

29 February 2012
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Ynys Gifftan

Last updated: 24 October 2006

John Roberts, who left Porthmadog when he was 29, recalls his mother's life on Ynys Gifftan, situated in the River Dwyryd estuary, facing Portmeirion.



My mother Sarah was born on Ynys Gifftan in the early 1900s. Her mother was originally from Llanaber and her father was originally from Talsarnau.



My mother was one of four children (photographed above around 1909) and was trained to be a dressmaker in Blaenau Ffestiniog from the age of 11.

Clearly, living on the island meant that trips to the mainland were dependent on the tides and depth of the

river, so my mother frequently waded across the estuary on her weekly commute to Blaenau.

When she married she moved to Porthmadog where she lived for the rest of her life.



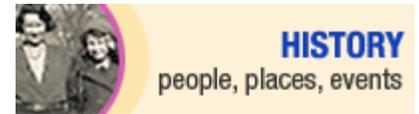
Even in her 70s my mother would think nothing of taking off her shoes and rolling up her skirt to cross the river to reach the house on Ynys. In this photo (left), taken in the 1970s, my mother is getting ready to cross the river.

My mother's younger brother, Hugh, stayed and worked on Ynys Gifftan until his wife's death. Also photographed (below) is my elder brother Jeffrey having a ride on a horse on the island with my Uncle Hugh in 1939.



Uncle Hugh later lived at Minffordd, while my mother's eldest brother, David, farmed near Portmeirion.

My heart is still in Wales and I have returned to Port at every opportunity with my wife and children. *John Roberts*



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	Sunday max 16°C min 9°C		Monday max 12°C min 7°C
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[Aerial photo of Ynys Gifftan](#)

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your comments

Christine Leonard (nee Mayer)

How lovely to read all this of the place I spent so many happy holiday hours and now visit every time I am in North Wales. We used to spend long summer days swimming in the beautiful rock pools around the Penrhyn side of the island, and in 1946-7 I used to borrow the island pony (I was around 12 years old) to ride across the sand. Leaving the island was not her wish, so she would try to roll me, but as soon as I turned round to return to the island she always gave me a wonderful charge! It is sad indeed to see the house so forlorn now.

Tue Jul 21 08:58:08 2009

Helen Rowe

Does anyone know if the farm had a name?

Wed Jun 24 16:22:08 2009

Patricia Lister of Cardiff

I was most interested to read John Roberts' account of Ynys Giffan and his mother Sarah's life there. Her youngest brother Hugh married my mother's sister Martha May (nee Wynne) known as Mattie in 1934. I spent nearly every holiday on the island from the early 1950s until 1968 when my uncle and aunt retired to Minffordd. Mattie died in 1974 and Hugh in 1985. It was like an adventure playground for children, with the life on the farm and activities governed by the tides. Uncle Hugh said that he could only go to school in the morning or afternoon when the tides were high. There was no electricity, water was from a well in the yard and heavy goods were brought across from Ynys by horse and cart, with lighter items carried on foot across the salt marsh from Talsarnau. I was very sad to learn that the house has become dilapidated. It was a unique experience to stay on the island and I have many happy memories.

Mon Jan 19 09:36:26 2009

Celt Roberts, Talsarnau

Talsarnau has a website and I am in the process of creating a section on Ynys Giffan. I would appreciate any contributions - stories, personal memories, photos etc.

Mae gan ardal Talsarnau safle wê, ac rwyf yn y broses o greu adran ar Ynys Giffan. Byddwn yn gwerthfawrogi unrhyw gyfraniadau – storïau, atgofion personol, lluniau ac ati.

Web team: Find the website on our [useful links](#) section.

Tue Jan 13 09:56:18 2009

Bob Hughes, Ynys, Talsarnau

My parents moved to live on the shore of the Dwyryd Estuary in 1947 when I was in my teens. We could look across to Portmeirion, with Ynys Giffan to the right. In about 1949 the farmer there sold up and moved to Canada. My father bought me my first shotgun at the sale. The farmer did not like Canada and came back. Out rowing in 1962, my wife and a friend were forced by bad weather to land and shelter till the tide went down: the farmer looked after them well. We have now returned to live in the same

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LLEOL I MI

Gogledd Orllewin



Tai Hanesyddol

O blastai crand i ffermydd gwledig, camwch dros drothwy rhai o dai mwyaf

hanesyddol yr ardal

glorious location. It is tragic to see the house now, almost covered in brambles. As far as I know, the island is still owned by Lord Harlech.

Tue Sep 25 09:44:51 2007

John Williams from Aberystwyth

The eldest son of the family was my father Robert Griffith. He died in 1935 and up until then I used to spend part of my school holidays on the island with my grandmother, my aunt Sarah (John Roberts' mother) and uncles David and Hugh. I well remember walking from the island with my Auntie Sarah across the salt marsh to the Glyn Estate office near Talsarnau to pay the rent due to Lord Harlech and back again before the tide came in.

Mon Aug 20 10:11:33 2007

Ifor Williams o Dywyn

Pwy sy'n berchennog rwan a Ynys Giffan? [Who owns Ynys Giffan now?]

Tue Jun 19 09:52:40 2007

Danny, llan ffestiniog

I visit Ynys Giffan most weekends and the house is now in a very sorry state of disrepair. I was lucky enough to speak to its former lodger recently who told me a few of his own stories about the house. Gorgeous place in a lovely country.

Tue May 8 10:04:38 2007

Aled Hughes, St. Petersburg, Florida

Great pics! I lived in Penrhyn as a child from '48 - 59, and was always fascinated by the island. I once tried to walk over in the late 70s, but never found the right place to cross. I believe at the time someone had just bought the house, and were going to renovate it. I also seem to recall the army had some cabins/huts just over from the island just after the war. Does anyone remember this?

Mon Dec 4 10:15:23 2006

Jane Wilde from Coventry

I love the article and the fantastic photos. I remember your Mam well, a lovely lady, and I can imagine her wading across the estuary. I remember the photos of when Mum and Dad visited the island with her. I can understand why you continue to visit such a beautiful part of Wales.

Mon Oct 30 09:47:05 2006

Christine Quinn-Jones BULKINGTON

This is a very interesting account, John, and I love your photos. I can remember your Mam walking across the water when we visited her.

Fri Oct 27 09:14:05 2006