

NANNEY (NANNAU) family, of Nannau, Meirionnydd

Nannau, which is in Llanfachreth parish, Meirionnydd, stands 700 feet above the level of the sea, and has been for centuries the home of one of the most powerful families in the county. The 'sprouting root,' according to the bards, was Ynyr Hen, who flourished 1200-50; his son, Ynyr Fychan, took the credit of helping to capture the rebel **Madog ap Llywelyn** in 1295 and of handing him over to the victors; his son Meurig Fychan has a sepulchral effigy in Dolgelley church, with a lion carved on his shield, but it is open to grave doubt whether he was one of the garrison of Bere castle soon after the death of **Llywelyn the Last**. There is no cogent proof to connect **Anian II**, bishop of St Asaph from 1268 to 1293 with this family, though a Peniarth manuscript does refer to him as the 'black friar of Nannau'; he had a brother also, and executor of his will, who signs as 'Adam de Nannew.' Nor is there sufficient foundation for the story of Hywel Sele's treachery towards **Owain Glyn Dŵr** in 1402 - he was grandson to Meurig Fychan - so little indeed that **Sir John E. Lloyd**, the author of the standard work on the prince, never refers to Hywel at all. But certainly, the poet **Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen** (c. 1370-1400), was cousin to Meurig Fychan, author of the famous elegy to Lleucu Llwyd. **Gruffydd Llwyd** sang the praises of two sons of Meurig Fychan (end of the 14th century); **Guto'r Glyn** likewise composed an elegy to Meurig Fychan II (period of Henry VI), and a *cywydd* to thank his son David for the gift of a horse; the polished **William Llŷn** adds a panegyric to **Gruffydd Nannau** (days of Henry VIII).

Between the days of Hywel Sele and the age of Elizabeth the Nanneys thrust their roots deep in the commote of Tal-y-bont through the buying up of lands in the townships of Brithdir and Dyffryndan, Cefnyrywen and Dolgleder, Garthgynfor, and Garthmaelan. The stock sent out many branches: a brother of Hywel Sele founded the **family of Caerynwch**; the Cefndeuddwr branch grew out in the middle of the 16th century, that of Maes Pandy at the end of that century; the Dolau-gwyn relationships were made secure by a series of complicated marriages. The head of the house in the years 1580-1620 was HUW NANNAU HEN, a very powerful personality, of whom the bards outdid each other in extravagant eulogies, no fewer than eleven of them bewailing his death in 1623. His career was not without some grave crises: he was on very bad terms with the **Llwyn family**, with the **Lloyd family** of Rhiwaedog, with the **Owen family** of Hengwrt, and these ill-wishers were joined by his own blood-relations of Cefndeuddwr (his great sin, it was said, was the pushing forward of his son Griffith, in 1593, as Member of Parliament for Merioneth against **John Lewis Owen** of Llwyn). His enemies concentrated on the charge that Huw Nannau had cut down thousands of trees at Penrhos between Mawddach and Afon-wen, and had made a great fortune out of them; the Exchequer gave a verdict of guilty against him, levying a fine of £1,500; Nannau went to prison rather than pay; after many petitions to the supreme authorities, he was set free, but the fine was not brought down lower than £800 [but see the item added to the bibliographical note].

The story of Nannau is somewhat uneventful until the days of colonel HUGH NANNEY, Member of Parliament for Merioneth (1695-1701) and his termagant wife Catherine, one of the daughters of **Cors-y-gedol** (she died in 1733). He was the last Nanney to hold the estate, for his heiress Janet married Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt in 1719, great-grandson to the antiquary **Robert Vaughan**; the antiquary himself had married a granddaughter of Huw Nannau Hen). Their son HUGH VAUGHAN almost made a total shipwreck of his fortunes by his ill-regulated life and his utter incapacity for estate management, but through the pluck and pertinacity of his lawyer John Lloyd and the prescience of the very intelligent **lady Elizabeth Baker**, who supervised the household at Nannau, things looked a little more hopeful at Vaughan's death in 1783, leaving his brother ROBERT HOWELL VAUGHAN (1723 - 1792), created a baronet in 1791, to carry on the long litigation till 1788, when the Chancery masters delivered a final and very favourable verdict. It is true that R. H. Vaughan was made a baronet in 1791, but much more important for the fortunes of the family was his marriage in 1765 with Ann Williams, heiress of the Ystumcolwyn lands by Meifod, she in turn being grand-daughter to the Meriel Williams who had married the squire of Meillionydd in Llŷn : the upshot of all this was that Sir Robert Howell Vaughan, and his son Sir ROBERT WILLIAMS VAUGHAN (1768 - 1843) were the quadruple possessors of Nannau, Hengwrt, Ystumcolwyn, and Meillionydd. What wonder that the second Sir Robert reared a new mansion at Nannau, became a Member of Parliament for Merioneth in 1792, and was re-elected thirteen times, remaining a member till 1836 ? Thanks were paid to him in the form of an illustrated address, signed by 122 names, in July, 1836; money was collected in 1841 to found the ' Vaughan Scholarship ' as a tribute to the length of his public service; and when he died in 1843 Meurig Idris composed a long ode of eulogy (12 pages). His brother EDWARD VAUGHAN (died 1807) had already succeeded by will to the Rûg estate (1780); these Rûg lands were in the possession of the Vaughans of Nannau till the death of the third Sir ROBERT VAUGHAN (1803 - 1859), when the second son of **lord Newborough** became proprietor. According to Sir Robert's will - he died without children - Hengwrt went to his wife's sisters (she was a Lloyd of Rhagad) and Nannau to one of the sons of the first **lord Mostyn**, with the clear proviso that these were only interim arrangements for one life, that the two estates were eventually to come into the hands of JOHN VAUGHAN (born 1829), a member of the Dolmelynlyn branch of the Hengwrt family. This happened in 1874; and Vaughan was very soon faced with the problem of the new railway to Bala, the old problem of fishing in the river Mawddach, and the question of the proper royalties to charge upon adventurers for gold upon his lands. In politics he was a thoroughbred Conservative, and was an unsuccessful candidate against **T. E. Ellis** in the General Election of 1886. He died on 29 June 1900 (Nannau MS. 835), not in 1898 as recorded in the *Pedigrees* of **J. E. Griffith** (200).

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Sources

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Further Reading

NLW Archives: [To the Electors of Merioneth... 1886](#)

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