

Pen y Lan Fach

To those of you unfamiliar with this area in Blaenau Gwent, Pen-y-Lan Fach (3) is across the Hafod Road that leads from the Nant y Glo Iron works to the Limestone quarries of Darren Disgwylfa that overlooks Llangattock in Breconshire, now Powys. Penlanfach as it is spelt today is the first house after the Hafod Farm, there is also one of the buildings hidden in the trees. There is a small brook running through the copse named Nant Gwyn (White Stream) and it is that little brook that caused the problem (see article below) back in 1867. If you look up the mountain you can follow the line of the stream by the trees growing alongside it. Pen y Lan Fach could probably be described as a little hamlet in the 1800s, on the map the name refers to the area and not to a specific house. There was a pub there, numerous buildings (see map at the end of the article) and other farms nearby would add to the small community. Apart from the Hafod Farm there was Lower Hafod Farm and Ty Newydd, all within walking distance of the pub but all now sadly demolished. There was another house further up and to the right with a footpath to a well, obviously their water supply. The pub would also cater for the many workers of the limestone quarries such as Pant Mawr Quarry (1) and Craig y Gaer Quarry (2) that probably provided limestone for the Nant y Glô iron works and Clydach Iron works. If you follow the stream down towards the Clydach River (and you certainly could many years ago as there was a foot path running alongside it) you will reach Blackrock another little hamlet before you reach Clydach. (Clydach in Breconshire not to be confused with the one near Swansea). The stream flows under the Turnpike Road of 1812(5) just below the Unicorn Inn.



This is Pen y Lan Fach today (2017) There is only one house still standing of the little hamlet and a ruin in the copse to the left of the house. The house has taken on the name Penlanfach.

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The article below is taken verbatim from the newspaper.

I found this story dated 30th March 1867 in:

The Brecon County Times Neath Gazette and General Advertiser for the Counties of Brecon Carmarthen Radnor Monmouth Glamorgan Cardigan Montgomery Hereford

CLYDACH. THE LATE SEVERE WEATHER. EXTRAORDINARY ACCIDENT AT PENLANFACH.

The weather had been quite severe on the mountains around Brynmawr during March 1867 with the depth of the snow being great, not helped by some very large snow drifts. This meant that traffic couldn't move and it was some time before the line of the railway from Abergavenny to Brynmawr could be cleared for the trains to pass.

On the previous Friday it had started to rain and many felt relief that at last the snow would finally disappear. Quite a lot of damage had been done during the snow but now the rain had arrived there was some devastating floods as what were once small mountain streams became raging torrents and the fields and roads were flooded making travelling very difficult. Also as the floods subsided the waters deposited debris on the roads making it difficult and even dangerous to travel.

On Saturday, the 23rd of March an accident occurred near Black Rock. About 150 yards up the mountain is a small place called Pen y Lan Fach. Here are a public house and a cottage, situated somewhat in a hollow. Near the top of the mountain, the snow had drifted into a heap at the mouth of what may be termed a small glen, this is the stream known as Nant Gwyn. The drift formed a kind of reservoir for the rain and melted snow and a considerable body of water had accumulated there. Some of the people living in the cottages below were concerned about the safety of their homes. Thomas Morgan and his brother set about clearing a drain which ran into the ravine above the houses. They had not been working there long before the bank of snow above gave way and the whole body of water rushed quickly down the mountain in the direction of the cottages. Some of the out buildings, mainly the cow shed and pigs' sty, were completely swept away and Thomas Morgan and his brother, who were working a few yards below, were carried away with them.

Thomas was afterwards found a distance of 120 yards down the mountain, where he had been stopped by a large piece of rock. He was badly injured, though able to walk with the assistance of two friends who came to his aid. The brother was not carried so far neither was he so seriously injured. Thomas Morgan having been taken to the public-house needed a doctor, this was between five and six o'clock in the afternoon but although Dr. Tuckett was found at home he was unable to get to the place till between one and two the following morning owing to the impassable state of the roads because of the floods. When he did arrive he found Thomas past recovery, one of his ribs having been broken and entered the lungs. Thomas died from suffocation caused by this at 11 a.m. the same morning.

From the place where Thomas was found, the flood had continued down the mountains towards the Black Rock road, down which it swept with great force till it reached a sudden turning. The weight of the whole body of water was then concentrated on a wall on the left hand side of the road, which gave way before it, and the waters rushed into the Clydach River. The Black Rock road was completely blocked up by dirt and stone, while the wall just mentioned fell on the tram road leading from Brynmawr⁽⁴⁾. The road was cleared after great difficulty, but the dram road remained blocked up for quite some time. Those who visited Penlanfach saw traces of the flood on the tiles of the cottages, within a few feet of the top. Had this part of the building not stood up to the pressure of the water, the loss of life and destruction of property would have been much worse than it was.

An inquest was held on the body of the unfortunate man, Thomas Morgan, at the Black Rock Inn, on Tuesday, before Deputy Coroner E. J. C. Davies, Esq., Crickhowell, and a respectable jury. The facts of the case having been heard, the question was mooted as to whether the drain made under the tram road at Pen y Lan Fach was sufficiently large to carry off the water from the hills on the occasion of a flood. After some discussion on the subject it was decided that an enlargement would be desirable, and a recommendation to this effect, to be placed before the owners, was attached to the jury's verdict of "accidental death."

Thomas Morgan left eight children utterly destitute, his wife having died about twelve



months before this sad occurrence. The jury men unanimously returned their fees for the benefit of the orphans and a subscription list was then and there drawn out, which was liberally headed by the coroner and Mr. W. F. Tuckett, physician. The brother of the deceased, who was injured at the same time recovered.

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This is a ruin in the copse next to Pen y Lan Fach. You can just about make the outline of a pine end of a building among the trees.

- (1) **Pant Mawr Quarry** is on the right hand side of the Hafod Road before you get to Tŷ yn y Coed. There was a cottage there below the road named Pant Mawr Cottage.
- (2) **Craig y Gaer Quarry** mentioned above is the quarry around the limestone pillar we call Tom Thumb or King Arthur's Seat by some. The name refers to the Gaer, the Iron Age fort which is below Tom Thumb. The earthworks around the fort can be clearly seen in the early morning sun.
- (3) **Pen y Lan Fach** means the head of the small parish. In this case it would be Llanelli Parish in the county of Breconshire now Powys.
- (4) This would be the **Clydach Railroad** from the Gilwern Canal to Beaufort Iron Works which runs up the valley on the north side. It was constructed in 1794
- (5) The **Turnpike Road of 1812** from Govilon to Merthyr Tydfil. There would have been a toll gate as you entered Brynmawr and another as you left entering Beaufort, known as Beaufort Gate.)



Map of Pen y Lan Fach hamlet dated 1880