

## Follow the Chair by William Gibbs

A previous paper described the chain of discoveries that helped identify the artist of the portrait of Colonel Thomas Wood in the y Gaer Court Room as George Hayter. That investigation also raised some doubts about another picture in the Court Room also listed in Museum Register and Art UK website as of Colonel Wood.

In the stream of correspondence on Art Detective about the first portrait of Colonel Wood there were a couple of very interesting discoveries about this picture. One is that the paper the sitter is holding appears to bear the signature of William the Fourth which seemed appropriate as this king had made Thomas Wood his personal ADC.

However the lack of similarity of the two faces raised some doubts about the attribution of this portrait. I was also struck by the very solid chair in which the sitter is rather uncomfortably sitting. Could this give some clues as to the artist?

Quite by chance I was also researching images for a talk that Ken Jones is giving later this year on the Brecon Town Improvement Act and I was trying to find portraits of the key figures involved. This led me to look through the family portraits of the Morgan family. One of Charles Gould Morgan immediately struck me as having a strong resemblance in posture to the “Wood” portrait. Both are sitting very stiffly in a leather padded chair. Morgan and Wood were close allies both serving as conservative MPs for Brecon and Breconshire and perhaps Morgan and Wood chose to sit for the same artist. So this suggested it would be worth



*“Colonel Thomas Wood of Gwernyfed by an artist in the circle of William Owen”*



*Charles Gould Morgan  
by William Henry Pickersgill  
National Trust, Tredgar House*

investigating the artist of the Morgan portrait, Henry William Pickersgill.



William Henry  
Pickersgill National  
Portrait Gallery

So I delved into the portraits by William Henry Pickersgill. He was a prolific and well respected portrait painter living from 1782 to 1875.

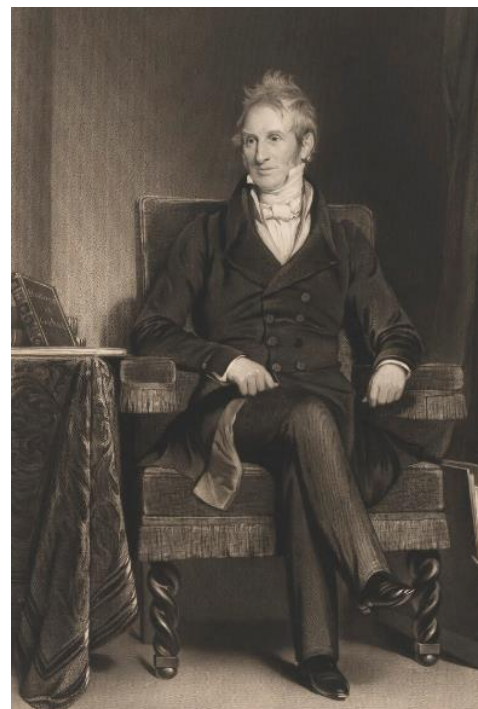
Many organisations own works by him or engravings based on his portraits. Starting with the National Portrait Gallery, I was soon excited to find what looked like a very familiar chair! Notice the frills under the arm rests. Several other portraits by Pickersgill with sitters in a chair similar if not identical to the one in the y Gaer portrait

convinced me that Pickersgill often used the same studio chair. This confirmed that he was a good candidate to be the unknown artist of the “Wood” portrait.

Next a visit to the British Museum Website, one of the most extraordinary on line collections of objects and pictures in the world. Much to my surprise a very familiar image appeared, an engraving of the sitting portrait in y Gaer! The engraver has indeed given an even clearer image of the sitter than the oil and details of the chair are striking.

However much to my surprise it was not labelled as Colonel Thomas Wood of Gwernyfed but as a *Portrait of Penry Williams, three-quarter length, seated in armchair decorated with lion's faces, directed to the front, face turned and looking to the left, wearing double breasted jacket closed and white neckerchief tied into a bow, holding a paper on his hands, a table on the left; after Pickersgill. Lithograph on chine-collé*

So for many years the portrait in y Gaer has been wrongly titled and wrongly attributed. Confirmation of the existence of such a portrait of Penry Williams in the Grand Jury



Mountstuart Elphinstone  
Engraving after portrait by William Henry  
Pickersgill NPG



Penry Williams of Penpont, print after Henry  
William Pickersgill by Thomas Herbert Maquire

Room of the erstwhile Brecon Assizes is recorded in Poole's *The Illustrated History and Biography of Brecknockshire*. In his description of the Grand Jury Room in the Brecon Assize Court Poole writes how on the wall opposite Camden's portrait is a painting ;

*of the late Penry Williams, Esq, of Penpont (father of the late highly respected chairman of Quarter Sessions), which was put up by his brother magistrates by subscription as a tribute to his worth and talents ;* So Poole provides a provenance for this portrait of Penry Williams now in the Court Room at y Gaer.

But what about the scroll being held with the signature of William the Fourth? This can be explained by the fact that Penry Williams was Lord Lieutenant of Breconshire from 1836 to 1847 . William the Fourth lived until 1837 so it is very possible that the paper being held is the official authorisation of Penry Williams as Lord Lieutenant, signed by King William, an honour of which he was very proud. Tom Lloyd ( Wales Herald Extraordinary ) has confirmed that the document is similar in form to other documents confirming this office.



Detail of Scroll bearing the name of William IV

The fact that Penry Williams is holding such a document is consistent with letters in the Penpont Estate Records in the National Library of Wales which provide further information on how and when this portrait of Penry Williams came to be painted. Held there is a letter of April 13, 1846, from John Jones to Penry

Williams enclosing a *Resolution of a body of Gentlemen subscribers, determined to perpetuate a good likeness of one who has for many years has held the highest office in the county with distinguished honour and the strictest impartiality* and a further communication from Edward Williams, Honorary Secretary for the subscribers asks Penry Williams *to have the goodness to sit for his portrait to Mr Pickersgill or such painter of eminence as he may select.*



Penry Williams in Uniform of Lord Lieutenant

In Penpont there is still a portrait of Penry Williams in the uniform of Lord Lieutenant, illustrated here thanks to Jonathan Williams.

More informally there are these silhouettes of him and his wife done in the 1830's by Cuypp of Bristol.



How and when the portrait in y Gaer came to be labelled as a portrait of Thomas Wood still remains a mystery. Perhaps it was when the Assize Court became the new Brecknock

Museum in 1972 and the picture first moved from the Jury Room to hang elsewhere in the Museum. Now it can take up its real identity again ,thanks to an uncomfortable chair, as a portrait of Penry Williams of Penpont, painted by Henry William Pickersgill in 1846.