

SMITH, THOMAS ASSHETON (1752-1828), of Vaenol Bangor landed proprietor and quarry owner

Name: Thomas Assheton Smith
Date of birth: 1752
Date of death: 1828
Spouse: Elizabeth Smith (née Wynn)
Child: Thomas Assheton Smith
Parent: Thomas Assheton Smith
Gender: Male
Occupation: landed proprietor and quarry owner
Home: Vaenol
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Land Ownership
Author: Emyr Gwynne Jones

Born 1752, the son of Thomas Assheton of Ashley, Cheshire, he added the name Smith to his surname when he inherited the Vaenol and Tedworth (Hampshire), estates under the will of his uncle, William Smith, son of John Smith, Speaker of the House of Commons, 1705-8.

The story of how the Vaenol estate - the ancient patrimony of a branch of the **Williams** family of Cochwillan - came into the hands of a totally unconnected English family is most unusual. Today, we can do no more than guess at the strange circumstances which prompted Sir William Williams, the last of the Vaenol family, to devise all his lands in his will, dated 25 June 1695, to Sir Bouchier Wrey, a man of very doubtful character, then to the latter's two sons, and after them to king William III. It was through this king's generosity that Vaenol became the property of the above-mentioned John Smith and his heirs for ever.

So, the old manor of Dinorwig, which includes nearly the whole of the parishes of Llanddeiniolen and Llanberis, together with other properties in Caernarvonshire and Anglesey, came into the possession of Thomas Assheton Smith, who built himself a new mansion where he stayed for a few months each year. He was high sheriff of Caernarvonshire 1783-4 and Member of Parliament for the same county from 1774 to 1780. In 1806 he induced Parliament to pass a law enclosing the Llanddeiniolen commons, a law which added four-fifths of the common land to his estate, an increase of 2,692 acres and more, and also gave him as lord of the manor of Dinorwig the right to the slate on the commons. By this time Smith had come to realize that it would pay him to develop the quarries on his estate. In 1809 he formed a company of four with himself as chairman, but, before long, disagreements arose between the partners and the upshot was that in 1820 he took the reins into his own hands. He saw the number of quarrymen rise from 200 in 1820 to 800 in 1826, when 20,000 tons of slate were produced. He built a fine road so that the slate could be brought down from Dinorwig to 'Port Dinorwic' for export from the new harbour which he had planned and built there.

He died in his mansion at Tedworth, 12 May 1828, and was succeeded as squire of Vaenol by the second son of his marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of **Watkin Wynn of Foelas**, who had the same name as his father -

THOMAS ASSHETON SMITH (1776 - 1858),

He was born in London, 2 August 1776, and was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He was Conservative member for Andover, 1821-31, and Caernarvonshire, 1832-41. But he is best remembered as a famous master of foxhounds; not for nothing was he called by his contemporaries 'the British Nimrod.' He was also at one time a notable cricketer, and when he visited Vaenol his main interest was yachting on the Menai Straits. He developed considerably both his estate and the quarries; he extended the harbour at Port Dinorwic and between 1834 and 1848 was engaged in building the railway which still runs from Cilfach Ddu along the banks of Padarn Lake. He died at Vaenol 9 September 1858, and was buried at Tedworth. He married Matilda, daughter of William Webber, Binfield Lodge, Berkshire, but they had no children and, after his widow's death, the Welsh estates passed into the possession of George William Duff, his niece's eldest son.

Author

Emyr Gwynne Jones, (1911 - 1972)

Sources

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