

Pentyrch and District Local History Society
Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol Pentyrch a'r Cylch

THE GARTH DOMAIN

(A SERIES DESCRIBING LOCAL PLACES AND PEOPLE AS THEY WERE)

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*Y Philipiaid – The Remarkable Phillipses of
Gwaelodygarth*

Lynn Davies – a Memoir

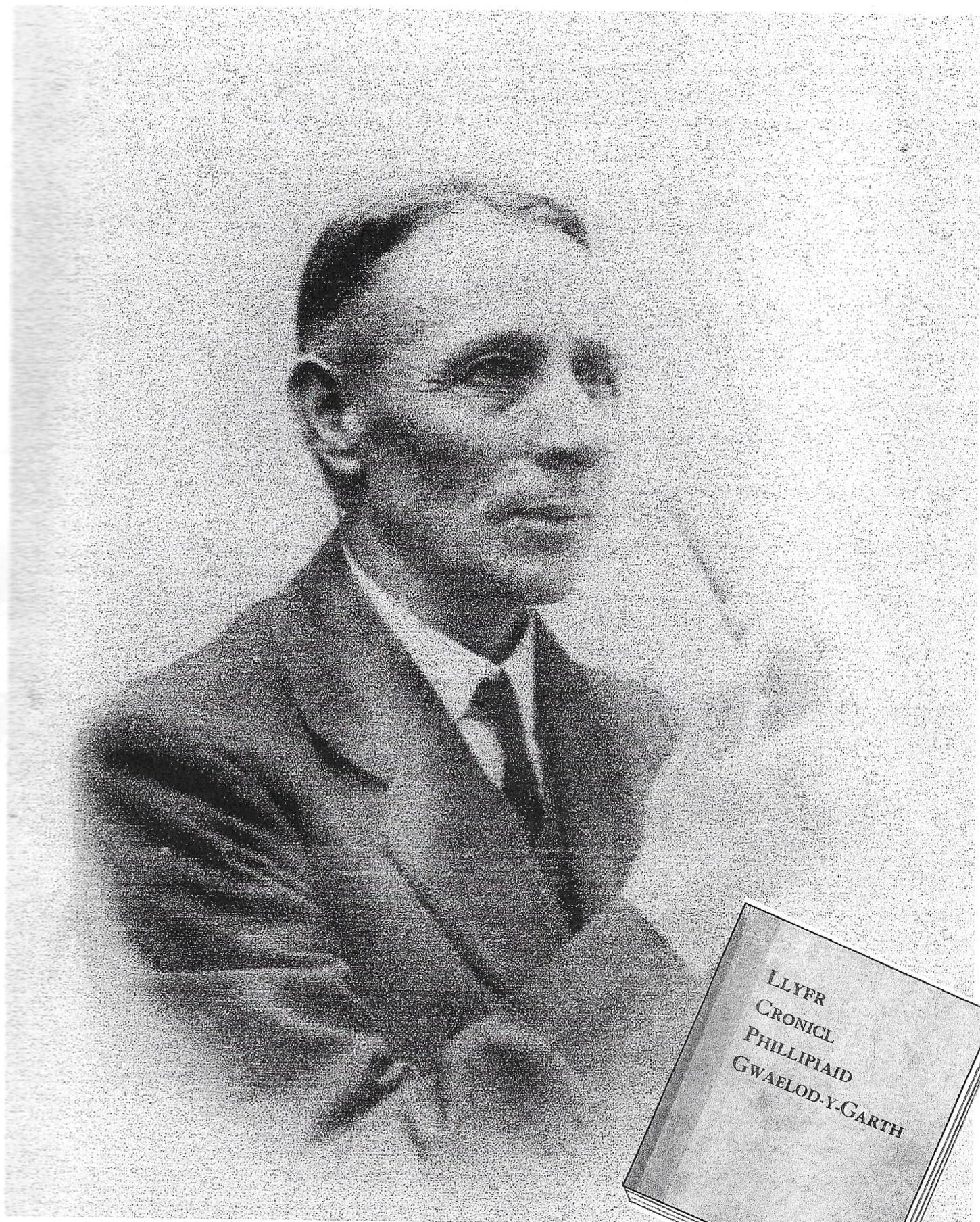
Notes from the Old School - Pentyrch

The Village Museum

Compiled by Don Llewellyn



Phil and Arthur Phillipps in 'Welsh Rarebit' on the wireless



Evan J Phillips who 70 years ago compiled 'Cronicl Y Phillipiaid' – a remarkable family history study.

Drawing heavily from this source, the editor, with help from Derek Thomas, has put together the following treatise on 'The Phillipses of Gwaelodygarth'.

Y PHILLIPAIID

The Remarkable Phillips Family of Gwaelodygarth

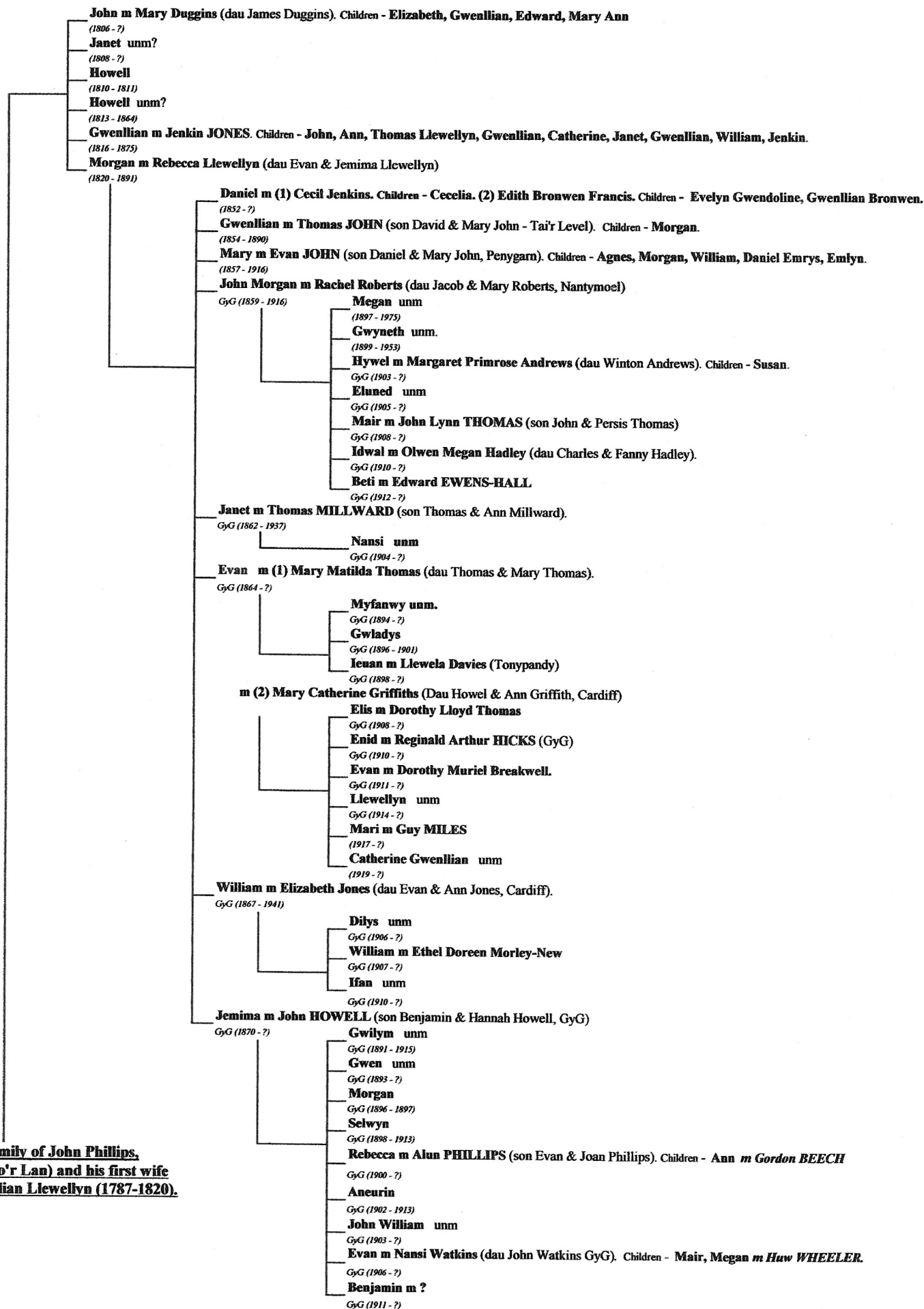
The very name, *Y Phillipiaid*, has a classical ring to it; one that would sit comfortably on any ancient Greek dynasty. Not surprisingly therefore, countless members of the ubiquitous Phillipises have made their mark over several generations influencing more than anyone the evolution of Gwaelodygarth as a community.

Our story begins with John Phillips (Shôn o'r Lan) who was born in 1786 at Ystrad Dyfodwg to his parents Morgan and Gwenllian. John was married to Gwenllian Llewellyn who died in 1820 and he moved with his family to the Lan Farm in about 1829 and then in the 1840s into the village of Gwaelodygarth where he was to die in 1871. During his period in the Gwaelod, he was very active indeed in the Ivorite movement. He is described in the 'Phillipiaid' as a versatile individual with an independent mind. The '*Iforiaid*' was a group zealously promoting Welsh culture and the Cambrian way of life. Shôn was regarded as the 'Father of the Ivorites' in the Llantwit and Pentyrch areas. He and his second wife Deborah wife were baptised in the River Taff near the weir by the Rev John Evans the minister of Penuel (Baptist) chapel, Pentyrch on 17 April, 1859 (the year of a great revival). Shôn and his family attended Penuel until Salem Gwaelodygarth was established in 1863.

With 14 children, at least 54 grandchildren, and well over 150 great grandchildren, Shôn was the progenitor of a family whose members would dominate local life for over a century and a half. Their entrepreneurial skills guided several local enterprises whilst their devotion to local non-conformist worship has been conspicuous. They were at the forefront of local education and their energetic promotion of leisure activities ranging from amateur dramatics to team sports was always second to none. Remarkably, of Shôn's 54 grandchildren, 29 were born in Gwaelodygarth and of the 150 great-grandchildren, 44 were Gwaelod born. This statistic shows how widespread the Phillips lineage was within a comparatively small community covering the complete spectrum of village social life. Also, well beyond the boundaries of Gwaelodygarth itself, members of the Phillips line have achieved much acclaim and even celebrity.

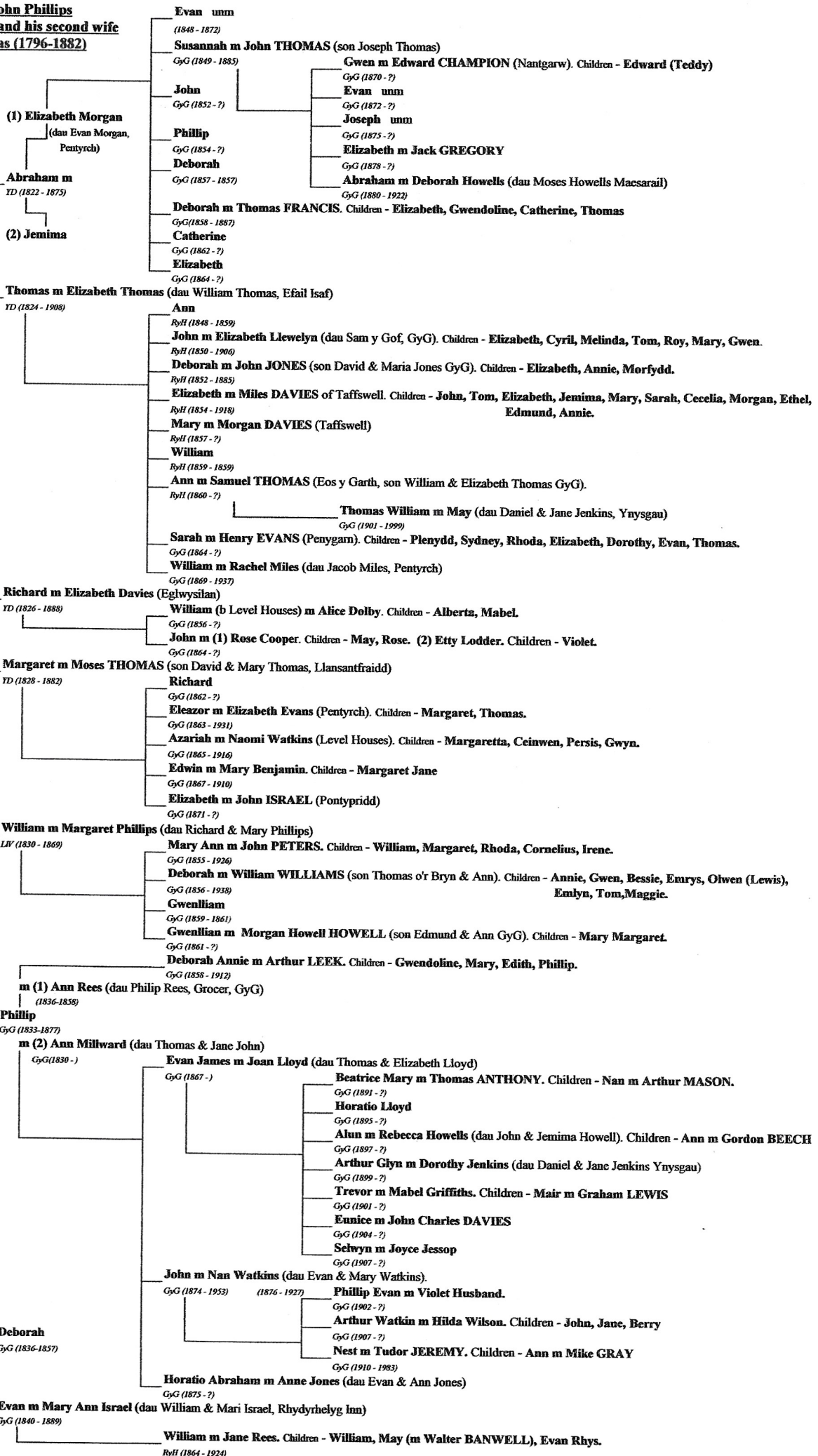
The canvas needed to produce a comprehensive family tree would be impossibly large. As an admirable alternative my colleague Derek Thomas has compiled a family structure drawing information from '*Llyfr Cronicl Phillipiaid Gwaelodygarth*' – a masterpiece of research – written in 1942 by Evan Phillips, one of the grandsons of Shôn o'r Lan, and has been supplemented by census information, by Parish records, and by Monumental Inscription records of St Catwg's, Penuel, Bronllwyn and Horeb. The coverage has been curtailed – with certain exceptions – to that of the great grandchildren of Shôn o'r Lan. Even so, it is acknowledged that there will be unavoidable omissions. A large print-out is available for inspection at our new museum in Penuel Road Pentyrch. It is recommended that anyone seeking further information should consult the Phillips Chronicle (*Cronicl y Phillipiaid*), a copy of which is in the possession of our society. Here, though, in these pages, we shall simply take a look at some of the facts that come to mind when thinking of old Shôn and his descendants.

If there is one feature discernible through the generations that followed Shôn o'r Lan it is the consistently high level of cultural achievement. No-one represents this more than the aforementioned Evan Phillips who fittingly produced the monumental work on the 'Phillipiaid'. He also published other works of local interest including '*Trethiant Plwyf Pentyrch 1824-1825*' (Land Rating for the Parish of Pentyrch 1824-25).



**The family of John Phillips,
(Shon o'r Lan) and his first wife
Gwendlian Llewellyn (1787-1820).**

**The family of John Phillips
(Shon o'r Lan) and his second wife
Deborah Thomas (1796-1882)**



Evan was born in Gwaelodygarth on the 1st of December 1864. He attended Gwaelod School in the time of the admirable headmaster, Thomas Madge, before going on to Cardiff Technical College. He began his working career at Spillers and Co., Cardiff, in 1879. In 1896 he moved into Garth Villas which he had built himself. Evan married firstly Mary Matilda Thomas of the Post Office Nantgarw in 1892 but by 1901 his young wife had died. Their son Ieuan Gwyn, born in 1898 went on to serve in the first world war on Torpedo Boat Destroyers. Their daughter, Gwladys Olwen, (born 1896) had died at the age of five when on holiday at Porthcawl. On 22nd October 1907 he married Mary Catherine Griffith ('Kitty') from Cardiff at the Tabernacle Baptist chapel. Their first child, Ellis, was born in 1908 and in that year the family moved into Is y Deri, another fine house he raised himself. There, their daughter Enid Siriol was born in 1910. Ellis, at just 15 years of age passed the Senior Cambridge Examination with honours. Their other son, Evan Griffith, born in 1911 also passed at 15 years, the Senior Cambridge Examination with honours. Enid gained the Matriculation Examination of the University of London. In 1894 Evan Phillips was chosen as the first Clerk of the newly formed Pentyrch Parish Council. There were further children: Llewelyn, born at *Is y Deri* in 1914 unsurprisingly also passed the Senior Cambridge Examination. Another daughter came along during their time in London. Mari Yvonne was born at Brondesbury Park London N.W.2 in 1917. Mari's fine educational record began with passing the Matriculation Examination of the University of London. Their last child, Catherine Gwenllian was born in 1919 at a Nursing Home in Abergavenny. She was educated at Kilburn High School until 1934 and afterwards at Howells School, Llandaff before getting the College's Diploma at Kings, Campden Hill.

Evan Phillips was chairman of the Council and Parish Overseer for twelve years. He did work for numerous charities at this time. He also succeeded in obtaining the Parish Tithe Map and placing it into the rightful custody the Council. The Spillers company moved him to London in 1916 before returning in 1935. He was the firm's chief accountant in 1905 and a member of the Superannuation Fund committee. In 1927 he became a director of the company and also a director of British Oak Insurance Co. Ltd. On his retirement in 1934 the Staff of Spillers entertained him to Dinner at the Savoy Hotel and presented him with a Queen Anne writing desk, a chair, a bookcase and silver inkstand.

It goes without saying that the written Welsh of Evan Phillips is of a very high standard indeed but where some of the original documents (e.g. church records) were in English he has wisely chosen not to translate them. It is a fact though that during his early life the majority of the inhabitants of his home village were Welsh monoglots.

In his '*Croniel*' Evan tells us of his great-great grandfather Howell Philip (born in 1720) who originally farmed in Breconshire moving to Aberdare and then to the Rhondda Fach. The family then arrived at Garth Isaf farm in the parish of Llantwit Fardre before settling at Y Lan in the same parish. From there it was just a stone's throw to Gwaelodygarth where Shôn and his tribe quickly took root. Since then the scattering of descendants across the world has been truly kaleidoscopic.

Derek Thomas confirms that those who stayed in the bounds of the Pentyrch parish are respectfully remembered. Certainly if any of the older inhabitants of the Gwaelod are asked to identify those with 'Phillipiaid' connections we get a torrent of information. We find that John Morgan Phillips, a grandson of Shôn o'r Lan by his first wife lived with his family at Bedw Arian ('Silver Birch') at the top of School Lane. John's daughter Megan was a teacher, unmarried – as was the requirement in those days – and taught in Tongwynlais for many years. Her sister Eluned had a hairdressing business in Cardiff. Mair married Lynn Thomas and they lived in Garth Villas. Lynn was the son of John and Persis Thomas who kept a shop in Gwaelodygarth. Persis had been a teacher in the

Gwaelod School. Nansi Millward, a niece of John Morgan Phillips lived in Garth Villas and taught at Whitchurch Primary School. She was also unmarried.

Living in Woodlands, Gwaelodygarth were the highly respected Jemima and John Howell, Jemima being a brother of John Morgan and Evan. Their daughter Gwen was the senior mistress at Gwaelodygarth School for many years and had a major educational input for a generation of village children. Daughter Rebecca married her second cousin, Alun Phillips and lived at Ffynnon Ffigys. Sons John William, Evan and Benjamin like several other relatives were founder members and active participants in the Garth Cricket Club. Bennie Howell who had been a teacher at his old school Pontypridd County, became headmaster of Carmarthen Grammar School and wrote a history of that establishment. One of Evan's daughters married Hubert Wheeler of Pentyrch.

Going back to Victorian times, one name stands out prominently – that of Abraham Phillips, the overman who was one of the dozen to be killed in an explosion on 3rd December 1875 in the Brass vein at the Llan colliery, a drift mine in the belly of the Garth. Abraham was the first child of Shôn o'r Lan and his second wife Deborah. Although born in the Rhondda he made his home at Wood Cottage in Georgetown

From a report in the Western Mail:

'On Monday morning Abraham Phillips went down the incline before the men were allowed to go in. By 6.30 they were also permitted to enter but nothing was heard from them until half past nine when those working near the entrance were alarmed by a body of men rushing out shouting for help ...'

After the extent of the tragedy was fully understood, the coroner's party made its solemn trip around the bereaved families, witnessing some horrific scenes:

'Another half-hour's walk brought the group to the house of Abraham Phillips the overman at the ill-fated pit. The late Mr Phillips leaves a widow and six children ... It appears that at the time of the explosion, Mr Phillips was walking in the pit accompanied by two colliers who were to live to tell the tale. As they approached the place where the explosion occurred, they met one of the deceased, all in flames and burnt in a frightful manner. Mr Phillips and his companions immediately did all they could to put out the flames and to render the suffering man any help in their power. It all happened so quickly. One of the survivors recalls that as a horde of men rushed by in great excitement, Mr Phillips who was in a more calm state of mind, advised them in Welsh to 'take things quiet'. Soon afterwards, the blast must have reached the point where Phillips stood and he was blown aside with great force.'

Abraham's granddaughter Gwen married Edward Champion (sen.) who came from a prominent line of west country clay pipe makers. They lived on the Garth Hill and later near the Gwaelod School. Gwen's sister Elizabeth married Jack Gregory and also lived on Garth Hill. Jack was a country poet and the writer (Don Llew) recalls meeting him with his father on several occasions on the mountain road. Jack would pull from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper which bore the latest of his poetic compositions and insist on reading it out to us. I seem to remember one piece was about *Y Brenin Llwyd* (The king of the Mist) a ghostly entity that lived in the forest of the Lesser Garth on the other side of the Valley of Hoarfrost (*Cwmlhwydrew*). Abraham's brother Thomas Phillips (who would become known as Twmos o'r Lan) had a son John who married Elizabeth, daughter of the Gwaelodygarth blacksmith, Samuel Llewellyn (Sam y Gof). John's sister Deborah married John,