

VI *Settlement in Llanfairfechan – Bryn-y-Neuadd*

It was in Llanfairfechan that John Platt decided to create his fresh country estate. Llanfairfechan is a village which lies on the southern shore of Conwy Bay at the point where the Menai Strait opens into the bay and, hence, is near equidistant between the town of Conwy and the city of Bangor. In the mid-nineteenth century it was in the former county of Caernarfon and had a population of some 800 inhabitants who, as small tenant farmers and peasant folk, followed a way of life which had scarcely changed in generations. When, in 1857, John Platt found Llanfairfechan he had missed the opportunity to acquire the Bulkeley lands of which, just twelve months earlier, Sir Richard Bulkeley, whose main estate was across the Strait in Anglesey, had decided to dispose. The sale of these lands, which had been in the Bulkeley's possession since the sixteenth century, had already brought changes in Llanfairfechan: the more enterprising of the local people had bought the land they farmed and others had obtained a plot of ground on which to build a boarding house to cater for the increasing number of visitors, chiefly from Manchester, Liverpool and other Lancashire industrial towns, who were finding Llanfairfechan, with its sandy seashore and hills, a congenial place in which to pass their summer holiday. But the principal purchaser of the Bulkeley lands had been a Richard Luck, a wealthy Leicestershire solicitor, who developed his purchase into a neat little estate on which he built an adequate mansion and named "Plas Llanfair". John Platt had to turn his attention to lands on the western side of the river (Afon Ddu, flowing through the village, south to north) which for centuries had belonged to a family named Roberts. The last of the Roberts line had died in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the lands had passed to his daughter, Mary, and thence through marriage to the Wynne family of Denbighshire. Mary's son, John Wynne, had, in 1832, impoverished himself when endeavouring to replace the Roberts' old house, Bryn-y-Neuadd, with a new mansion. John Wynne had been forced to sell his entire Roberts possessions in Llanfairfechan to a resident of Bangor who had made no attempt to complete the mansion so that, in its unfinished state, it had lain der-

elict and decaying for twenty-five years. John Platt bought Bryn-y-Neuadd and the former Roberts lands and, very soon, the astonishment the local people had felt at the Richard Luck development was to pale against their utter disbelief at the vast transformation John Platt was to bring about in their simple part of the world.

The new Bryn-y-Neuadd estate was to be created in the classic style: park with carriage drives and walks, gardens – including a walled kitchen garden, covert and copses, stables and coach houses and a home farm. Work proceeded at a speed and with an intensity as if a rural Hartford New Works was being fashioned from the Welsh countryside; in just four years the transformation of the former Roberts possessions was completed. The House had been enlarged to four times the size John Wynne had envisaged, John Platt had gained permission to move the line of the Turnpike road, in order to take it further away from the House, and the fringes of the Park were planted with trees to screen the House from both the road and the railway. Along the shoreline, a sea wall was constructed, surmounted with a private promenade which was approached from the Park by way of a private level crossing over the railway and a drive in a secluded avenue. Two principal lodges controlled entry into the Park: Front Lodge which stood on the Turnpike road, at a short distance from the centre of Llanfairfechan village, it bore the date 1861 and was adorned with the Platt coat of arms and family motto "Virtute et Labore". Grand lodge, a building which was arched over the carriage drive, at the far end of the Park, was used for joining the Turnpike road for journeys westward towards Abergwyngregyn and Bangor. A third, lesser, lodge controlled passage to and from the railway station and Farm Lodge stood at the entrance to the home farm. The Annals of the County Families of Wales described Bryn-y-Neuadd, "the seat of John Platt Esquire" as "a structure which with its appurtenances, tastefully planted grounds and magnificent surrounding scenery is one of the most pleasing residences in the Principality".

John Platt was not to let his new estate rest within the boundaries of the Roberts lands, he bought-up the adjoining small farmsteads from which the primitive buildings were swept away and the land itself was converted into large fields to increase the acreage of the home farm which had been functioning from 1858 – quick time even by John Platt's standards. On some higher ground a subterranean reservoir was constructed to secure an adequate water supply for the home farm and the estate generally. In his dealings John Platt was forthright and had no time for others who did not behave likewise, as instance the occasion when the contract for the purchase of one of the adjoining farmsteads was to be signed, John Platt had the pen in his hand when