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**Blue van man has arrived**

Jul 3 2004  
Bethan Lloyd, The Western Mail



In the second instalment of her diary, Anne Owen Taylor gets some expert help to find out the age and features of interest at Cefnmeurig, her family farm in Carmarthenshire which is undergoing major restoration...

A FEW years ago a study was published which claimed that "White Van Man," the much maligned menace of the motorways, was a myth. I'm not so sure.

I've been spending a lot of time on the M4 over the last few weeks travelling back and forth to Cefnmeurig and experience has taught me to instinctively give white transit vans plenty of space.

If Proust, the French novelist and thinker, was alive today, it is unlikely he would have resorted to such crude stereotypes as "White Van Man." I have always liked his insightful observation that "the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

I believe this to be true but sometimes the untrained eye needs the help of others before these discoveries can be made. We have been very privileged at Cefnmeurig to have had visits from a couple of experts who have a talent for communicating their knowledge and bringing their subject alive.

Rob Scourfield loves buildings and he happily gave up his Saturday morning to give us his views on the age and features of interest at Cefnmeurig. Robert is the co-author of the PevsnerArchitectural Guide for Pembrokeshire, which has recently been published. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on vernacular houses and farm buildings as Cefnmeurig is close enough to the Pembrokeshire border for the chapter to have some relevance.

He dated the main part of the farmhouse as c1800. It may be earlier than this but because of the vernacular style, it is impossible to tell at the moment. There was definitely a Cefnmeurig farm in the 1740s, as confirmed by the will of my six times great grandfather, John Rees but he and his family may have lived in a very basic wooden dwelling, that was

**Waitrose**

Smile.

Palmerston Road,  
Barry.  
August 19<sup>th</sup>.

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later demolished. The main part of the house may date back to this time but there is unlikely to be definite proof. The removal of the render might reveal some more secrets about the age and later modifications to the building.

Early maps and the presence of a "simne fawr" (inglenook) window indicates that one gable wall was rebuilt and a kitchen extension added c1890-1900. This is around the time my great grandfather bought the farm off the Llwynocrwn estate for the high price of £2,800. It is possible that there was a cowshed on the site of the kitchen extension and there is some evidence to suggest that the eaves were raised at the time the extension was built.

The sash windows, internal doors and boarded partitions are dated c1890-1900.

The stone lean-to at the back of the building houses a dairy, work areas and a loft space where some of the servants would have slept, probably on wooden pallets with straw mattresses. Cold in winter and hot in summer.

Over the past few weeks, the farmhouse, outbuildings, garden and orchard has been corralled with about a mile of fencing. This is not to stop people getting out but to stop the livestock getting in and trampling over the garden and footpaths. We intend to replace the metal farm gates around the house with wooden gates in the Carmarthenshire style.

At last, work has started on the house just. All the interior plaster is coming off, together with layers and layers of wallpaper. Cefnmeurig is literally the history of wallpaper through the 20th Century as my ancestors and the later tenants just plastered new wallpaper onto old without removing any layers.

I have collected 30 different samples; the maximum layer count is six, in the living room.

Before the men moved on site, I met the contractor David Gray of Letterston at a neutral venue to discuss the contract. "How will I recognise you?" I asked. "I'll be driving a blue transit van," he said. What a relief.

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Follow the day-to-day progress of Cefnmeurig's restoration on the weblog: <http://visitwestwales.blogs.com>

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