan Stewart, who was born in 1858 in Cardigan, but the eldest son mentioned in the family history constructed by C.G. Winder of Canada, was James Logan Stewart, who was born in 1866.

At present, we do not have any details about the birthplaces of the children of James and Louisa Stewart, but the impression is that they were born in Wales, at or near Castle Malgwyn. We know that in 1873, at the time of their fourth child's baptism, they were living in Rhosygilwen, a mile or so away from Castle Malgwyn. We also know that Mrs Mary Colby, the previous occupant, died in December 1869, so we can assume that the Stewarts moved in the following year. It is likely, therefore, that they were living in Castle Malgwyn with Elizabeth Gower from 1866 until they moved to Rhosygilwen, and that their presence was the catalyst that renewed Mrs Gower's interest in the estate. Luckily, nothing ever came of the proposals to rebuild the house, but Mrs Gower does seem to have done something to the farmyard, as there is a weather-vane marked 'EG 1867', which presumably stands for Elizabeth Gower.

Besides her two nephews, James and Lewes, Elizabeth Gower also had the company of her brothers William and Hart from time to time at the house. William had returned to Canada in around 1841, where he had become a renowned scientist and first director of the Geological Survey of Canada. He was a self-taught geologist and he had learnt his trade in the coal fields of South Wales in the 1830s. He, therefore, had more than one connection with the area, so it is no surprise to learn that he was visiting the area almost every other year from 1851 onwards. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1856 and when he retired from the GSC in 1869, he spent most of his last years with his sister. In November 1873, he was godfather to James Stewart's fourth and last child, William Edmond Logan Stewart, and he was probably at the mansion the previous month, when his brother Hart died there. He was back for the last time in 1874 and he stayed in Wales until his death in June 1875. He was buried in the Gower family plot in Cilgerran churchyard alongside his brother, Hart, and his brother-in-law, Abel Lewes Gower.

He was joined the following year by his sister, who died in January 1876. The local newspaper account of her funeral suggests that the arrangements were made by James Stewart, the nephew who had shared many of her last years at Castle Malgwyn. Although the Gowers are not mentioned in connection with the actual funeral, which may mean that they were not present, the house and estate passed not to the nephew who had done so much for her, but to her husband's nephew, Erasmus Gower.

## Robert Frederick Gower (1876-1884)

Although Erasmus Gower was said to have been the heir of Elizabeth Gower in 1875, we do have a deed of the estate signed by his father in 1878, which suggests that he owned it before his son. Although he owned the family estate of Glandovan, it was let out to the Archdeacon North, while he himself had lived at Clynderwen, further to the south. However, after the death of Elizabeth Gower, he and his wife moved into Castle Malgwyn.

Robert Frederick Gower was already in his 80s in 1876, and his wife almost 70. By then, he would have been well into retirement, so they may have moved into the house to be close to their son, Erasmus, and his new family. However, if they were looking for a quiet life, it doesn't appear that they necessarily got one. Within a year of Elizabeth Gower's death, her two sisters, Agnes Stewart and Margaret Ker, had brought a court case against Robert Frederick and his son *"touching the title to Griffith Isaac, otherwise Griffith Evans's Quarry presented by the Corporation of Cilgerran"*.

Now, back in 1867, Robert Frederick had asked Elizabeth's eminent brother, Sir William Logan, to report on the suitability of the slate beds along the south bank of the Teifi just downstream from Castle Malgwyn. We know from the newspaper report of Erasmus Gower's wedding in 1875 that he was credited with the revival of the *"Cilgerran quarries"*, so it would appear that, as well as asking for Sir William's expert advice on the standard of the slate, they also approached members of his family for financial support for the enterprise. Although we do not have too many details of the affairs immediately after Elizabeth Gower's death, it is interesting to note that in 1877, when James Stewart's wife died, the local newspaper reported thirty carriages of the local gentry at the funeral and, although they named twenty of these, not one was a Gower.

Robert Frederick had been interested in the railways from an early stage in their development. Way back in the 1840s, he had been involved with the Swansea Vale Railway and in 1845 he put his name down for 30,000 shares in the Vale of Neath Railway. The collapse of the family firm, mentioned above, put an end to this early speculation, but by the time he had moved into Castle Malgwyn more developments were afoot. In 1877, the Whitland & Taf Vale Railway received permission to extend the line to Cardigan, with a station in Cilgerran, just around the corner from Castle Malgwyn. This time, however, it was Robert Frederick's son, Erasmus, who became

involved as a director. The Whitland & Cardigan Railway, as it was renamed in 1877, was known as a leisurely journey of an hour and a half, or more, depending on whether there were any rabbits or pheasants along the way.

It is tempting to think that the station was built at Cilgerran, just four miles from the terminus in Cardigan, to facilitate the travels of the Gower family from London to their estates at Glandovan and Castle Malgwyn, but the real reason was probably to serve the local slate quarries.

Robert Frederick Gower died in 1884 at the ripe old age of 90, his wife, Lillias Millar, having died four years earlier. The local newspaper reported that through "*his large-hearted philanthropy and great acts of charity during his comparatively short sojourn in this neighbourhood, the solemn event has created a loss which cannot but be severely felt*".

## Erasmus Gower (1884-1914)

Like James Stewart before him, Erasmus Gower had retired from the army with the rank of Captain, having spent most of his early life in the 12th Lancers. In 1875, a year before the death of his aunt, Elizabeth Gower, he had married Catherine Vans Agnew, who was 22 years his junior. Like his mother, Catherine was from Wigtownshire in Scotland, and it was back to Scotland that she had gone for the birth of her first child, Lillias Mary, in 1877.



Lily Gower (c1898)

Photograph by Tom Mathias on the new lawn at Castle Malgwyn(?) from the frontispiece of 'Croquet Up To date' by Arthur Lillie (1900).

that "*Two weeks ago she made an unfinished break of 74 points at Castle Malgwyn in South Wales*", which may well have been on the new 'court'.

A photograph of Lily Gower, that was used as the frontispiece of Arthur Lillie's book, 'Croquet Up To Date', of 1900, shows her as a young woman playing on a lawn that looks very much like that at Castle Malgwyn. It is attributed to one *J. Mathias*. Now, around the turn of the twentieth century there was an amateur photographer in the village called *Tom Mathias*. He lived just around the corner in Pontrhydyceirt and was well-known for his photographs of the local gentry, including the Gowers of Castle Malgwyn. The likelihood is, therefore, that this photograph is by him and was taken in the neighbourhood, either at Castle Malgwyn itself or at the Newcastle Emlyn Croquet Club, where Lily and her mother also played.

Lily Gower married another top croquet player, Reginald Beaton, in 1906 and moved to London, where they brought up a family of two sons. She continued to play top-level croquet for most of her life, her name only missing from the record books for short periods at a time. In 1928, three years after the early death of her husband, she was once more 'Lady Champion of England', almost 30 years after her first success, and she was regularly winning doubles tournaments throughout the 1930s. Her last top-level tournament success was in 1948, when she won the Peel Memorials at the age of 71, and she was to be seen on the croquet courts until her death in 1959.

## Erasmus William Gower (1914-1948)

Lily Gower grew up to be the first of the great woman croquet players in the history of the sport, winning her first major tournament in 1898 at Budleigh Salterton in Devon on her first outing in public. The following year she became 'Lady Champion of England' and held the title for three years in succession. Around the time of her initial success in top-level croquet, her father had the ground at the front of the mansion levelled out to accommodate a full-sized croquet lawn, which is still in existence. An account in the autumn edition of 'The Field' in 1898 mentions

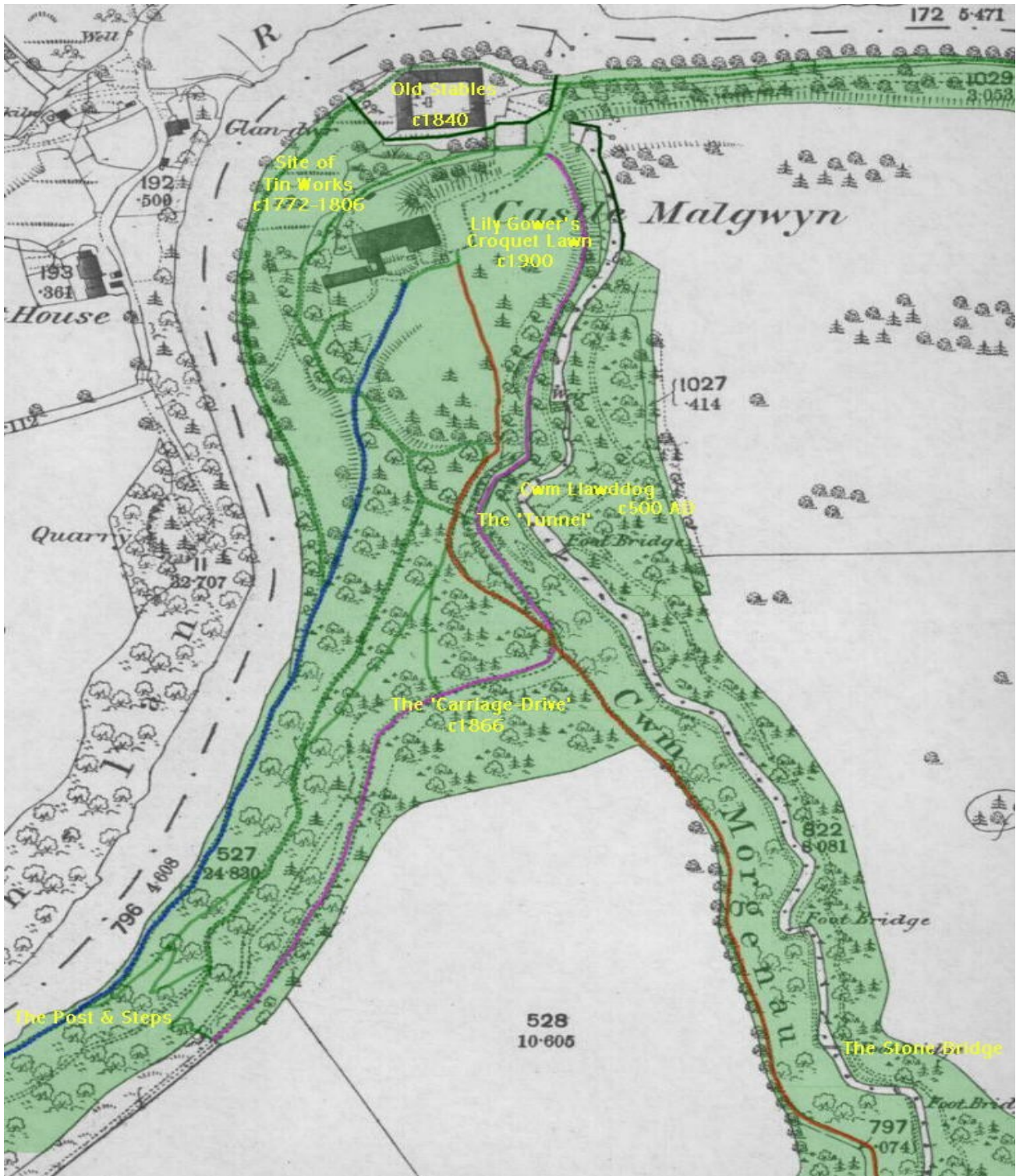
Erasmus William was the last of the Gowers to own Castle Malgwyn. He had followed his father into the Army and, like him, had retired with the rank of Captain after serving with the Royal Munster Fusiliers during the First World War. His two sons also saw war service, but they were unluckier than their father, both being killed in action. Desmond, the younger, was a R.A.F. Pilot Officer, who was shot down in his Hurricane and killed over Normandy in 1940. His other son, Erasmus Francis, was a Royal Marine. He survived the Second World War, but was killed in action in 1953 while serving in the Hong Kong Defence Force.

In 1948 Erasmus William sold Castle Malgwyn and bought back Glandovan, the old family house that he had sold off in 1917. He died in 1958 and left Glandovan to his only surviving child, Mrs Helen Dew, who was living in South Africa at the time. She sold it a year later.

The Castle Malgwyn estate was split up when Erasmus William sold out, the farm going to one buyer and the mansion and land on the west side of the road to another. The house was converted into an hotel in 1962, the stables and lodge were sold off in the following years, and the field to the south of the drive is once more a part of Castle Malgwyn Farm. The upper part of this field is now the home of Llechryd Cricket Club, a fitting ending, perhaps, to the tenure of the Gowers of Castle Malgwyn, as David Gower, the former England captain, is a descendant of James Gower, the brother of Abel Anthony Gower, who bought the estate from the Hammets way back in 1824.

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# The Castell Malgwyn Estate



Based upon 1890 O.S. Map.