

The 'Glyn Mawr' apple – a very lucky survivor

Background

In late November 2006 I visited 'Glyn Mawr' (Fig. 1 and 2; location Fig.11), a small hill farm in Llangywer near Llyn Tegid, Bala, in North Wales - home to my father's ancestors between the 1790's and about 1920. Glyn Mawr is a very small property, for much if its life just two rooms and a crog loft. The inhabitants were poor, Welsh-speaking hill farmers - at least until the 1920s - working about 25 acres of land. The story goes that the family came over the Berwyn mountains in search of freedom of speech, having previously lived near Meifod in Montgomeryshire, upping sticks due to persecution by a landlord; in those days it was common practice to make tenants vote the way their landlord wanted them to. They took over Glyn Mawr, probably in the 1790's, having initially spent some time at a nearby, now ruined, cottage – Pren Briglas. My ancestors were essentially subsistence farmers. The house and its occupants have an interesting history of their own - summarised in a locally published periodical (Clwydydd, 1933). Before the adjacent Glyn chapel (visible in Fig. 3) was built in 1813, the house was used by Methodist preachers as a place to give sermons; a time when non-conformism was sometimes violently 'discouraged' by establishment landlords and landowners. An unfortunate preacher, one Peter Williams, was taken in at Glyn Mawr after having been 'cruelly treated by (henchmen of) Sir Watkin' (Clwydydd, 1933). *'There is no lack of evidence to show that Sir Watkin hated the Methodists; Peter Williams and others experienced fierce persecution at his hands and great was their rejoicing when he died suddenly, 26 Sept 1749, as a result of a fall from his horse while hunting'* (Jones, 2001).

Many hill farms in north Wales were too small to remain viable in the twentieth century and in the spring of 1965 Glyn Mawr was sold. Empty at that time and owned by a descendent Gwilym Roberts who lived at the adjacent farm of Pant yr Onnen, it was bought by an English couple and used as an occasional holiday home for about 30 years, remaining little changed. Glyn Mawr was again unoccupied when I visited in 2006, and probably under new ownership - with a water main in process of being laid to the old house (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Glyn Mawr farmhouse in 2006.

The line of this water main had resulted in the removal of one of two old fruit trees. The tree was an apple that, by the look of it, had been uprooted a few days before my visit; and was lying where it had fallen (Fig. 3). On a previous visit on 18th May 1995 I had inadvertently taken a photo of this tree in blossom (Fig. 4). The felled tree had a dense crown and substantial trunk, but was not very tall. There was no real sign of past pruning. I didn't think to look for evidence of it having been grafted onto a stock. In an effort to save the type and being curious to know what it was I took cuttings and kept them in a fridge until spring. In March 2007 I grafted one onto a rootstock and two onto established 'host' trees (Ribston pippin and Bramley). Surprisingly all three 'took'. The resulting tree has grown on in a climatically rather similar site at an elevation of 550 feet (GPS: 53.220484, -3.338382). It has fruited well for 3-4 years, and shown no signs of disease.

The 'Glyn Mawr' apple is a cooker of unusual pear-shaped appearance, ripening late (mid/end October through to mid-November) and having a 'snout' reminiscent of the variety 'Catshead' (Figs. 6 to 10). The fruit have a very good taste and cook to a firm puree, making excellent apple sauce and tart fillings. Given the parent tree had a substantial trunk (Fig. 5) it seems possible that it started life in Victorian times; it had clearly proved well suited to the cool damp climate of west Wales. Given the modest means of the household it seems unlikely that the tree was bought commercially. More than likely it was an apple core seedling - possibly germinating in the household midden.



Fig. 2. The hill land around Glyn Mawr farm (centre), with a newly dug water main snaking up the field below the house.



Fig. 3. Roots protrude from the ground in front of the digger, with the uprooted tree lying to the left. Glyn chapel and Llyn Tegid (Bala lake) are visible in the background.



Fig. 4. Before (18.05.1995; above) and after (24.11.2006; below)



Fig 5. Apple tree root.



Fig 6. 'Glyn Mawr' apples on my 10-year-old tree.



Figs. 7 'Glyn Mawr' apples on my 10-year-old tree.



Fig. 8. Ripe 'Glyn Mawr' apples. Appearance in December.



Fig. 9. 'Glyn Mawr' apples showing the notable 'snout'.



Fig. 10. Cut surface of a (peeled) 'Glyn Mawr' apple.

Source tree location



Fig. 11. GPS site of origin [52.869139, -3.615630](https://www.google.com/maps/place/52.869139,-3.615630)

