

BRYCHEINIOG

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CYMDEITHAS BRYCHEINIOG A CHYFEILLION YR AMGUEDDFA
THE BRECKNOCK SOCIETY AND MUSEUM FRIENDS

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THE BRECKNOCK SOCIETY and MUSEUM FRIENDS

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GOLYGYDDOL

Yn gyntaf oll, rhaid imi ymddiheuro i gyfrannwyr a darllenwyr fel y cyfryw am yr oedi mawr cyn i'r gyfrol hon ymddangos. Pan gymerais i drosodd fel Golygydd bum mlynedd yn ôl, fy mwriad oedd cyhoeddi rhifyn newydd yn gynnwys ymhob blwyddyn, i gyd-ddigwydd â Darlith Goffa Syr John Lloyd. Roedd hanes cyhoeddi'r cylchgrawn yn y blynyddoedd cynnar yn un o fylchau mawr rhwng ymddangosiadau, y mwyaf ohonynt rhwng 1972 a 1976, ond llwyddwyd i gael cyhoeddiadau cyson yn ddiweddar – tan eleni. Fy mai i yn unig yw'r ffaith bod rhifyn eleni yn ymddangos mor hwyr – ymhlith y rhwystrau roedd symud tŷ yn gyfrifol am lawer o anawsterau personol, ac unwaith eto hoffwn ymddiheuro i bawb.

Roedd yr ymgais i lawnsio a dosbarthu *Brycheiniog* adeg y Ddarlith yn aflwyddiannus: gan mai'r Ddarlith yw'r unig achlysur pan fydd nifer fawr o'r aelodau'n bresennol – llawer mwy nag yn y Cyfarfod Cyffredinol – ymddangosodd fel cyfle gwych i gysylltu'n uniongyrchol â'r aelodaeth a thorri lawr ar gostau postio ac yn y blaen, ond roedd stondin ar gyfer *Brycheiniog* yng nghyntedd Neuadd y Dref neu Theatr Brycheiniog yn anweladwy neu'n anghyraeddadwy i'r nifer fawr o'r gynulleidfa a oedd yn awyddus i frysio i'w seddau, a meddyliwyd y byddai lawnsiad ar wahân o bosib yn well. Bydd Cyngor Gweithredol Cymdeithas Brycheiniog yn ystyried hyn yn y cyfarfod nesaf, a byddwn yn croesawu unrhyw awgrymiadau gan ddarllenwyr a chyfrannwyr parthed hyn.

Newyddion mwyaf y flwyddyn i'r Gymdeithas, wrth gwrs, yw'r ffaith bod Cronfa Trefnadaeth y Loteri wedi cymeradwyo grant hael iawn am y newidiadau i Amgueddfa Brycheiniog, a chewch ddarllen mwy o fanylion am hynny yn adroddiad Nigel Blackmore, Uwch Guradur yr Amgueddfa. Rydym yn hynod ddiolchgar iddo ef ac i swyddogion yr Amgueddfa a Chyngor Sir Powys am eu gwaith dygn a diflino wrth baratoi'r cais i Gronfa'r Loteri drwy gydol y cyfnod hir y bu hynny dan ystyriaeth. Nid yw holl fanylion cyd-leoliad Llyfrgell Aberhonddu ac Amgueddfa Brycheiniog yn hollol glir hyd yn hyn, ond rhaid cyfaddef y bydd y newidiadau'n gyfle gwych i ehangu a dyfnhau'r perthynas agos rhwng y Gymdeithas a'r Amgueddfa, ac i ennyn diddordeb a chyfraniad y cyhoedd.

Bu Tony Bell yn Drysorydd i'r Gymdeithas am ddeng mlynedd tan yn ddiweddar. Mae bellach wedi penderfynu ymddeol o'r swydd mae wedi ei llenw gydag effeithrwydd a brwdfrydedd dros gyfnod hynod o brysur ac yn wir tyngedfennol yn hanes y Gymdeithas. Bu ei gyfraniad i weithgareddau a thrafodaethau eraill Cyngor Cymdeithas Brycheiniog yn werthfawr iawn hefyd. Mae'r Gymdeithas yn ddiolchgar iawn iddo, ac yn dymuno'n dda iddo yn y dyfodol. Buom yn ffodus iawn bod Peter Jenkins wedi neidio i'r adwy, a, chan ystyried ei gyfraniad a chyfranogiad mewn nifer o ffyrdd i'r Gymdeithas, rydym yn sicr y bydd yn llywyddu ar gyfnod ffyniannus dros ben.

Golygyddol

5

Mae'r Gymdeithas hefyd wedi dechrau ar lunio cofrestr o gymwysterau, galluoedd a diddordebau arbennig yr aelodau, fel y bydd modd inni ddefnyddio talentau pawb wrth ddehongli hanes ein Sir.

Yn olaf, rhaid imi ddiolch wrth fy Nirprwy Olygydd, Peter Jenkins, am ei waith hollol ddibynadwy wrth edrych ar ôl ochr fasnachol ac ymarferol *Brycheiniog*, gan ymddiheuro'n daer iddo ef yn benodol am yr ofid a'r pryder mae'r oedi wrth gyhoeddi wedi achosi iddo. Diolch hefyd i staff Wasg Gomer am eu gwaith trylwyr a'u hamynedd wrth gynhyrchu'r Cylchgrawn.

BRYNACH PARRI

EDITORIAL

My first duty must be to apologise to all contributors to this Volume of *Brycheiniog*, and to its readers, for the long delay in publication this year. Upon taking over as Editor five years ago, I stated my intention of publishing a new volume annually, to coincide with the annual Sir John Lloyd Lecture in the early part of the year. The early history of the Journal had included a number of blank years, when *Brycheiniog* failed to appear, the longest gap being between 1972 and 1976, but in recent years – with the exception of this – the Journal has appeared regularly. The fault for this delay is entirely mine – a difficult house move being one of the many factors that have made my life complicated this year – but I should like once again to apologise to everyone.

Attempts at launching and distributing *Brycheiniog* at the time of the annual Sir John Lloyd Lecture proved to be unsuccessful: since the Lecture is the only occasion on which a substantial number of members are gathered together – many more than at the AGM – it did appear to offer an excellent opportunity to relate directly to the members and to cut down on postage and other costs, but a *Brycheiniog* stand in the foyer of Breton Guildhall or Theatr Brycheiniog proved to be invisible or unreachable to many of those present, who were anxious to get to their seats, and it was thought that a separate launch might prove to be much better. The Executive Council of the Brecknock Society will consider this matter at their next meeting, and I would welcome any suggestions from readers and contributors.

The most important news of the year for this Society, without a shadow of doubt, was the announcement that the Lottery Heritage Fund had approved an extremely generous grant which will enable the great changes envisaged for the Brecknock Museum to be carried out, and the Report of the Senior Curator of the Museum, Nigel Blackmore, outlines the possibilities in more detail. We are extremely grateful to Nigel and the staff of the Museum and Powys County Council for their tremendous and untiring work in preparing the application to the Lottery Fund throughout the long gestation period. Not all the details of the development and the possible relocation of Brecon Library to an adjacent site are as yet set in stone, but it is obvious that these developments will offer a unique opportunity to extend and deepen the close relationship between this Society and the Museum, and to widen the interest and participation of the general public in both the Museum and the Brecknock Society.

Tony Bell has been the Society's Treasurer for the last ten years. He has recently decided to retire from a post that he has filled most efficiently and enthusiastically during a period which has been extremely busy and indeed important for the Society. His contribution to the activities and proceedings of the Council of the Brecknock Society have also been of great value. The Society

is most grateful to him for all his work, and wishes him well for the future. We are most fortunate that Peter Jenkins has agreed to take his place, and, considering his great contribution and participation in various aspects of the work of the Society, we are certain that he will preside over a very successful period.

I should like to thank the Members and Officers of the Executive Council of the Brecknock Society for their hard work throughout the year, especially in the preparation an extremely interesting programme of lectures and field trips for Society Members and the public in general.

The Society has also initiated the drawing up of a register of the special qualifications and interests of Members, which will enable the Society to make the fullest use of the wealth of talent available to us in the interpretation of the history of our historic County.

Finally, I wish to thank my Assistant Editor, Peter Jenkins, for his invaluable work on the financial and practical side of this Journal, and also apologise to him specifically for all the concern caused to him by the delay in publication this year. I also wish to thank the staff of our printers, Gwasg Gomer, Llandysul, for their thorough and painstaking work, and their patience, in the production of this Journal.

BRYNACH PARRI

CYFRANNWYR/CONTRIBUTORS

Edward Parry is a former history teacher at Christ College, and was Editor of this Journal for 18 years.

R. F. Peter Powell is a long-standing member and enthusiastic supporter of the Society, and has served as President (1984–1993), Treasurer (1994–2004), and Assistant Editor of *Brycheiniog* (1992–2000). He is a mathematician, and a widely recognized toponymist, and has contributed greatly to this and other historical Journals.

Dr David Stephenson is Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, Welsh History and Archaeology, Bangor University. The author of numerous books and papers on medieval Welsh history, he is currently finishing a book on the medieval kingdom and lordships of Powys. He and his wife live in Llanidloes, and he has recently published a history of that town.

Michael Jones, a previous contributor to *Brycheiniog*, is a History graduate from Cambridge University (1967), but spent his working life as an accountant – the last twenty years with the NHS in Powys. In retirement, he runs a small-holding in the Honddu Valley together with his wife, and raises funds for Usk House day hospice in Brecon. His interest in local history lies particularly in those aspects of the past that can easily be forgotten.

E. D. Evans is a graduate of Aberystwyth University, and taught History and Welsh Studies at Barry and Cardiff Colleges of Education and was Tutor at the open University for twenty years. He is the author of *A History of Wales, 1660–1815* (U.W.P.) and has contributed in English and Welsh to *Brycheiniog* and other historical journals.

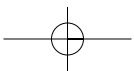
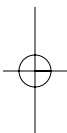
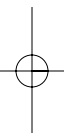
Seamus Hamill-Keays had a varied and exciting career in the RAF, in Britain and further afield, followed by eighteen years as a Principal Lecturer at the Polytechnic of Wales, later the University of Glamorgan, and has recently completed a further degree in Celtic Studies at Lampeter University. He has served as Councillor and Chairman of his Community Council in Tal-y-Bont, and has written on aspects of early history.

Glyn Mathias is a distinguished broadcaster and journalist, and is greatly involved in the administration of the Roland Mathias Prize established by his father.

Dr Elizabeth Siberry is a historian who has researched and published on a range of subjects from the crusades to local history. Particular current interests are Ouseley and his work and orientalist/antiquarian circle and nineteenth century artists who

painted the Crickhowell area. She lives near Crickhowell and is Membership Secretary of the Brecknock Society.

Sam Adams was Editor of *Poetry Wales* from 1973 to 1975 and former chairman of the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig. He edited the *Collected Poems and Collected Stories of Roland Mathias*, is the author of three monographs in the 'Writers of Wales' series and published his third collection of poems, *Missed Chances* in 2007.



ADRODDIADAU/REPORTS

BRECKNOCK MUSEUM & ART GALLERY REPORT 2012–13

Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery has remained closed since the 31st October 2011. During this period of closure a number of projects have been undertaken including major building works, which have seen the creation of a brand new top floor gallery space.

Early in the summer of 2013, we received the wonderful news that our second round Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application had been approved and we had been granted nearly £2.5million towards the restoration and development of Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery. The grant will enable the Museum to complete the Connecting Communities and Collections project, which aims not only to see the restoration of the Grade II* listed Shire Hall and Assize Court, but also the reinterpretation of the Museum collections. This reinterpretation is being developed with volunteer representatives of the Brecknock Community, from Ystradgynlais to Hay, from Llanwrtyd Wells to Crickhowell, along with representatives of the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends. We intend the new Museum to represent the whole of the former county of Brecknockshire and aim to enable our visitors to engage with its people and the surrounding landscape, which has made this such a special place to live, work and visit.

The project will also see an expansion of the education facilities and activities at the Museum – so important for developing first contact between the children of Brecknockshire and the heritage of the former county. We also expect to see a dramatic increase in the number of volunteering opportunities at the Museum, allowing the local community to fully engage with their heritage and participate in the future growth of the Museum.

The HLF application would not have been successful without the local contribution of the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends and the Brecknock Art Trust, which have both supported the bid with £100,000. Other sources of funding are being researched to expand the project even further and help create the best County Museum facility in the Country.

Whilst our focus over the last eighteen months has been on the Forward roof works and the HLF project normal day to day Museum business has continued as normal. During the last year, with financial support from the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends, the Museum purchased four Medieval silver coins from Glyn Tarrell, again with your support these Archaeological Treasure items have been saved for the people of Brecknock.

The Museum collection expanded by over 340 items in 2012, and included archaeological objects, artworks, photographs and a number of social history and rural life items. Volunteers working with Museum Staff have been busy scanning photographs and creating inventories of all the Museum collections, this work

has enabled us to re-examine the collection and many previously unidentified items have been brought to light.

Over the next two years the Museum database will be made accessible online and the general public will be able to research the collections remotely. We expect this facility to add a vast amount of information to the Museum collection from user detective work. Users of the BBC's Your Paintings website, where the Museum's Oil and Acrylic Art collection can now be seen, have searched and identified a number paintings which were previously recorded as by unknown artists. One relative identified a painting made by his grandfather and produced documentary evidence to identify the sitter. The painting also incorporated a chair which the artist had used in other paintings now housed in other public collections, all identified on the Website.

During the summer of 2012 Brecknock Museum worked with the local community to create an exhibition to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the Monmouthshire and Brecknockshire Canal. Due to the temporary closure of the Museum galleries the exhibition was hosted by Brecon Library and proved a popular addition to the Library building. Education activities were developed in relation to the exhibition and many local school children participated.

Early in 2012 the Museum saw the retirement of three stalwarts of the Brecknock team. Ann Blake, Patti Harries and Caroline Gorman hung up their Museum badges for the final time; we thank them for their great service to the Museum. Also, the year saw the departure of the Assistant Curator, Abigail Kenvyn who left us to join the Royal Mint Museum, as Assistant Curator of Exhibitions, her new exciting post will help develop the Royal Mints new visitor centre and its exhibition programme; we wish her lots of success.

The Brecknock Society and Museum Friends are fundamental to the development and continuing growth of Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery, many thanks for your continued support during this period of closure, fear not we will return and it will be worth the wait.

NIGEL BLACKAMORE MPhil.
Senior Curator
Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery

NEWTON AND ITS OWNERS, 1582–1725

*This article was originally published in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 132 (1984), and appears, with extra material and revisions by the author, with the kind permission of that journal to whom Brycheiniog is most grateful.*

In 1851 the editor of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* wrote: ‘Sir David Gam’s mansion still exists close to the town of Brecon, in the same state of neglect as all the other historical monuments of that town and county.’¹ This disparaging tone was echoed by ‘An Antiquary’ writing in the same journal in 1862, ‘Newton Hall, Sir David Gam’s old house remains in *statu quo*; neither better nor worse. I wish I could say *better*, for such a stately old place deserves to be thoroughly restored, and made again into the residence of an important family. It should be surrounded by a park instead of a farm, and it might be again turned into one of the most important residences of the county.’² It was not always so. In 1698 Hugh Thomas made this comment on the Games house, ‘It is one of the fairest [houses] in the County; it stands upon the fall of the River Tarrell into Uske and surrounded like a castle with inward and outward Courts both enclosed with strong embattled walls and for rich furniture within is not inferior to any in Wales.’³ One of the aims of this paper is to test the truth of Thomas’ remarks against the documentary evidence and to explain the decline in the fortunes of Newton. Sir David Gam’s connection with the house will have to be jettisoned but in its place there emerges a picture of a major gentry mansion whose history is well – if sporadically – documented. Until recently Welsh country houses have received little attention but the example of Newton gives some idea of what can be learned where the sources permit.⁴

The appearance of the house today (Plate 1) is at once impressive, disappointing and puzzling. Surrounded by a nine-hole golf course, it stands tall and powerful with an unusual pyramidal roof culminating in a large chimney stack. On closer examination the building shows much evidence of repair and alteration, particularly to the fenestration. The outside is a rather untidy mixture of poor quality sandstone and limestone with some ashlar work at the corners. There are traces of white rendering clinging to the walls. There is no sign of the courts and embattled walls described by Hugh Thomas. The pervading impression is of a massive pile reduced in status from the time it was built.⁵

Any attempt to establish the age of Newton must start with the inscription over the fireplace in the hall (Plate 2): ‘JOHN GAMES MAB AG ETIVEDD HENA EDWARD GAMES AP JOHN AP MORGAN AP EVAN AP DAVYDD GAM 1582.’ Above the inscription is the motto, ‘AR DDUW Y GYD O GAMES’.⁶ But Hugh Thomas claimed that ‘John ab Morgan Gam of Poytins Esqr first built Newton and made it his principal dwelling.’⁷ Theophilus Jones disagreed. ‘I presume the Havards had an old mansion where Newton now



Plate 1 (a) Newton from the south.



(b) Newton from the north.

stands, but the present house seems to have been built by Sir John Games.²⁸ Modern commentators generally concur, albeit with some reservations, that 1582 is the date of construction.⁹ However that there was a house on the site before that date is not in doubt. There are references to one Philip de Newton and to stone and wooden buildings among the twelve messuages there in 1326.¹⁰ Fifteenth and sixteenth-century documents mention land, gardens and tenements at Newton or 'le Nywton'.¹¹ Haslam refers to 'an earlier house . . . called Trenewydd'.¹² However despite Thomas' assertion that John Games was styled 'of Newton' the surviving documents contain no such references. Between 1542 and 1554 both John and his son Edward are described as of 'Pytens Castle' or 'Peytyn duy'.¹³ Not until 1558 is Edward referred to as 'of Newton'. A possible explanation of the conflicting evidence is that Thomas was confusing John Games with his grandson Sir John. That the date of the building is 1582 is reinforced by two further pieces of evidence. First the plan of the house (Fig. 1). The significance of the double-pile plan is discussed below; it is sufficient to say here that such a design is remarkable for the last quarter of the sixteenth century let alone an earlier date. The comparison with Pencelli Castle Farm also points to 1582 as the date of building.¹⁴ So too, paradoxically, do the medieval windows on the north elevation. The 'Y' tracery of the upper windows suggests a date of c. 1300 while the lower one is probably fifteenth century (Plate 1b). It is likely that these windows are not part of an earlier Newton but were taken from the

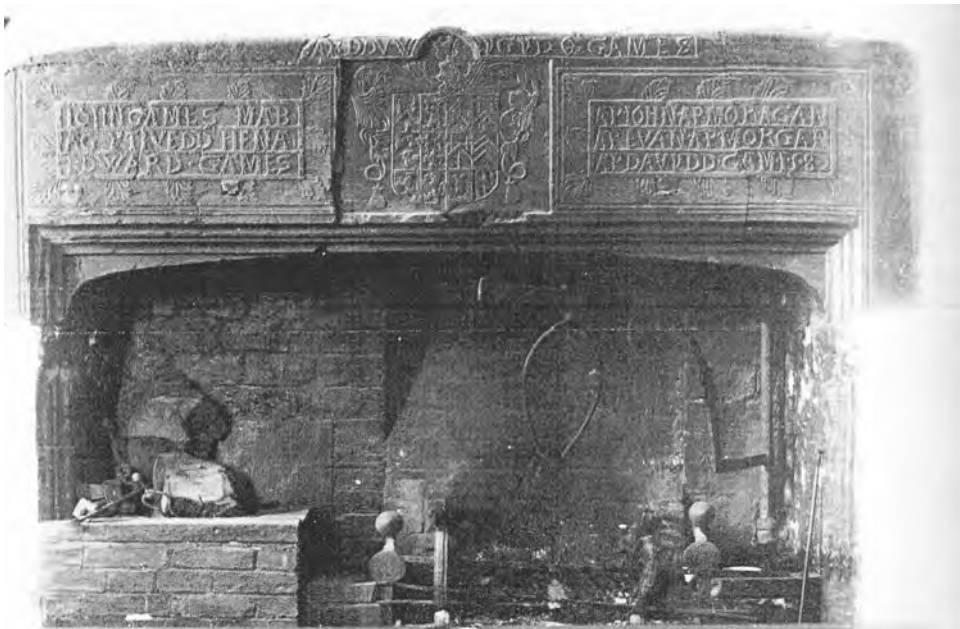


Plate 2 The Hall fireplace with its inscription

Dominican friary less than a mile away to the east.¹⁵ After the Dissolution, Henry VIII ordered the establishment of a College on the site. In a Deposition about the state of the College in c. 1582 article 22 states, 'That before the nowe B. his cominge to that Sea, [this refers to Bishop Middleton, bishop of St. David's from 1582 to 1592] . . . yt Mr. John Games had a wyndowe that was pulled downe out of the colledge . . .'¹⁶ So much, for the moment, of the building, what of the builder?

The Games family, descendants of the hero of Agincourt, was among that small group of gentry families which dominated the social and political life of the area.¹⁷ They intermarried, met on judicial and governmental business, and built houses impressive in style and longevity. The builder of Newton is a good example of his kind. Sir John's father, Edward Games, was Recorder of Brecon (the first holder of that office), an M.P. for the County in 1545 and later Sheriff in 1558. He married Elizabeth, daughter of the Vaughans of Porthaml, and John was their eldest son. He married another Elizabeth, of the Buckland branch of the Games family, and he was four times Sheriff of the County and the first knight in the family since Sir David Gam. Such was the unexceptional pedigree of the builder but his creation owed little in style to his county or his contemporaries.

The sixteenth century was the greatest age of domestic building yet seen in Britain. New ideas, designs and materials allied to recently acquired wealth resulted in an explosion of effort. Wales has nothing to compare with the 'prodigy' houses of England but on the level of gentry mansions the parallels are much closer. The typical house of this status was built on the 'H' or 'half-H' plan; Powys has fine examples at Monaughty,¹⁸ Old Gwernyfed and Y Dderw.¹⁹ But Newton was built to a square, double-pile plan with the principal stack in the centre. One of the new Renaissance features, the storeyed porch, was incorporated into the projecting south 'wing'. These modern features do not prepare one for the major surprise of the interior: the hall. By the later sixteenth century as the social importance of the hall declined so did its size; open halls were floored over, enclosed chimneys were inserted and the single-storey hall was the norm. At Newton the hall rises through two storeys and has a dais some four inches above the main floor level. This amalgam of modern and archaic qualities makes the house remarkable, especially in view of its provincial remoteness from the centres of taste and fashion. Still more intriguing is that within five miles of Brecon is another house which shares the peculiarities of Newton. Pencelli Castle Farm occupies the site of a medieval castle and like Newton it incorporates some medieval masonry. More significant is that both are built to the double-pile plan. At Pencelli the distinction between the two halves of the house is more pronounced; the front has a ground floor and one storey above, while the rear rises to a second floor. This is explained by the dimensions of the ground-floor front rooms which have a headroom of approximately sixteen feet. The present drawing room has a corbel stone at ceiling height which suggests that the

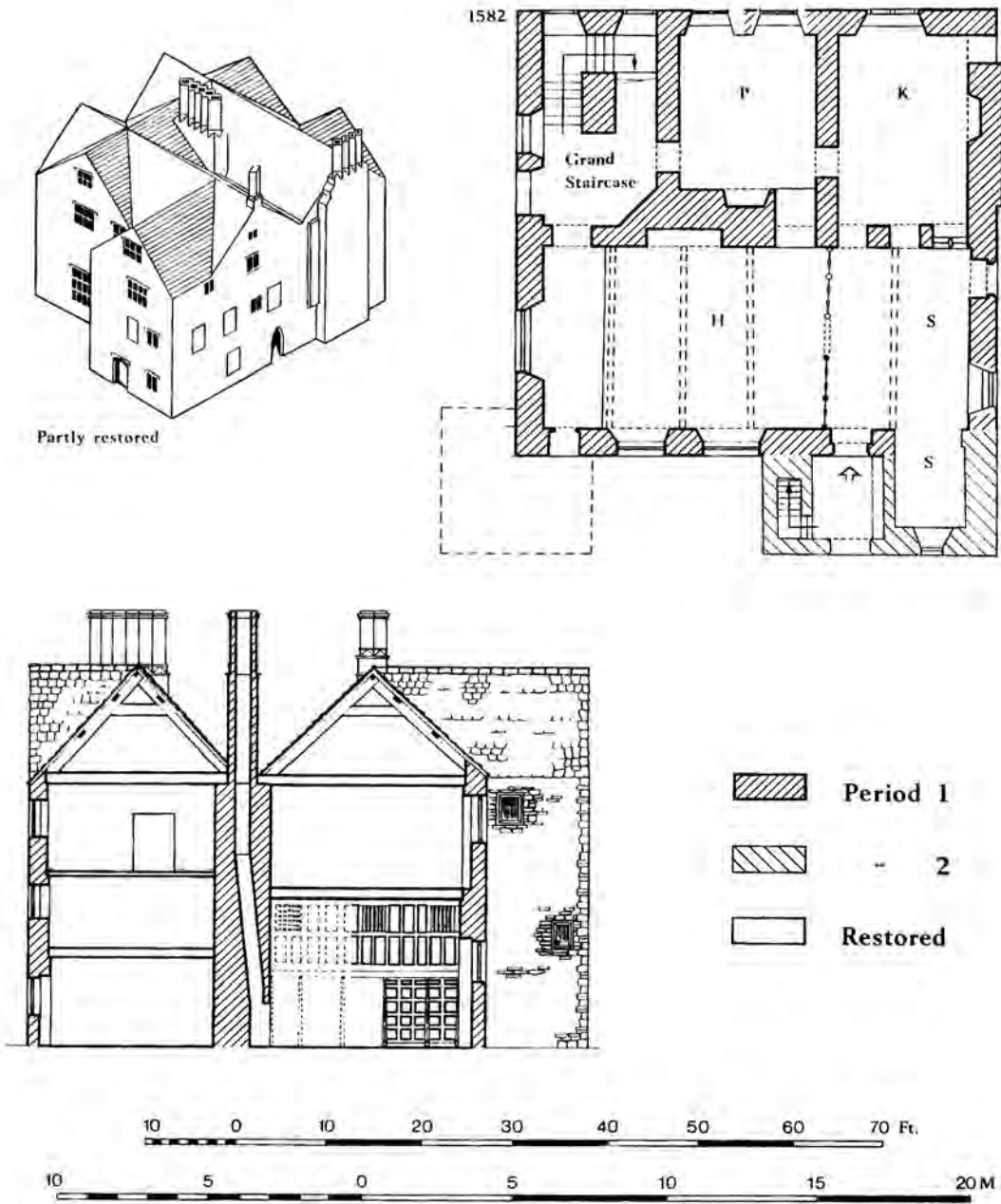


Fig. 1 Newton (from P. Smith, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* (1975), reproduced with the sanction of the Controller, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. *Crown copyright reserved*)

dimensions are original. The comparison with the hall at Newton is striking. The exact date of the house at Pencelli is uncertain. In the last century the date 1578 was noted 'over the door';²⁰ this is no longer visible but there is a date, 1583, scratched crudely on the front door. The closeness of both dates to that on the inscription at Newton is remarkable. That the design of one house influenced the other is made more probable by the family link between them. Sir John Games' sister Jane married Richard Herbert whose home was Pencelli.²¹ That two gentry houses should have used this unusual plan is surely no coincidence. What is puzzling is why it was adopted at such an early date in this area. As Peter Smith remarks, Newton seems to be 'the earliest Welsh example of a double-pile house'.²² Whitehall in Shrewsbury, built between 1578 and 1582, is considered to be the earliest dated example of the plan in England.²³ However, M. W. Barley in a paper on the incidence of the double-pile plan makes no reference to Newton and comments that 'rural examples are very rare before about 1630'.²⁴ The advantages of the plan are discussed by Barley and he points out the obvious economies. 'In proportion to floor area provided, the double pile required only about half as much material for external and internal walling' as the conventional plan.

The hundred and fifty years after the building of Newton are the best documented and were the most prosperous in the history of the house. The Games' circle of relations widened both socially and geographically. The sums of money available for the improvement and decoration of the house were considerable. Ironically it was not a Games but Thomas Walker – who married into the family – who contributed most to the late seventeenth-century splendour of the mansion; but his only surviving child was a daughter and with her marriage to Francis Jenkins of Hensol, Glamorgan, the Games connection with Newton was near its end. The dispersal of some of the contents in the 1720s did however result in the compilation of documents which add largely to our knowledge of the interior.²⁵ In addition to these lists of paintings, fireplaces and other embellishments there are two very informative inventories. The first, of 1614, was taken on the death of Sir John Games and contains a detailed survey of the contents of the house. Just over a century later Thomas Walker's widow died and an equally painstaking inventory was made on that occasion. The interpretation of these sources is not easy and some of the problems they raise will be unresolved, but they do make possible a fairly accurate reconstruction of the interior as well as throwing light on the changing status and function of the rooms.²⁶

Already by 1614 there had been some re-arrangements of the rooms on the ground floor. There are references to 'the Butterie' and 'the ould buttrye' and to the new and old parlours. There is no reason to believe that the house had been extended by this date so these changes indicate different uses of existing rooms. Perhaps they were connected with the insertion of the impressive screen at the lower end of the hall. The original timberwork is simple, even crude; in the early

seventeenth century classical decoration was applied and then c.1700 a large pedimented door-case was superimposed. Finally the proportions of the screen were ruined in the nineteenth century when the present staircase was inserted. It is not possible to determine the precise location of all the rooms mentioned in the 1614 inventory, but some are defined by their size or position. There can be no doubt that the hall, kitchen and service rooms were on the ground floor; but identifying the 'Dineinge Chamber' and the two parlours is more difficult. The most likely explanation is that the 'new parlour' and the 'Dineinge Chamber' were on the first floor and that the 'old parlour' was the room between the staircase and the kitchen.²⁷ The hall was no longer the social centre of the house and its various functions were being taken over by smaller rooms such as parlours and dining rooms. The desire for greater privacy was an important influence on this development. It is significant that in 1614 the 'Dineinge Chamber' contained the most expensive furnishings at Newton; here were the only examples of wall hangings: the 'five peeces of Arras' valued at £13 6s. 8d. By comparison the spartan furniture in the hall was worth only £3 5s. 0d. This suggests that the servants ate in the hall while the Games family dined upstairs in greater comfort.

By the early eighteenth century much had been done to change the appearance and uses of the rooms. The ground-floor 'ould parlour' of 1614 is described as the 'Withdrawing Room' in 1725. One of the lists of paintings makes it clear that the dining room was still on the first floor.²⁸ The most interesting addition to the rooms included in the eighteenth-century lists is 'The Great Parlour'. The one room sufficiently grand to warrant such a description is that over the hall. In 1614 it contained two beds and little other furniture and was referred to simply as 'the chamber over the hall'. A century later it had almost as many paintings as the hall²⁹ as well as two tables (one marble, the other 'alabaster sett in wood'), eight chairs, a couch and two 'Painted Skreens'. Today the room is one of the few at Newton to show some traces of its original decoration. There are fragments of seventeenth-century plasterwork on the walls beside the windows and above the fireplace (Plate 3). Below the 'Great Parlour' the hall had now regained some of its late medieval importance. It was furnished and decorated in a style appropriate to the formal centre of the building. Large paintings, Royal and family Arms covered the walls; the furniture included a big table and a reading stand but there was none of the more private, comfortable furniture which filled so many of the smaller rooms.

It is clear that in 1725 the house was furnished more completely than in 1614. The considerable number of chairs, tables, cabinets, looking-glasses and clocks testifies to the affluence of the owners. Exactly how much of this was bought by Thomas Walker is not known but he contributed significantly to the appearance of the interior in two ways. He purchased many paintings and by 1700 Newton housed a substantial collection.³⁰ Walker also spent lavishly on fireplaces.



Plate 3 Plasterwork in the Great Chambers: frieze and springer of ribbing.



Plate 4 A fragment of the original ornamental woodwork (in the sitting room).

A note of 1707 states, 'There are several valuable Pictures & Pieces of painting hung up and Several Marble and Glass Chimney pieces fixed in the walls'.³¹ An undated document headed a 'Note of Marble Pieces' identifies ten rooms and gives the value of the fireplace in each. The total is £315.³² One was presumably the 'Dapl'd Duffe Culer'd Chimney Pece' specified in a receipt and which cost Walker £18 0s. 0d.³³ The same room contains one of the few pieces of original ornamental woodwork (Plate 4), although this is probably not *in situ*.³⁴ It is likely that other improvements, which are not documented, date from the Walker era. The doorcases in the hall and the Great Parlour are quite imposing examples of late seventeenth-century design. However, the stairs which connect these two principal rooms, which were reconstructed c. 1700, are less impressive than expected; this is probably because they were built in the same position as the original stairs and here there was little room for a display of grandeur.³⁵ Many of the rooms were panelled. In the eighteenth century an inventory of the paintings refers to 'The Wainscott Chamber';³⁶ in 1872 the Cambrians were advised to look at the 'richly panelled Hall'.³⁷ At present there are some pieces of what look like seventeenth-century panelling in the room over the hall. Not content with these many alterations to the interior, Walker was probably responsible for the most striking change to the external appearance of Newton since 1582. The remodelling of the roof which resulted in the pyramidal structure to be seen today was completed c. 1700.³⁸ The only dated building outside the house is the large barn to the east which has a datestone of 1697 – further evidence of Walker's zeal for improvement.

Before dealing with the paintings which did more than anything else to beautify the house, something should be said about the man who was chiefly responsible for the Newton of 1700. Thomas Walker is the one owner of the house about whom a substantial body of information survives. That being said, one has to admit to some perplexity as to his birth and burial places.³⁹ Some of this confusion is explained by his wife's ancestry. Elizabeth was the daughter of Hoo Games whose unusual Christian name was derived from his maternal grandfather, Richard Hoo of Burnham Overy in Norfolk. It is this Norfolk link which explains why a Warwickshire gentleman who married a Breconshire heiress was to be interred in East Anglia.⁴⁰ Walker's marriage meant that he became closely involved in the affairs of his adopted town. As a lawyer of some eminence – he was Reader and later Treasurer of the Inner Temple⁴¹ – it is not surprising that he became Recorder of Brecon, an office he held from 1689 until his death in 1707. But like much else in his career this appointment was controversial: the previous Recorder, John Powell, in his letter of resignation had recommended Francis Lloyd for the position. The Corporation ignored Powell's advice and chose Walker.⁴² Hugh Thomas remarks on his generosity to the church of St. Mary in the town: 'In the year of our Lord 1691 [the church] was adorned with several fine Marble Tables of the Pater Noster, Ten Commandments and the Creed all in English by the bounty of the Worshipful Thomas Walker of Newton.'⁴³

However, Walker spent much of his time away from home, especially in London.⁴⁴ His personal accounts show regular payments to servants and officers of the Temple.⁴⁵ His absences from Newton meant that Elizabeth wrote to him giving local and family news as well as demanding special purchases to be made in London.

A few of these informative letters survive and they help to fill out the picture of Walker. His combative nature clearly involved him in some risky situations. In January 1688 Elizabeth chided her husband for concealing the news of 'yr being run through ye body'; she complained that the servants at Newton knew of the incident a fortnight ago but they had not ventured to tell their mistress.⁴⁶ During 1694–96 Walker was involved in a bitter legal battle with his brother-in-law Daniel Williams over the terms of Williams' marriage contract.⁴⁷ In this case Walker was accused of suborning a witness, Thomas Morgan, vicar of Llanfaes!⁴⁸ Apparently he had persuaded the vicar to supply false testimony; in return Walker would 'pay his debts and take him out of Goale'. (The choice of Thomas Morgan as an accomplice was unwise as he made at least two appearances in the ecclesiastical courts on charges of assault, immoderate drinking and conducting clandestine marriages.)⁴⁹ It is probable that Elizabeth was referring to this case when she wrote in June 1696, 'tis sorrowfull news to hear of another bout in chancery I pray God deliver us out of ye hands of our cruell Enemys.'⁵⁰

One advantage of having a husband living in London for part of the year was

that Elizabeth was in touch with the latest news and fashion. In January 1688 she concluded her letter with a request; 'Pray let me know if ye Court is still in mourning & wt is most worne'. Walker was also asked to buy things for his wife and to arrange their carriage to Brecon. 'We want six silver spoons & glass for ye chariot' she informed him and went on, 'If you can get any sauce pans or coper pots you may send ym by ye waggon'.⁵¹ The most interesting purchases Walker made in London were the paintings which adorned Newton. We do not know how many of the pictures were in the house before Walker's arrival but it is probable that he was chiefly responsible for accumulating the collection. There is evidence that he was buying pictures in 1689–90 and some of the purchases are listed in the inventories made later. In a letter of 8th October 1689 Edmund Clifford, who signed himself 'Good Cosin', wrote to Walker at Newton, 'I have bought as many pictures of Doyley as comes to 10 li'.⁵² For ten pounds he got seven pictures, the most expensive of which was the portrait of 'Anne of Bullen' at £3. The last of this batch, 'A Parrott with foure grapes; this I gott into the bargain', was put in the dining room under the portrait of Rosamund. On another occasion Clifford bought on his behalf a number of works from one George Prideaux.⁵³ Two of these were by renowned artists: 'Cane & Abell 13s. 'tis a true sketch of Tintorett' and 'Tantalus his head 6s. 'tis a true Originall of Rubens & worth 3 times that money'. One must beware of taking Prideaux's recommendations at their face value because he goes on to confide to Clifford that I want money extreamly'.

By the time he died Walker's collection was very considerable. A series of inventories of the paintings was drawn up in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁴ They give a brief description of each item, their places in particular rooms and, in some cases, their cost and later valuation. The most complete inventory lists nearly two hundred pieces.⁵⁵ The rooms at Newton are spacious but not enormous and when one takes into consideration the area occupied by windows, doors and fireplaces one begins to appreciate how impressive – not to say oppressive – such a collection would seem to a modern visitor. The number and style of pictures in each room were guides to its importance or to the taste of the occupant. Patriotism and loyalty were displayed in the hall with large portraits of James I and William III in addition to two equestrian statues of St. George, one marble, the other alabaster. The Great Parlour contained thirty pictures; they included such diverse subjects as Louis XIV, Biblical scenes and landscapes. One of the portraits was attributed to 'Sr Peter Lilly'.⁵⁶ A number of rooms had paintings over doorways or chimney pieces but only the dining room had 'One Large Seeling Piece'. One dined surrounded by Ladies: next to the chimney were Madam Walker and Madam Jenkins but 'On Each side of the window, Rosamont and Jane Shore'.⁵⁷ The only room in which the paintings followed one theme was in 'The Wainscoat Chamber being Madm Walker's Room'. Here the widow had gathered a collection of pictures on religious subjects. They included

the Holy Family, Saints Jerome, Ambrose and Sebastian, also exemplary works such as the picture over the fireplace, 'A Picture of Death's Head, the book of Life, and a letter giving warning'. However this conventional piety was not repeated in her daughter's Dressing Room where these items are noted: 'Lucretia after young Tarquin ravished her'; 'Mary Magdalen'; 'The Grand Cham of Tartary's Mistress'.

Elizabeth Walker died in 1725 but a few years earlier preparations were in hand for the dispersal of the collection. The compilation of the inventories in 1722 supports the idea that the pictures were to be divided among the family or sold. Letters from two Hereford dealers show some of the negotiations involved. Thomas Winston looked out the better works and offered £50 for them. His rather disparaging remarks about the pictures obviously upset Madam Walker but he justified his attitude writing that 'I will assure yu that I think I bid yu as much or more than they are worth'.⁵⁸ A second opinion was more encouraging. James Hill in a letter to Daniel Williams, Elizabeth Walker's brother-in-law, commented that 'There are several good pictures in the collection' but that some of the works were suffering from the effects of 'Time and negligence'. Hill complained that his job of sifting through the paintings was made more difficult because of 'the removal of the pictures into the same room, having made the catalogue useless'.⁵⁹ We do not know how many pictures Hill or the other dealers bought but some certainly remained in the house. In 1748 a list was drawn up entitled an 'Account of the Pictures in the Hall'.⁶⁰ This describes twenty-one items, most of which can be traced in the earlier inventories. The hall now contained a motley collection taken from almost all the rooms in the house. Whether the rest of Newton was now bare of pictures and this remnant was all that remained of Walker's splendid display is not clear.

How representative of Welsh houses was Newton in terms of furnishings and decoration?⁶¹ It is not easy to find houses of comparable status with similar contents.⁶²

The few contemporary references to paintings in Welsh houses reinforce the impression that Newton was a spectacular exception to the general rule.⁶³ An inventory of Abermarlais, made in 1756, describes a house of similar size which contained twenty-one pictures.⁶⁴ Even Hafod, that extraordinary cultural mecca of nineteenth-century west Wales, was furnished with only fifty paintings.⁶⁵ Samuel Pepys, a contemporary of Walker, left on his death sixty-one pictures, thirty-three of which were portraits.⁶⁶ But only one collection that I know of provides a close and revealing comparison with Newton. This was assembled by a Londoner, William Cartwright, actor and bookseller during the reign of Charles II.⁶⁷ Cartwright had two hundred and thirty-nine pictures, few of much value and only a handful attributed to named artists. The subjects were similar to those at Newton and both collections contained a few Dutch works of the sort which were becoming popular in the later seventeenth century. Such comparisons

suggest that in this case at least provincial taste and style did not lag far behind the capital.

Today none of Walker's pictures are at Newton. It is not known what happened to the contents of the house after the estate was divided and sold during the eighteenth century. In Victorian times the once impressive house presented the sad appearance which prompted the comments quoted at the beginning of this paper. Today Newton is part of the Abercamlais estate but only a small part of it is occupied.⁶⁸ There are a few elusive reminders of Thomas Walker and the Games family in Brecon. A nineteenth-century local historian claimed that the bells of St. Mary's were donated by Walker.⁶⁹ The chapel of Christ College contains a splendid brass chandelier inscribed, 'The Gift of Elizabeth Walker of Newton, 1723'. Her memory is also preserved in the Games Almshouses which she and her sister endowed in the suburb of Llanfaes. The contract for their construction specified that a handsome inscription and coat-of-arms be placed on the front of the hospital.⁷⁰ But anyone searching for this will be disappointed. In the nineteenth century the Games Hospital was completely rebuilt in an undistinguished style and the imposing memorial to the donors was not preserved.⁷¹

I am grateful to my colleague, Mr. A. J. Hughes, who took the photographs illustrating this article.

EDWARD PARRY

Notes

¹ *Arch. Camb.*, 1851, Vol. II, New Series, p. 37 footnote.

² *Ibid.*, 1862, Vol. VIII, Third Series, pp. 155–6.

³ Hugh Thomas, *Essay Towards The History of Brecknockshire 1698*, pp. 42–3, pub. Brecknock Museum, 1967.

⁴ See for example, Peter Smith, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* (London, HMSO 1975); John B. Hilling *The Historic Architecture of Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1976); Richard Haslam, *The Buildings of Wales: Powys* (Penguin and University of Wales Press, 1979); *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan, Vol. IV, Part I: The Greater Houses*. (HMSO, Cardiff, 1981).

⁵ See the articles by S. R. Jones and J. T. Smith in *Brycheiniog*, Vol. XI, (1965), pp. 24–30.

⁶ 'Etifedd Hena' i.e. the eldest heir; presumably an indication of the system of partible inheritance. The motto 'Ar Dduw y Gyd' can be translated as 'All things depend on God'.

⁷ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁸ Theophilus Jones, *A History of the County of Brecknock*, Vol. II, p. 719 (Edition of 1809).

⁹ S. R. Jones and J. T. Smith, *op. cit.*; R. Haslam, *op. cit.*; P. Smith, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ *The Black Book of St. Davids* (Cymmrodorion Record Series, No. 5), pp. 306–311.

¹¹ Penpont Supp., 781. The most important source for this article is the collection of Penpont papers at the National Library of Wales. Those relating to Newton are calendared in 'A Supplementary Schedule of the Penpont Deeds and Documents' (1975). Hereafter they are referred to as Penpont Supp. I wish to thank the staff at the National Library for their courtesy and assistance.

¹² Haslam, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

¹³ Penpont Supp., 861.

¹⁴ See below.

¹⁵ The documents concerning the dissolution of the Friary and the subsequent establishment of the College are discussed in *The College of Christ of Brecknock 1538–1811*, P. V. Davies, F.S.A. (Brecknock Museum, 1968).

¹⁶ Cecil MSS, Hatfield House, 214/215.

¹⁷ For the family tree, see Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–169.

¹⁸ See 'The Houses of Radnorshire, Part III', H. Brooksby in *Trans. Radnorshire Society*, Vol. XL, 1970.

¹⁹ S. R. Jones and J. T. Smith, 'Houses of Breconshire, Part II' in *Brycheiniog* Vol. X, pp. 86–90, 1964.

²⁰ *Arch. Camb.*, Vol. III, Fourth Series, 1872, p. 390.

²¹ Jones, *op. cit.*, II, p. 173.

²² P. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

²³ S. R. Jones and J. T. Smith, *op. cit.*

²⁴ M. W. Barley, 'The Double Pile House' in *Archaeological Journal* 136, 1979, p. 255.

²⁵ e.g. Penpont Supp., 1582–4, 1592.

²⁶ For the conventional arrangement of rooms at this time see M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 104 et seq.

²⁷ The inventory refers to the 'Cockloft' over the parlour implying that the new parlour was upstairs. The eighteenth-century evidence points to an upstairs dining room; this may have been the case as early as 1614.

²⁸ Penpont Supp., 1592.

²⁹ The various lists give different totals for the same rooms; the hall had 36 or 33, the Great Parlour 26 or 30.

³⁰ See below for a discussion of the paintings.

³¹ Penpont Supp., 1114 and 1115.

³² Penpont Supp., 1597, c. 1710–1720.

³³ Penpont Supp., 1580.

³⁴ The Inventory of Paintings (Penpont Supp., 1592) includes a reference to 'a Fine Piece of Carved work'.

³⁵ The form of the staircase – wide, shallow treads round a masonry column – indicates that this is the position of the original stairs of 1582.

³⁶ Penpont Supp., 1592.

³⁷ *Arch. Camb.*, Vol. III, Fourth Series, 1872, p. 390.

³⁸ Jones and Smith, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Theophilus Jones describes him as 'of Oxfordshire' whereas the Admissions Records of the Inner Temple give him as from Ratley, Warwickshire. Dugdale claims that he was buried at Ratley (see *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, Vol. I, p. 540, 2nd. edition, 1730) but the Rev. F. Blomefield in his *Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (1739–1775) says that he was buried in the church at Burnham Overy (Vol. VII, p. 26). The latter is correct.

⁴⁰ Penpont Supp., 1233. This is a receipt, dated 27th April, 1710, for a monument to Walker; it is signed by Edward Stanton, a well-known sculptor of funerary memorials. This work, paid for by Walker's widow, was sent to Norfolk. In the church at Burnham Overy there is a monument to Walker (see Blomefield *op. cit.*) but no evidence that it is Stanton's work. Gunnis in his *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660–1851* gives a list of Stanton's commissions but does not mention this memorial.

⁴¹ Admissions Records of the Inner Temple refer to his admission on 19th November, 1662. See also J. E. Martin, *Masters of the Bench of . . . the Inner Temple* (1883).

⁴² Minutes of Brecon Common Council, 1667–1807, 130v.

⁴³ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Interesting material on Walker's domestic and legal business is contained in MS. 21954 D, at N.L.W.

⁴⁵ Penpont Supp., 1183.

⁴⁶ Penpont Supp., 640.

⁴⁷ MS. 21954 D.

⁴⁸ Penpont Supp., 629.

⁴⁹ SD/CCB/G 81 and SD/CCB/147 at N.L.W.

⁵⁰ Penpont Supp., 1580.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Penpont Supp., 1575.

⁵³ Penpont Supp., 1578.

⁵⁴ Penpont Supp., 1592, 1582–4. The first of these lists is undated, the other three are all of 1722. It seems likely that they were compiled when some of the contents of the house were sold. This is confirmed by the survival of letters to Hereford dealers about the paintings (see below).

⁵⁵ The numbers given in each list vary between 172 and 192.

⁵⁶ Other attributions are to Cornelius Johnson, van Dyck and James Fellowes. In the correspondence about the purchase of pictures there are references to works by Rubens and Tintoretto.

⁵⁷ An odd juxtaposition; two ladies of Newton confronted by two royal mistresses.

⁵⁸ Penpont Supp., 1586.

⁵⁹ Penpont Supp., 1589.

⁶⁰ Penpont Supp., 1588.

⁶¹ I would like to thank Dr. Prys Morgan and Dr. Hugh Dunthorne, both of the University College of Swansea, for their helpful advice on contemporary artistic taste and picture collecting.

⁶² Interesting comments on the arrangement and hanging of paintings are to be found in P. Thornton, *Seventeenth Century Decoration in England, France and Holland* (Yale University Press, 1978). But this book, like others on the same subject, takes most of its examples from the great aristocratic houses and is of little relevance to Newton.

⁶³ See for example R. Charles, 'Some Penrice Pictures' in *Glamorgan Historian*, Vol. 3, pp. 213–219.

⁶⁴ Major Francis Jones, 'Welsh Interiors: Abermarlais', in *Arch. Camb.*, Vol. CXVI, 1967.

⁶⁵ B. J. Malkin, *Scenery, Antiquities & Biography of South Wales*, Vol. 2, pp. 71–87 (London, 1807).

⁶⁶ I am grateful to R. C. Latham, Esq., of Magdalene College, Cambridge for information about Pepys' pictures and for a copy of the Inventory of his paintings made in 1824 (b MS Eng; 991 Houghton Lib., Harvard).

⁶⁷ The Catalogue of William Cartwright's collection is Dulwich College MS No. XIV. My thanks are due to G. A. Waterfield, Esq., Director of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, for information on Cartwright.

⁶⁸ I am very grateful to the present tenants of Newton, Mr. and Mrs. David Evans, for their patient co-operation while I was writing this article.

⁶⁹ James Williams, *Brecon and its Neighbourhood* (Brecon, 1868) p. 71. This claim is contradicted by the evidence of the bells themselves; they were cast in 1750 and the inscriptions on them make no mention of Thomas Walker. Mr. Bryan Williams kindly supplied this information about the St. Mary's bells.

⁷⁰ Penpont Supp., 1056, 1238, 1240.

⁷¹ John Wood's Plan of Brecon (1834) shows the almshouses on their original alignment i.e. facing west towards Newton, not as they are today facing south, parallel to the main road.

CONQUERORS, COURTIERS AND CAREERISTS: THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY IN BRYCHEINIOG 1093–1282

‘The first conqueror of the three cantrefs of the land of Brycheiniog was Bernard of Neufmarché, a Norman’. So begins the medieval tract recounting the history of Brecon and its lords.¹ That conquest had probably begun in the late 1080s and had so far progressed by 1093 that Bernard’s forces were able to defeat and kill the predominant king of south Wales, Rhys ap Tewdwr, with whom, declared the Welsh chronicler writing in Llanbadarn Fawr, ‘there fell the kingdom of the Britons’.² It is likely that Bernard was now able to mark his advance into Wales with the building of Brecon castle.³ Thereafter it is possible to trace the development of the Anglo-Norman regime in Brycheiniog through the next two centuries.

On Bernard’s death, which occurred by the mid 1120s, his lordship passed to his son-in-law Miles of Gloucester.⁴ The lordship of Brecon passed in due course to Miles’s eldest son Roger and then to Roger’s three brothers in turn, Walter, Henry and Mahel.⁵ All of the brothers died without male children with the result that on Mahel’s death in 1175 the whole of the inheritance was divided amongst his three sisters Margaret, Bertha and Lucy. The lordship of Brecon, together with northern Gwent fell to the share of Bertha, who had married William II de Braose.⁶ De Braose was already lord of Builth and Radnor, and now acquired a substantial addition to an already formidable bloc of Marcher territory. The son of Bertha and William II, William III de Braose, for long enjoyed the favour of King John, and it seemed that nothing could prevent him from turning Brecon into the core territory of a huge Marcher empire. To the territories already mentioned, royal favour enabled him to add the farm of the county of Hereford, the custody of the castles of Glamorgan and Gwynllwg, the whole lordship of Gower and the castles of Grosmont, Skenfrith and Llantilio (White Castle).⁷ Here we have a prime example of progress through the favour of the royal court. But, particularly with John, royal favour could turn to suspicion and deadly hostility, and so it was in the case of William de Braose: in 1207 John began to turn on the erstwhile favourite, and by 1211 William, hounded from all of his lands, had died an exile in France, and his wife and eldest son had been starved to death in John’s prison.⁸

On the fall of William de Braose the lordship of Brecon was partitioned by John, with one third of it converted into a new lordship of Blaenllyfni, and granted to another of the king’s favourites Peter fitz Herbert, whose father had married Lucy, daughter of Mahel of Gloucester and who had nursed a claim to the territory.⁹ Amongst the surviving de Braoses, it is not surprising to find two, Giles bishop of Hereford and Reginald, amongst the opponents of King John in the troubles of his later years. Working together they occupied most of the

lordships that had been held by William; opportunistic transfers of allegiance between the royal and baronial factions saw Giles, before his death in 1215, and then Reginald, confirmed in their possession of those lands though the latter had to accept the insistence of the government of John's successor, the boy king Henry III, that he should accept Peter fitz Herbert's control of Blaenllyfni.¹⁰

On Reginald's death in 1228 he was succeeded as lord of Brecon and the other Marcher lordships by his son William. Within a year William was captured by Llywelyn the Great of Gwynedd in the course of a war in Ceri. William was freed on the promise of a ransom of 2000 marks, the marriage of his daughter Isabella to Llywelyn's son and heir Dafydd, and the transfer by way of dowry of the lordship of Builth to the Welsh ruler. Notoriously, on a visit to Llywelyn's court in 1230 William de Braose was discovered carrying on an affair with the prince's wife Joan, and was swiftly executed.¹¹ William died without male issue and once again the lordship of Brecon, along with the other de Braose territories, passed into royal custody. Their keeping was entrusted in turn to the Justiciar, Hubert de Burgh, the king's brother Richard earl of Cornwall and then Gilbert, the Earl Marshall. In 1241 Henry III allowed the lordship of Brecon to pass into the possession of Humphrey de Bohun, the husband of Eleanor, one of the de Braose heiresses.¹² Humphrey was the son of the earl of Hereford, and with only relatively brief interludes the lordship of Brecon would remain in the hands of the de Bohun family until the line failed in the later 14th century. The hold of the fitz Herberts on Blaenllyfni was less long-lived, but still endured into the early 14th century.¹³

Such was the succession of Anglo-Norman magnates to the lordships of Brecon and Blaenllyfni. Those lordships and their constituent elements were the product of conquest. But conquest involves several complex processes: after initial acquisition there must come consolidation. Important amongst the elements in consolidation was the foundation of towns, which might have multiple functions, such as developing market activity and increasing the supply of cash in the region, which would have the effect of binding the rural population into the economy of the lordship, and attracting settlers who would in turn increase the availability of military manpower.¹⁴ But urban commercial growth could be slow and might itself generate ethnic tensions; external support might be required to buttress the position of the marcher lords. It has become a commonplace of modern historiography that the original, somewhat buccaneering, phase of conquest was by the late 12th century replaced by a growing reliance of the Marcher lords on the resources of the English crown to help them stabilise, retain and on occasion advance, their position in the March.¹⁵ At the highest level, therefore, the consolidation of conquest involved the favour and cooperation of the royal court. A further element in that consolidation of lordship was the process of sub-infeudation, according to which sub-lordships were created and Anglo-Norman power was extended downwards, closer to the grassroots of society. Thus the Baskervilles emerged as lords of Pencelli until the

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failure of the male line in 1210; the Pichards became lords of Tretower in Ystrad Yw Uchaf, at first part of Brecon and subsequently of Blaenllyfni; the Cliffords acquired Cantref Selyf with its castle of Bronllys until they were replaced by the Giffards in the 1260s; and the Turbervilles acquired Crickhowell, Ystrad Yw Isaf.¹⁶ These are merely the most prominent families in the settlement of much of the lordship of Brecon by the Anglo-Norman knightly class. In a particularly valuable discussion Dr Brock Holden has shown that in the course of the 12th and 13th centuries the members of that class had increasingly concentrated their holdings within specific lordships – thus families might split into two or more branches, with one branch holding in Brecon and another or others holding in say, Herefordshire.¹⁷ This deepened the commitment of those who held in Marcher lordships such as Brecon to hang on to their holdings in those lordships, and when a family held its lands of only one lord, a fitz Herbert or a de Bohun for example, then the bond of loyalty to that lord was greatly strengthened. A further element in the consolidation of lordship was the construction, and in some cases the reconstruction, of castles. It is clear that between the late 11th and 13th century over a score of Anglo-Norman castles were constructed within the lordships of Brecon and Blaenllyfni with more in the adjoining lordships of Builth and Hay. The castles and the obligation of the knights to help to defend them remained crucial to the Anglo-Norman grip on Brycheiniog, precisely because that grip was by no means secure. It was hardly the case that, as is often assumed, ‘the firm early hold [of the Anglo-Norman conquerors] was rarely weakened.’¹⁸ Indeed for much of the two centuries that followed Bernard of Neufmarche’s first incursions into Wales Brycheiniog resembled a war zone.

Up to this point it has been possible to sketch the development of the lordships of Brycheiniog in terms of the activities of Anglo-Norman lords, knights and soldiery and Anglo-Norman institutions with hardly a reference to the Welsh response to the conquerors. And though such a one-sided, or at best two-dimensional, view has tended to be the norm, it generates rather less than half of the story. Let us look first at Welsh military intervention in the region. It seems that that began very early: it is hinted at by the chronicler who compiled the (lost) Latin text that underlies the vernacular chronicle *Brut y Tywysogion*. Under 1096 that chronicle records that

The Britons of Brycheiniog and Gwent and Gwynllwg threw off the rule of the French . . . and after that the French moved a host to Brycheiniog and thought to ravage the whole land, but, having failed to accomplish their thoughts, as they were returning they were slain by the sons of Idnerth ap Cadwgan, Gruffudd and Ifor, in the place called Aber-Llech [close to Ystradgynlais]¹⁹

It is probable that the chronicler is recording that the Welsh regained much if not all of Brycheiniog only three years after Bernard’s triumph over Rhys ap

Tewdwr. But it is noteworthy that the Welsh leaders who defeated the Anglo-Norman force at Aber-Llech were not men of Brycheiniog. They can be identified as representatives of the dynasty of Elystan Glodrydd, reputed founder of the ruling house of Rhwng Gwy a Hafren – a territory comprising the later county of Radnorshire and the land of Builth.²⁰ 1096 is not the last time that the presence of that dynasty in Brycheiniog is noted for under 1099 we find that ‘Llywelyn ap Cadwgan was slain by the men of Brycheiniog’.²¹ Llywelyn ap Cadwgan was the uncle of the brothers who were victorious at Aber-Llech in 1096. Genealogical evidence of the late 12th and early 13th century suggests that he is to be associated with Builth.²² And in 1101 the chronicle records the death at an unspecified location of Goronwy ap Cadwgan – brother of the man killed in 1099.²³ I have argued elsewhere that this sequence of events represents a record of the establishment of the dynasty of Elystan Glodrydd in Brycheiniog, after they were driven out of much of the realm between Wye and Severn in the early and mid-1090s by the advancing forces of Hugh Mortimer and Philip de Braose.²⁴ It seems probable that they established themselves in Brycheiniog following a Welsh insurgency in southeast Wales and that they may have met opposition not only from Anglo-Norman forces but also from the Welsh community of the land. I have suggested that the anonymous praise poem *Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy* should be dated to the year 1101, and that it was composed to mark Hywel’s accession to the realm of Brycheiniog in succession to his father Goronwy ap Cadwgan, an accession celebrated in the line ‘the land of Brycheiniog [is] your true right, may everyone see that.’²⁵ That there was opposition to Hywel and his family from within Brycheiniog is suggested by the poet’s declaration that ‘all the chieftains who attempt then a plan of oppression, boldly Hywel will drive them away.’²⁶ But in 1102 Hywel ap Goronwy was given Ystrad Tywi, Cydweli and Gower by Henry I, as part of that monarch’s reordering of much of Wales in the aftermath of the rebellion of Robert of Bellême.²⁷ It seems likely that in the process Hywel renounced his interests in Brycheiniog, leaving Bernard of Neufmarché free to resume his occupation of that territory.

That the Anglo-Norman hold on Brycheiniog was not uniformly secure is suggested by the chronicle accounts of the Welsh political and military revival that began in the mid-1130s: a Hywel ap Maredudd ‘of Brycheiniog’, of uncertain ancestry, is recorded in the *Brut* as joining the fighting in Ceredigion, with his two sons, Rhys and Maredudd. That the conflict spread into Brycheiniog was suggested both by the report in the *Gesta Stephani* that Baldwin fitzGilbert, despatched by King Stephen to put down Welsh risings in south Wales in 1136, made his base at Brecon castle, but was unable to proceed any further because of the strength of the forces arrayed against him. The seriousness of the challenge to Anglo-Norman control of Brycheiniog was underlined by Gerald of Wales, who commented, in his discussion of the history of that region, on the fact that the

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elders of the land could recall events associated with the devastation caused by Hywel ap Maredudd. Though far from precise, it is possible that this is a reference to the leader of that name who was active in 1136. And Gerald's comment was made in the context of an observation that similar events had been seen in his own day, in connection with the great war in which the sons [perhaps more credibly the grandsons?] of Iestyn ap Gwrgant, a dynasty associated with western Morgannwg, had devastated the whole region.²⁸ In the following generation the rise to power of the lord Rhys in south-west Wales also impacted on Brycheiniog, for in 1168 Rhys launched an attack on that land. Frustrated and driven back in his first attack he gathered a large army and returned, succeeding in ravaging much of Brycheiniog and in destroying the castle of Builth. Following diplomatic intervention by the government of Henry II Rhys withdrew – but the exercise had demonstrated the fragility of the central March in the face of attacks by an able Welsh leader.²⁹ It appears that Rhys was once more active in Brycheiniog in or shortly before 1194, when he stole the torque of St Cynog from the church of Merthyr Cynog in Cantref Selyf and took it, symbolically, to Dinefwr. That event may have been long presaged, for Dr Angharad Elias has drawn attention to the *Canu i Ddewi* of Gwynfardd Brycheiniog, court poet to the Lord Rhys, which seems to show that Rhys had an interest in establishing the subordination of the cult of Cynog to that of St David some years before the seizure of the torque.³⁰ 1194 may not have been the last time that Rhys's power was felt in Brycheiniog: in 1196, in his last great campaign, he harried the de Braose lands of Radnor and Elfael just to the north.³¹ A profound sense of insecurity, as much as pathologically violent inclination, may underlie the oppressions and atrocities that were perpetrated against prominent Welshmen of the region after the de Braose succession to Brecon and northern Gwent.

The death of the lord Rhys in 1197 opened the way for a bid, remarkably successful despite occasional reverses, by Gwenwynwyn ab Owain Cyfeiliog of Powys to establish political hegemony over much of Wales. In the course of the following years Gwenwynwyn's forces appeared several times in the central March. Undeterred by the failure of the Welsh coalition that he had apparently organised to capture Painscastle in Elfael in 1198, he raided into the lands of William de Braose between 1202 and 1204, and on de Braose's fall in 1208 Gwenwynwyn again moved into the region of Brycheiniog when he attacked King John's protégé, Peter fitz Herbert in the lordship of Blaenllyfni.³² After his apparently treacherous seizure by King John during a meeting at Shrewsbury later in 1208, the threat from Gwenwynwyn all but disappeared.³³ That is not to say, however, that the lordship of Brecon and its neighbours enjoyed a period of tranquillity.

In the aftermath of the fall of William de Braose in the years 1208–11 the western reaches of the lordship were at times used as a base by members of the family of the Lord Rhys, who were contending with their kinsmen for power in

Deheubarth. Thus in 1213 the Welsh chronicle records that Rhys ap Gruffudd, grandson of the Lord Rhys ‘moved a mighty host from Brycheiniog and came by force to the land of Ystrad Tywi’ to encounter his uncle Rhys Fychan (Rhys Gryg). In the ensuing fighting Rhys Fychan withdrew, leaving his castle of Llandovery to face probable siege, whereupon the chronicle records that Rhys ap Gruffudd once more went to Brycheiniog: ‘and along with a mighty host of French and Welsh he came before Llandovery’ which he proceeded to force to surrender.³⁴ More significantly, in the years following the fall of William de Braose and the seizure of Gwenwynwyn the lordships of Brycheiniog were increasingly the focus of the interest, and at times the anger, of Llywelyn the Great of Gwynedd. The first signs of this appear as early as 1209 when Llywelyn was associated with a group of Cistercian abbots as arbitrators in a dispute over apparent encroachments by Strata Florida upon the lands and rights in Cantref Selyf of Abbey Dore.³⁵ A less peaceful side of Llywelyn was seen in 1217 when, according to the Welsh chronicle, he was enraged by the decision of Reginald de Braose, his former ally, to make his peace with the government of Henry III:

And he moved a host against Reginald, and made for Brycheiniog and arrayed forces, and went against Brecon and planned to destroy the town completely. And the burgesses, unable to resist him, came to him and with the help of Rhys Ieuanc ap Gruffudd they made peace with him, and gave him five hostages from amongst the most gentle folk of the town against their paying him a hundred marks for peace for the town.³⁶

Nor did the lordships of Brycheiniog escape the effects of the war of 1223, when Llywelyn, after occupying the castles of Kinnerley and Alberbury in the northern March, confronted the forces of both Henry III and the Earl Marshal.³⁷ It is clear that in one episode of the conflict Llywelyn besieged the castle of Builth, and it must have been in a clash related to that campaign that he captured a number of the magnates of Brycheiniog. An entry on the Patent Roll records an arrangement made on 9th October, relating to men being held by Llywelyn, shortly after the prince and the government of Henry III had had agreed terms of peace and brought the conflict to an end.³⁸ Several magnates of the March, including Walter de Clifford and Hugh Mortimer, were enjoined to make an undertaking. The terms were that if Llywelyn should release a number of prisoners, Roger Pichard, John Waldeboef, David de Burghill, Henry de Fraxino, Robert de Burghill, Hugo de Radnor and John fitz Michael they should be returned to him on a specific date, unless those appointed as assessors of the damage done to the king by Llywelyn and his men should judge that the prisoners ought to be freed. The arrangement presumably allowed the prisoners the opportunity to collect their own ransoms, while providing that that might not be necessary if the assessors deemed that Llywelyn had no right to them. Several of the prisoners

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can be readily identified as members of prominent families from, or closely connected with, the lordships of Brecon and Blaenllyfni.³⁹ They may have been captured in fighting occasioned by Llywelyn's siege of Builth, but it is also possible that they were taken in an engagement occasioned by a foray into Brycheiniog itself. The royal army that was assembled to force Llywelyn's withdrawal from the central March can be tracked on its progress from Hereford to Montgomery.⁴⁰ The force was at Hereford on 19th September and at Bronllys on 20th. By 24th it had returned to Hereford, from where it moved to Leominster. The appearance of the force at Bronllys is interesting; it may represent a stopping-place in an approach to Builth, but Bronllys lies some way off the direct line of march to Builth. This suggests that there may have been some need for a show of strength in the lordship of Blaenllyfni, and that there may have been fighting in that region.

Again, in 1231 after the close of the period of de Braose lordship the chronicle reports that 'strife grew afresh between the Lord Llywelyn and the King, and Llywelyn destroyed Montgomery and Brecon and Hay and Radnor and burned them all.'⁴¹ Two years later in 1233 'Llywelyn and a mighty host along with him, went to Brycheiniog and he burned all the towns and castles that were in that land, and he carried many spoils away with him. And he manfully laid siege to the castle of Brecon every day for a whole month with catapults, and he threw the walls to the ground. And yet he left the castle for fear and burned the whole town.' Llywelyn's progress through the Brycheiniog March was doubtless helped by the impact on the region of his (temporary) ally, Richard Marshall, who, in pursuit of his own objectives, destroyed the Pichard castle of Tretower.⁴²

Llywelyn had clearly had designs on the territories of the March of Brycheiniog and nearby lordships. But he was by no means committed solely to shows of force to establish his dominance in the region. He could also countenance rather more subtle approaches; in this respect his marriage plans for his children were particularly significant. One reason for his outrage at the 1217 reconciliation of Reginald de Braose and an English government with which Llywelyn was at odds was that two years previously the prince had arranged the marriage of his daughter Gwladus Ddu with Reginald.⁴³ Gwladus remained Reginald's wife until his death in 1228, after which she was given in marriage to another potential obstacle to Llywelyn's ambitions, Ralph Mortimer of Wigmore.⁴⁴ Another daughter, Margaret, was used to discomfort Reginald after his defection of 1217 for she was married off to John de Braose, Reginald's nephew, who had advanced a claim to the de Braose lordships, and was given great encouragement by Llywelyn.⁴⁵ On John de Braose's death in 1232 Llywelyn kept up his dynastic pressure in the region by arranging Margaret's next marriage to Walter Clifford of Clifford and Cantref Selyf. Most significant of all in 1229/30 Llywelyn had arranged the marriage of his son Dafydd to Isabella the daughter of Reginald de Braose's successor at Brecon, William. We have seen that in 1230 William was

executed by Llywelyn for his alleged affair with the prince's wife.⁴⁶ But Llywelyn was unwilling to allow anything as trivial as an execution to deflect him from his purpose. He wrote to William's widow and her brother William Marshall, to ask whether they were still willing for the marriage arrangement to proceed, pointing out that he, Llywelyn, could see no reason why it should not.⁴⁷ The marriage went ahead and Llywelyn's bailiffs moved into the lordship of Builth as previously arranged as part of the marriage settlement. From there they immediately began to interfere in the affairs of the lordship of Brecon, principally in support of a Welsh magnate of that lordship, Madog Fychan. It was reported that Llywelyn's forces had entered the land of Brycheiniog on three separate forays, taking plunder and prisoners, as part of a campaign aimed at securing agreement that Madog Fychan could hold his lands in that land from Llywelyn.⁴⁸ At a later period in Llywelyn's life, the fact that Henry III's government took care to include tenants of the honour of Brecknock in a prohibition against performing homage to Dafydd ap Llywelyn in 1238 strongly suggests that Llywelyn's sphere of influence extended into Brycheiniog.⁴⁹

Llywelyn the Great might raid Brycheiniog and inflict massive damage on its lordships, and he might play marital politics, at times with unseemly earnestness, but though he was able to take neighbouring territories under control it is unlikely that he was able to bring the lordship of Brecon securely into his possession. His son Dafydd appears in turn to have threatened Brycheiniog in the course of his drive through central Wales in 1244–45. At some point in that period Dafydd issued letters of protection for the lands of Abbey Dore to a group of bailiffs of Builth, whom he addresses as his beloved and faithful men; they included Madog Fychan, probably to be identified as the man of that name who was at the centre of the disputes of 1230. Now, Dore held no lands in the land of Builth itself, and so it would appear that Dafydd's bailiffs were being instructed to protect the abbey's possessions in nearby Cantref Selyf.⁵⁰ Again, in the course of the later 1250s and early 1260s, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd succeeded in re-establishing and even exceeding that dominance in Welsh affairs that his grandfather Llywelyn Fawr had enjoyed. By 1262 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was able to lead his forces into Brycheiniog to receive the homage of the men of that land.⁵¹ It seems that the region remained in a highly unstable condition: early in 1263 royal officials reported that Llywelyn had taken homage and fealty from the men of the lordships of the region, so that 'the whole March is in terror' and that 'the whole Welshry up to the confines of Abergavenny' had turned to Llywelyn.⁵² On the other hand it is also clear that royal forces were still able to move quite freely along the Usk valley between Brecon and Abergavenny.⁵³ In 1264/5 it seems likely that much of the military initiative in the region passed from Llywelyn to Henry III's son, the future Edward I, who captured a stronghold that Llywelyn had apparently built to the west of Brecon. In 1266 Edward's principal ally in the March, Roger Mortimer, had taken over the role of opposing Llywelyn in

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Brycheiniog, where he was decisively worsted by the prince.⁵⁴ The situation was confused by disunity within the de Bohun family in the face of the state of civil war that existed in England, and indeed in the March, in the mid-1260s. Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford was, from the Battle of Lewes 1264, a prisoner of Simon de Montfort's baronial faction, whilst his son, also Humphrey, had fought and was wounded in Simon's cause at Lewes and was to die with Simon at Evesham in 1265.⁵⁵ The de Bohun heir to Brecon – inevitably also called Humphrey – was a minor, and the custody of the lordship was granted to Gilbert de Clare, lord of Glamorgan, until in the Treaty of Montgomery of 1267 Brecon, along with many other territories in the March, was confirmed as part of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's newly recognised principality of Wales.⁵⁶ The Anglo-Norman conquest of Brycheiniog had, it seemed, finally been undone.

It was not of course to be: in a process that we shall examine shortly Llywelyn's control of Brecon was put under mounting pressure; the town of Brecon itself seems to have been once more under de Bohun control by 1273 and by September of 1273 Hugh de Turberville at Crughywel and Reginald fitzPeter at Blaenllyfni were engaged in warfare with the prince, and by the end of Llywelyn's war with Edward I in 1276-77 the whole lordship had returned to de Bohun hands.⁵⁷ Even that, however, is not quite the end of the story of the involvement of the house of Gwynedd with Brycheiniog. It is well known that Llywelyn fought a further war against Edward I in 1282 in the course of which he was killed in the land of Builth in December. The Welsh chronicle reports that when he met his death he was without many of his troops, having sent his steward and the bulk of his forces forward to Brycheiniog to take the homage of the men of that land.⁵⁸ After Llywelyn's death the war was continued, hopelessly, by his brother Dafydd and one of the last documents that Dafydd is known to have issued is a commission to one John ap Dafydd to raise troops in Ceri, Maelienydd, Gwerthrynion, Elfael, Builth and Brecon. With Edward I's armies and scouting parties closing in the envoy set out from Llanberis with his letters.⁵⁹ He is never heard of again.

So it is not until the effective end of the line of Gwynedd, the last of the expansionist native dynasties of Wales, that the Anglo-Norman acquisition of lordship in Brycheiniog was complete. But here is only one Welsh dimension to the history of conquest, for we have examined only the threat, and on occasion the fact, of Welsh re-possession of Brycheiniog by dynasties of external origin – those of the land between Wye and Severn, of Deheubarth, of Powys and finally of Gwynedd. But having considered the plantation of Anglo-Normans, as lords, as knights and their tenants, and as burgesses, and having surveyed the efforts of intrusive Welsh dynasties to wrest control of the lordship from them, we must turn now to look at the part played by the Welsh population of Brycheiniog. The evidence, for much of our period, is pitifully thin, but just occasionally we have glimpses of important events and processes. Here is one such view from the Welsh chronicle under the year 1197:

In that year Trahaearn Fychan of Brycheiniog, a brave eminent man and of gentle lineage with the niece of the Lord Rhys – his sister's daughter – as his wife came incautiously to Llangorse, to the court of his lord William de Braose, and there he was seized and imprisoned. And as a pitiful example and with unusual cruelty he was bound by his feet to the tail of a strong horse and was thus drawn along the streets of Brecon as far as the gallows and there his head was struck off and he was hanged by his feet and he was for three days on the gallows after his brother and his son and his wife, niece of the Lord Rhys, had fled from such peril as that.⁶⁰

The importance of this lurid tale is that it establishes that there were still at the close of the 12th century Welsh magnates of considerable political importance in the Braose lordship. In the case of Trahaearn Fychan, we have a local *uchelwr* who was married into the most prominent Welsh princely dynasty of the day. But what do we know, and what can we deduce, about the identity of other such magnates? What little evidence we have gives, on occasion, tantalisingly opaque glimpses of continuing Welsh political and cultural vitality in some parts of Brycheiniog. Thus a chirograph of 1241, recording the settlement of a dispute involving Walter de Clifford and the abbey of Dore regarding lands in Cantref Selyf, contains a careful description of the Dore estates which includes a reference to a point at which they bordered 'the land of Madoc Bochan of Ginnog'.⁶¹ Madoc Bochan is surely to be identified as the Madog Fychan who appears in the early 1230s and in 1245.⁶² It is fairly clear from the delimitation in the chirograph that the lands of Madog Fychan lay to the west of the abbey grange of Gwenddwr.⁶³ It is thus virtually certain that Madog's lands lay round the motte and nearby ringwork known as Castell Madog⁶⁴ and this in turn raises the possibility that Madog Fychan was the eponymous founder, or at least possessor, of that castle. Even more intriguing is Madog's designation as 'of Ginnog'. This seems to connect him with the nearby Merthyr Cynog, the church of which lies in a remote part of the Epynt uplands and is sheltered not only by nature but also, some three miles to the east, by Castell Madog. It is likely that Merthyr Cynog was the centre of the cult of St Cynog, and Dr Elias has argued convincingly that the lawbook, *Llyfr Cynog*, of possible twelfth-century origin, was associated with Brycheiniog.⁶⁵ Although the extension of her argument, that Merthyr Cynog may have been the place of its ultimate provenance, is perhaps harder to sustain, given internal indications that it may have had a more northern origin, it is quite possible that a copy of that text may have been copied, edited and kept there.⁶⁶ It has been maintained that the church of Merthyr Cynog has twelfth and thirteenth century features, and this in turn provokes the suspicion that the local Welsh magnate Madog Fychan may have been the patron of this important spiritual and cultural centre. It may be a sign of the symbolic importance of the church of Merthyr Cynog as a bastion of the old order that the territory surrounding it was not included in grants to the Cistercians.⁶⁷

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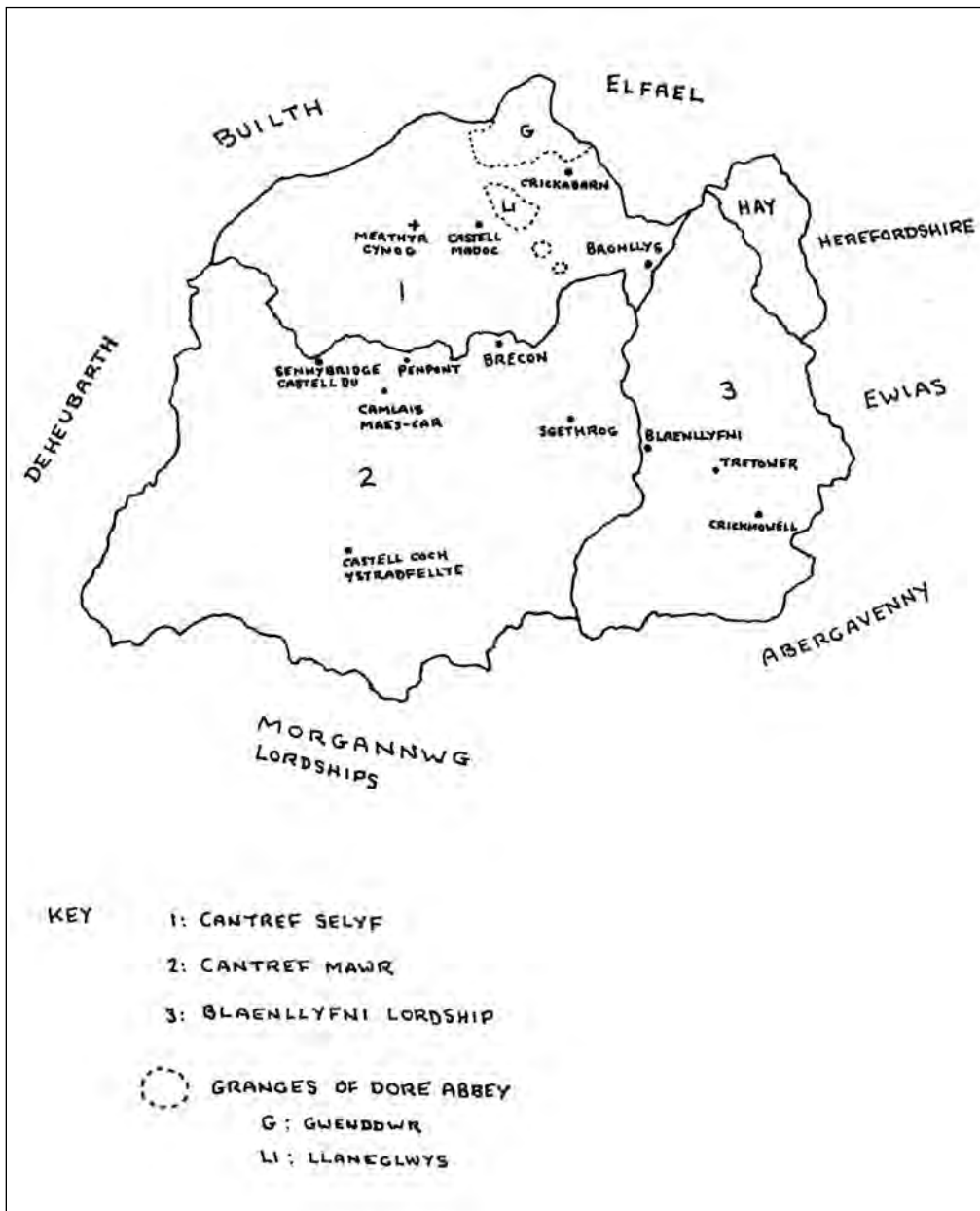


Figure 1 Significant places mentioned in the text.

In his survey of the castles of Brecknockshire David Cathcart King was led to raise the suspicion that some other fortified structures may have had a Welsh origin. Thus, in his discussion of Castell Coch, Ystradfellte, he comments that ‘this castle far away on the slopes of the Fforest Fawr, is remote from the rest of the castles in the county, and resembles a Welsh rather than an English castle’.⁶⁸ Now, there is, I suspect, a link between the apparently unrelated story of Trahaearn Fychan and this analysis of Castell Coch. For it is quite possible to identify Trahaearn in the Welsh pedigrees, as a descendant of Maenyrch, a former lord of part at least of Brycheiniog.⁶⁹ Trahaearn was of aristocratic, even royal, lineage. Not only was his wife a niece of the Lord Rhys, but one of his sisters was apparently married to one of the Lord Rhys’s sons, Rhys Gryg.⁷⁰ And the descendants of Trahaearn Fychan through his son – appropriately called Rhys – were territorially associated with Ystradfellte.⁷¹ It is difficult to avoid the speculation that the fortification of Castell Coch was the work of Trahaearn’s family. When the grandsons of the Lord Rhys used western Brycheiniog as a base for their attempts to establish themselves in Deheubarth they were operating it seems in a region where they could number the greater magnates amongst their kinsmen. Nor is Castell Coch the only fortified structure to have been identified as possibly Welsh. The castle at Maes-car on Mynydd Illtud some six miles south-west of Brecon consists of a motte surmounted by the stones of a round tower with massively thick walls. Cathcart King’s initial verdict on this structure was unambiguous, that ‘this was a substantial tower and in English work would certainly not stand alone, as this does. I should conclude that it is a Welsh castle . . . the high and lonely site suggests the same conclusion.’⁷² This comment may form the basis for a cautionary tale because Cathcart King subsequently changed his mind completely and suggested a radically different origin of the castle at Maes-car. But we shall examine the point shortly. Similarly there is an isolated tower of uncertain date at Llansanffraid (Scethrog) in the flats of the Usk, near Pencelly, the formidable castle at the centre of the sub-lordship of the Baskervilles.⁷³ Some five miles upstream from Brecon on the Honddu there also lies the motte of Castell Madog – a name suggestive of Welsh origin.⁷⁴ And at Penpont, near Capel Betws on the Usk is the traditional site of a castle associated with a Welsh magnate called Einion Sais, active in the second half of the 13th century.⁷⁵ In 1271 that same Einion Sais is recorded as present at Rhyd y Briw, the site of a castle at Sennybridge that was almost certainly a stronghold of Llywelyn the Last during his occupation of the lordship of Brecon.⁷⁶ The circumstances of the appearance of Einion Sais at Rhyd y Briw will be examined shortly. Finally it is worth noting that in 1251 the castellan of the major stronghold of Bronllys, the centre of the sub-lordship of Cantref Selyf under the Cliffords and subsequently the Giffards, was a Welshman, Rhys ap Meurig, who was prominent in the lordship in the mid-1250s.⁷⁷ By the 13th century therefore it seems that the leaders of Welsh society in Brycheiniog were no strangers to the

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possession or custody of castles, some of which they themselves had commissioned. This was no isolated phenomenon – at the same period, probably in the 1270s, one of the constables of White Castle, in the nearby lordship of the Three Castles, then in Crown custody, was a Welshman, Philip ap Goronwy.⁷⁸

The vision of Anglo-Norman conquest and occupation suddenly begins to appear somewhat blurred. Indeed, Dr Holden has commented on the dual aspect of the central Marchland in the later 12th century. In the lowlands of Brecon, Abergavenny and Monmouth he points to significant, indeed thorough, consolidation by the Anglo-Norman lords. Sub-infeudation, the endogamous nature of tenure with few members of the knightly class holding lands in different lordships, significant immigration and colonisation and the foundation of boroughs ‘which served as both trade entrepots and magnets for further immigration from England and beyond’ are all the norm in that zone.⁷⁹ On the other hand ‘in the uplands of Brecon, Radnor, Builth and Maelienydd [and he might have added Elfael] English control was much more patchy. All that could be reasonably expected here was a loose overlordship . . .’⁸⁰ But having noted the uneven quality of Anglo-Norman lordship, Holden fails to develop his analysis, and thereby ignores an unimportant aspect of the frontier society that he sets out to anatomise. In his account, as in so many, the Welsh are seen from an Anglo-centric perspective: they are threatening but anonymous – we do not meet them as individuals. Of course, that is often how the Welsh population do appear in the chronicles, even those that emanate from Wales because no Welsh chronicle text originated in Brycheiniog. It is to be expected that we should see these largely anonymous Welsh as the opponents of the Anglo-Norman intruders. In 1096 the Britons of Brycheiniog, Gwent and Gwynllwg threw off the rule of the French. A century later it seems that Anglo-Norman practical control of parts of the lordships of Brycheiniog was still incomplete. Attacks on the Anglo-Norman abbey of Margam in Glamorgan by ‘men of Brecon and Senghenydd’ recorded in 1205 were quite possibly a response to the disastrous winter of 1204–05.⁸¹ It is unlikely that they were carried out on the orders or with the active approval of the conventionally but markedly pious William de Braose or the lord of Senghenydd, Gruffudd ab Ifor, himself a benefactor to Margam.⁸² Instead they suggest that parts of Brecon lordship – in this instance the southern uplands – were probably at times effectively autonomous. At the close of our time-scale Llywelyn ap Gruffudd must have expected that his steward would be welcomed by some at least of the men of Brycheiniog in 1282. And in 1262 the same prince had arrived in the region at the request, says the Welsh chronicle, of the leading men of Brycheiniog.⁸³ Professor Beverley Smith has pointed out that we might be tempted to discount this statement as one emanating from a partisan commentator, but notes that ‘it is substantiated by the testimony of two men who commanded the king’s forces in the area at the time.’⁸⁴ He is referring to reports from Peter de Montfort and John de Grey.⁸⁵ But it is perhaps not

unknown for military commanders, in despatches to their governments to exaggerate rather than to play down the difficulties facing them. Even in the chronicles there are other and more confusing sides to the picture. The men of Brycheiniog appear to have killed in 1097 a Welsh leader from outside who sought to impose himself on the region. And when Reginald de Braose arrived in the lordship of Brecon in 1215 to restore his family's position there the Welsh chronicler records that 'the Welsh of that land received him honourably'.⁸⁶ Generalisations of this sort always need to be treated with caution. Of course, they are often all that the medieval historian, particularly the historian of medieval Wales, has at his or her disposal. But in the case of Brycheiniog and its neighbouring territories, as the 13th century advances, we are able to discern with increasing clarity the activities and attitudes of specific leading members of Welsh society. And what we see is a growing mutual acculturation – Welsh magnates coming to terms with Anglo-Norman lordship, and Anglo-Norman lords accepting the fact, and the potential, of Welsh magnate leadership. Where once the names of those who controlled or were prominent in the lordships created in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries had been exclusively Anglo-Norman the later twelfth century (intermittently) and the thirteenth century (more consistently) saw the growing importance of Welshmen.

A few examples of this process must suffice. We have already noted the case of Rhys ap Meurig, Constable of Bronllys, who witnessed a document of 1251 recording the settlement of a dispute between Dore abbey and a group of freemen of Cantref Selyf. Eleven years before the agreement of 1251 the bailiff or chief officer of Walter Clifford in Cantref Selyf was recorded as Gruffudd Fychan. This man's name appears again, most instructively, in a royal mandate to Walter Clifford in 1252 to enlarge the pass of *Clettur* (the river Clettwr) leading as far as the house of Gruffudd Fychan, a move intended to lessen the danger for those travelling to the royal castle of Builth. The Clettwr joins the Wye at Erwood, and it seems reasonable to identify Gruffudd Fychan's house as the small castle close to the church at Crickadarn. So it seems that Gruffudd's residence was probably a castle, and was certainly large enough to serve as a landmark.⁸⁷

Another potentially significant case is that of Trahaearn ap Hywel. He is possibly to be identified as Trahaearn Tal ap Hywel of Sgethrog.⁸⁸ Interestingly this is the location of one of the more enigmatic fortified places in the Vale of the Usk some five miles south-east of Brecon. He may be the Trahaearn ap Hywel who appears as a royal negotiator in 1258, working alongside a prominent royal administrator from west Wales, Gwilym ap Gwrward.⁸⁹ Trahaearn Tal ap Hywel is noted in the genealogies as marrying Eva, daughter of Miles Pichard of Tretower, which itself lay some five miles southwest of Sgethrog.⁹⁰ A close relationship with the lords of Brecon is suggested by evidence that Trahaearn ap Hywel sold to Humphrey de Bohun (lord of Brecon 1275–98) lands on Mynydd Illtud in order to facilitate the development by de Bohun of the castle of

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Camlais.⁹¹ This castle is identical with the fortification at Maes-car initially identified as a Welsh structure by Cathcart King. The evidence of the sale, which probably took place in the late 1270s, was the factor that persuaded Cathcart King to abandon the notion that Maes-car was Welsh in origin.⁹² But we should note that the record of de Bohun's work at the site appears to refer to the strengthening of the castle (*ad firmandum Castrum de Gamleys*)⁹³ so it remains entirely possible that, as in other parts of Wales, a castle of Welsh origin was reoccupied and strengthened by Anglo-Norman forces in the aftermath of one of the wars of Edward I. In the present context the important point is that the land near to Camlais was transferred to de Bohun by purchase rather than expropriation and this suggests that Trahaearn may have been a de Bohun partisan by the later 1270s.

The most outstanding example of a magnate who was able to effect a mutually beneficial accommodation with the Anglo-Norman Marcher lords is provided by the case of Hywel ap Meurig. It is possible that he was a brother of the Rhys ap Meurig who commanded Bronllys in 1251 and continued to be prominent in Cantref Selyf into the 1270s. The Welsh genealogies give Hywel ap Meurig as a descendant of the Lord Rhys but his pedigree seems clearly to be corrupt and it must be admitted that it is a possibility that his lineage has been grafted on to the stock of the Lord Rhys.⁹⁴ It is at least clear that he was a man of the central March who certainly had strong connections with the lordship of Brecon as well as with Elfael. It is possible that he had lands on both sides of the river Wye. Hywel emerges as a royal negotiator in 1260 at the latest, and a Mortimer partisan in 1263;⁹⁵ in 1271 he appears in Cantref Selyf in circumstances that will be discussed below; in 1274 he is found gathering intelligence about the movements of Prince Llywelyn on behalf of the Mortimers;⁹⁶ in the next year he appears in royal service as a surveyor of castles and lands in Carmarthen and Cardigan.⁹⁷ It is quite clear that his royal and Marcher connections provoked the hostility of Llywelyn and by 1276 he had been obliged to surrender his son John to the prince as a guarantee of his future loyalty. It is possible that Llywelyn was induced to release John when sureties totalling £100 were obtained for his father's good conduct from many of the leading Welshmen of the middle March including one of £40 from the abbot of Cwmhir.⁹⁸ But this did not prevent Hywel from leading a force of some 2700 troops from Brecon and Radnor against Llywelyn in 1277.⁹⁹ Following that war many honours and responsibilities came his way; he was appointed to take charge of the building of Builth castle for Edward I and had a grant of the mine nearby; he undertook a number of judicial commissions for the royal government in the March and in west Wales and in particular was appointed to the Hopton Commission to hear cases arising in the aftermath of the war of 1277. At some point he was knighted and appears on the St George's Roll, a Roll of Arms associated with the Mortimer family.¹⁰⁰ Hywel ap Meurig died in 1281 but his descendants continued to be of great importance and influence as administrators through the late 13th and 14th century.¹⁰¹

It is clear that like Hywel ap Meurig many of the Welsh magnates of Brycheiniog were at the very least ill at ease with the situation that obtained when Llywelyn brought the region within his principality. By the early 1270s several of them had clearly aroused Llywelyn's suspicions to the extent that the prince was holding them, or members of their families, and was demanding that large sums should be put up as security for their future loyalty. The situation has been discussed by Professor Beverley Smith¹⁰² and most of the documents are well known, but it is worth summarising them rapidly. In 1271 Einion Sais ap Rhys of Brecon, the man reputed to possess a castle in the valley of the Usk to the west of Brecon itself, had to present himself at the prince's castle of Rhyd y Briw and find sureties for his loyalty to the prince to the value of 200 marks (£133 6s. 8d.).¹⁰³ Amongst those putting up the money was a grandson of the Lord Rhys and several notables of Brycheiniog and neighbouring regions.¹⁰⁴ Also in 1271 another magnate of Brycheiniog, Meurig ap Llywelyn, found sureties for 100 marks in order to secure the freedom of a hostage held by Prince Llywelyn.¹⁰⁵ In the same year Meurig ap Gruffudd, designated as a man of Elfael, but who also had lands in Cantref Selyf, had to find similar sureties against his future disobedience to the prince, to a total of 80 marks.¹⁰⁶ In neighbouring territories the prince's bailiffs of Builth and Gwerthrynion and the Welsh lords of Elfael found a large number of sureties for the future good conduct of Iorwerth ap Llywelyn of Builth, but the prince apparently stepped in and changed the arrangements, taking Iorwerth's son as a hostage and requiring the bailiffs and the lords themselves to put up £40.¹⁰⁷ The evidence suggests that 1271 was a year of some considerable tension and that the prince was particularly concerned about the loyalty of Welsh magnates in the March. The sums involved in the pledges of security for the good conduct of such men are very impressive: the cases cited above involve pledges for £340 – as much as the annual rent revenue of a fair-sized lordship – as much as could be raised, say, from the lordship of Gower, and much more than the rents of the lordship of Builth.¹⁰⁸ The leading Welshmen of the central March, many of them from Brycheiniog, were being drawn into an obedience to Llywelyn based primarily on a climate of fear. It is little wonder that when Edward I's forces moved against Llywelyn in 1276-77 many of the men were drawn from the lordships of the middle March and were led, as we have seen, by Hywel ap Meurig, with Einion Sais and Meurig ap Llywelyn amongst his lieutenants. Another magnate of Brycheiniog, Trahaearn ap Madog, rushed to join them there leaving his son Madog to be taken, as a prisoner, to one of Llywelyn's strongholds in Gwynedd.¹⁰⁹ Trahaearn was still struggling to find sureties for Madog's future loyalty to Llywelyn in 1278 – when Llywelyn had lost his hold on mid Wales and the central March, and in theory had no future interest in the region.¹¹⁰ Clearly, however, he did.

To catch a glimpse of the depth of the problem that Llywelyn faced in the lordship of Brecon in the 1270s we must turn finally to a document, at first sight

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innocuous, which has not previously been given detailed consideration. This is a charter, the original of which is preserved in the British Library; it records that an easement, a right of way, across lands in Cantref Selyf, that lay to the west of the Wye near Erwood and Gwenddwr was granted to the Herefordshire abbey of Dore which had been much patronised by the Clifford family.¹¹¹ The grant was made on August 1st 1271 by Meurig ap Gruffudd. We have met him before: quite possibly he was a son of the Gruffudd Fychan who lived near the Clettwr at Crickadarn, and he was described as being 'of Elfael' in November of 1271, when he was obliged to put up sureties of 80 marks to guarantee his future loyalty to Llywelyn. Just how necessary those sureties may have been is suggested by the final section of Meurig's charter: the witness list. The first named witness is Walter de Traveley, a member of a family with wide interests in the Marcher lordships who had been prominent in Brycheiniog for generations.¹¹² In the charter Walter de Traveley is described as Constable and Steward of Bronllys. He was probably acting by 1271 in the interests of John Giffard who had recently married Maud, the daughter and heiress of the last of the Clifford lords of Cantref Selyf, Walter (who died in 1263).¹¹³ Giffard was to emerge as one of Edward I's most trusted captains in his wars against Llywelyn.¹¹⁴ It is unlikely in the extreme that he was not holding part at least of Cantref Selyf against Llywelyn as early as 1271, and it is easy to understand how any Welsh magnate who was in any way associated with Giffard's lordship was risking the prince's suspicion and ill-will. The extent to which the Welsh magnates of the region were prepared to run that risk is suggested by the names that follow Walter de Traveley's. First comes Hywel ap Meurig, whose distinguished career as an official in the de Bohun, Mortimer and English royal interests has been sketched, as has his troubled relationship with Llywelyn; next is the name of Rhys ap Meurig, possibly a brother to Hywel and surely the man who was Constable of Bronllys for Walter Clifford in 1251. The names of the next two men, Walter ap Rhys and Gruffudd ap Cliffo[rd] leave little doubt as to their family's close relationships with the Marcher lords of Cantref Selyf.¹¹⁵ Finally amongst the remaining names is that of Llywelyn ap Caradog, one of those who was in some three months' time to stand surety for one of the Welsh magnates whose loyalty was suspected by prince Llywelyn.¹¹⁶

The group gathered in Cantref Selyf, probably at Bronllys itself, on 1st August 1271 thus included a number of Welsh magnates who were in various ways associated with the interests of the Anglo-Norman lords of the central March. Two of them would go on to face the hostility of prince Llywelyn within the lands that lay under his control. Their assembly in an area controlled by Walter de Traveley suggests that even at that early date Llywelyn's control of Brycheiniog was fraying at the edges. It is not unlikely that we can glimpse in the assembly at or near Bronllys a nucleus, probably not unique, of Welsh local resistance to the rule of Llywelyn. The fact that the lady of the lordship, Maud

Clifford was herself half Welsh, through her mother Margaret a granddaughter of Llywelyn the Great, may have made their adherence to the Marcher interest easier.¹¹⁷

We have seen that the establishment of Anglo-Norman lordship in Brycheiniog – as indeed in other areas of the March – was a complex process. Before it could be said to be substantially secure initial acquisition had to be followed by consolidation and consolidation might take many forms, including colonisation, fortification and strategies ranging from extreme brutality against Welsh communities and their leaders to ultimate accommodation with them. It is possible that divergent experiences divided local Welsh communities and even families, and this may explain contrasting Welsh responses to the attempted conquest of the central March by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. For some, such as the Welsh monk of Cwmhir chronicling events in the late 1250s and early 1260s the arrival of Llywelyn represented the promise of liberation.¹¹⁸ For others, and we have seen some of them, it represented a threat to the careers and relationships that they had striven determinedly to build.¹¹⁹

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Notes

* This paper represents an expanded version of the Sir John Lloyd Lecture given at Brecon in March 2012. I should like to express my thanks to the Brecknock Society for inviting me to give the lecture, for their hospitality on that occasion, and for giving me the opportunity to explore the complexities of a region on the medieval history of which much remains to be written.

¹ Caley, J, et al. (eds.), Dugdale, W, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols. in 8 (London, 1817–30), iii, p. 263.

² Jones, Thomas (ed. and trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon, Red Book of Hergest Version* [henceforth *BT, RBH*] (Cardiff, 1955), pp. 32–3.

³ King, D. J. Cathcart, *Castellarium Anglicanum*, 2 vols. (New York, London and Nendeln, 1983), i, pp. 16 and 23.

⁴ Rees, William, ‘The Medieval Lordship of Brecon’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1915–16), pp. 165–224, at p. 177.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁰ Holden, Brock, *Lords of the Central Marches. English Aristocracy and Frontier Society, 1087–1265* (Oxford, 2008), p. 195.

¹¹ Rees, ‘Medieval Lordship of Brecon’, p. 189.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 189–91; cf. Lieberman, Max, *The March of Wales 1067–1300* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 29.

¹³ Rees, ‘Medieval Lordship of Brecon’, p. 185.

¹⁴ For a stimulating discussion see Courtney, Paul, ‘Urbanism and ‘Feudalism’ on the Periphery: Some Thoughts from Marcher Wales’, in Giles, Kate and Dyer, Christopher (eds.), *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100–1500* (Maney, 2007), pp. 65–84. I am most grateful to Bob Silvester both for bringing this paper to my attention, and for allowing

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me to see his important study of ‘Settlement and the medieval landscape of the Llynfi basin in south Wales’ ahead of its publication.

¹⁵ Lieberman, *March of Wales*, pp. 30, 32; Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, p. 143.

¹⁶ Rees, ‘Medieval Lordship of Brecon’, pp. 205, 209.

¹⁷ Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, pp. 111–12, 135.

¹⁸ For the castles see King, D. J. Cathcart, ‘The Castles of Breconshire’, *Brycheiniog* 7 (1961), pp. 71–94; on the firm and enduring hold of the conquerors see Spurgeon, C. J., ‘The Castles of Montgomeryshire’, *Montgomeryshire Collections* 59 (1968 for 1965–6) pp. 1–59, at p. 5.

¹⁹ *BT, RBH*, pp. 34–35.

²⁰ Stephenson, David, ‘Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy: Dating and Context’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 57 (2009), pp. 41–49, at 42.

²¹ *BT, RBH*, pp. 38–39.

²² Stephenson, ‘Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy’, p. 45.

²³ *BT, RBH*, pp. 40–41; Bartrum, P. C., *Welsh Genealogies, A.D. 300–1400*, 8 vols. (Cardiff, 1974), sub Elystan Glodrydd 1.

²⁴ Lloyd, J. E., *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 vols with single pagination, third edition (London 1939), pp. 402–03; for the situation in Maelienydd see Wood, Rita with Stephenson, David, ‘The Romanesque doorway at St Padarn’s Church, Llanbadarn Fawr, Radnorshire’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 156 (2007), pp. 51–72 at pp. 65–68.

²⁵ Gruffudd, R. Geraint (ed.), ‘Awdl Fawl Ddiennw i Hywel ap Goronwy’ in Williams, J. Caerwyn and others (eds.), *Gwaith Meilir Brydydd a’i Ddisgynyddion* (Cardiff, 1994), poem 1, line 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 27–28.

²⁷ *BT, RBH*, pp. 46–47; Stephenson, ‘Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy’ p. 48.

²⁸ Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, p. 24; *BT, RBH*, pp. 114–15; Dimock, James F. (ed.), *Givaldi Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. VI (Rolls Series, London, 1868), p. 21. For Baldwin FitzGilbert’s problems at Brecon see Potter, K. R. (ed.), *Gesta Stephani* (London, 1955), pp. 12–13. It is certainly not the case that, as suggested by Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, p. 24, ‘Brecon and Abergavenny lordships appear to have escaped largely unscathed.’

²⁹ Williams (ab Ithel), J. (ed.), *Annales Cambriae* (Rolls Series, London, 1860), p. 52.

³⁰ Elias, Gwenno Angharad, ‘Llyfr Cynog of Cyfraith Hywel and St Cynog of Brycheiniog’ *Welsh History Review*, 23 (2006), 27–47, at pp. 42–43; it may be significant that a poet whose sobriquet associated him with Brycheiniog should apparently have turned to the Lord Rhys for patronage, but that is not to say that we have no hints of Welsh cultural vigour there.

³¹ *Givaldi Cambrensis Opera* VI, p. 112; for the campaign of 1196, see *BT, RBH*, pp. 176–77.

³² The campaign of 1198 is discussed by Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 586; Gwenwynwyn’s attacks on William de Braose in 1202–03 are noticed on p. 616. Additional details of Welsh casualties at Painscastle are given in Jones, Thomas (ed.), ‘Cronica de Wallia and other documents from Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3514’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 12 (1946), pp. 27–44, at 31. For an examination of one element in the complex background to Gwenwynwyn’s campaign of 1208 see Stephenson, David, ‘Ystrad Yw 1208: a Haven for Arwystli Exiles?’ *Brycheiniog* 38 (2006), pp. 49–54.

³³ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 621.

³⁴ *BT, RBH*, pp. 196–99.

³⁵ *Calendar of Ancient Deeds*, i, B.727.

³⁶ Jones, Thomas (ed. and trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon, Peniarth 20 Version* [henceforth *BT Pen20 Trans*] (Cardiff, 1952), p. 95.

³⁷ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, pp. 660–62. See also Walker, R. F., ‘Hubert de Burgh and Wales 1218–32’, *English Historical Review* 87 (1972), pp. 464–94.

³⁸ *Patent Rolls (1216–1225)*, p. 386.

³⁹ For Hugh of Radnor’s connection with the Baskerville family see Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, pp. 122–23; for the Pichards of Tretower, Ystrad Yw, *ibid.*, pp. 102–04, and 117; for the

Waldeboefs of Brecon, *ibid.*, 115. The Burghill family, as well as the Pichards and Waldeboefs, appear frequently as witnesses to charters in the Brecon cartulary.

⁴⁰ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 662, n. 41

⁴¹ *BT Pen20 Trans*, p. 102

⁴² For the report of Llywelyn's actions see *ibid.* For Richard Marshall's destruction of Tretower (Stratdewy = Ystrad Yw = Tretower) see *Close Rolls (1231–34)*, p. 328.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 91; cf. Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, p. 193.

⁴⁴ Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, p. 206.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–96; Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 658.

⁴⁶ See above, p. 000

⁴⁷ Pryce, Huw (ed.), *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120–1283* (Cardiff, 2005), nos. 261–62.

⁴⁸ For Madog Fychan see *ibid.*, nos. 263–65, and 307, also Edwards, J. G., (ed.), *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence concerning Wales* (Cardiff, 1935), pp. 35–36; It is possible that Madog Fychan was associated with Castell Madog, in Cantref Selyf, only some five miles south of the border with Builth: see discussion in Owen, Edward (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts relating to Wales in the British Museum*, 4 vols. (London, 1900–22), iii p. 540 and below, p. 000. Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, p. 201 suggests that even at an earlier date 'the renewed strength of the Welsh' may have been one of the factors that prompted Walter III de Clifford to confirm, in the early 1220s, a grant of Nanteglwys in Cantref Selyf to abbey Dore, originally made by his father, Walter II: '[w]hile filial piety was most likely the driving force behind the confirmation, the possibility that the Cliffords may have been unable to assert their (albeit loose) lordship in the Epynt mountains of Cantref Selyf in the face of resurgent Welsh power may well have made this act easier.' Clifford prestige in Cantref Selyf must have been dented by the collapse of the Cistercian abbey of Trawscoed which Walter Clifford had founded in that cantref in the early 1170s, and its reduction to the status of a grange of Dore; see Stephenson, D., "'Transient' religious houses and those of uncertain existence: Nefyn, Trawscoed, Pendâr, Clynnog Fawr and Llansanffraid', in the Monastic Wales website, www.monasticwales.org.

⁴⁹ *Close Rolls (1237–42)*, pp. 123–24.

⁵⁰ *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 307.

⁵¹ *BT, RBH*, pp. 252–53.

⁵² *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, pp. 15, 17–18, 30.

⁵³ Smith, J. Beverley, 'Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and the March of Wales', *Brycheiniog* 20 (1982–83), pp. 9–22, at p. 17.

⁵⁴ *Idem*, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales* (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 162 and n. 86, 252; for the clash between Mortimer and Llywelyn see *Annales Monasterii de Waverleia*, in Luard, H. R. (ed.), *Annales Monastici*, ii (Rolls Series, London, 1865), p. 370.

⁵⁵ Rees, 'Medieval Lordship of Brecon', p. 195.

⁵⁶ *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 363.

⁵⁷ Rees, 'Medieval Lordship of Brecon', pp. 197–99. For Turberville and FitzPeter see *Cal. Close Rolls (1272–79)*, p. 56. In 1277, however, the incoming Humphrey de Bohun was still meeting stiff resistance from forces loyal to Llywelyn, and needed assistance from Abergavenny: Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales*, pp. 356–58 and 416 and n. 97.

⁵⁸ *BT Pen20 Trans*, p. 120.

⁵⁹ *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 456.

⁶⁰ *BT, RBH* pp. 180–81; *BT Pen20 Trans*, p. 79.

⁶¹ Owen, *Catalogue*, 3, pp. 53–39.

⁶² See pp. 000 above.

⁶³ Owen, *Catalogue*, 3, pp. 539–40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 540; King, 'Castles of Breconshire', pp. 88–89 and map distinguishes the motte as Castell Madoc No.1 and the presumably earlier ringwork as Castell Madoc No. 2.

⁶⁵ Elias, 'Llyfr Cynog of Cyfraith Hywel and St Cynog of Brycheiniog', *passim*.

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⁶⁶ I propose to examine this question in detail elsewhere.

⁶⁷ The church at Merthyr Cynog is discussed by Elias, 'Llyfr Cynog of Cyfraith Hywel and St Cynog of Brycheiniog', p. 44 and by Haslam, Richard, *Powys [The Buildings of Wales]* (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 362; it is notable that the report on the church by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, for which see www.cpat.demon.co.uk/projects/longer/churches/brecon/16909, is rather more sceptical, pointing out that the nave 'could be 12thC or 13thC, though on very little substantive evidence'. The significance of the exclusion of the Cistercians from territory associated with older Welsh *monasteria* will be explored by the present writer in an study of the 12th century kingdom and successor lordships of Powys.

⁶⁸ King, 'Castles of Breconshire', p. 82.

⁶⁹ Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Bleddyn ap Maenyrch 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, sub Bleddyn ap Maenyrch 1, 27.

⁷² King, 'Castles of Breconshire', p. 83.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89. See also note 48 above.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94. Einion Sais was a great-nephew of that Trahaearn Fychan killed at Brecon in 1197 (for which incident see note 60 above): Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Bleddyn ap Maenyrch, 1, 3. Very significantly, Einion Sais was also a cousin of Rhys and Hywel, sons of Gruffudd ab Ednyfed Fychan. These were members of the foremost ministerial family of Gwynedd, who nevertheless emerged in the 1270s and 1280s as prominent opponents of Prince Llywelyn; see Stephenson, David, *The Governance of Gwynedd* (Cardiff, 1984) p. 105

⁷⁶ Edwards, J. G. (ed.), *Littere Wallie* (Cardiff, 1940), pp. 28–29, 33–34.

⁷⁷ British Library, Campbell Charters xviii 2, summarised in Owen, *Catalogue*, iii p. 625. This document records the termination of a dispute over pasture rights in Cantref Selyf between a (named) group of Welshmen and the abbot of Dore; it is surely indicative of the practical limits of Clifford control in Cantref Selyf that the Welsh parties appear to have submitted to some form of arbitration without reference to their nominal Clifford lord, and that the witnesses to the resulting document included Owain ap Maredudd, lord of Elfael. See also *Monasticum Anglicanum*, v, p. 555 for Rhys ap Meurig's appearance as a witness to a Clifford charter regarding the lands of Dore in Cantref Selyf in the mid-1250s.

⁷⁸ Kansas University, Pearson Library, MS 191: 8; the probability that this charter is to be dated to the 1270s is established by comparison with MS 191: 12.

⁷⁹ Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches*, p. 42.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸¹ Clark, G. T. (ed.), *Cartae et alia Munimenta quae ad Dominium de Glamorgancia Pertinent*, 6 vols. (2nd ed. Cardiff, 1910), ii, pp. 301–02; *Annales de Margan*, in Luard, H. R. (ed.), *Annales Monastici* (Rolls Series, London, 1864) i, p. 28. On the other hand Gerald of Wales suggests that violence was endemic in the region of Brycheiniog; for he claims that 'the natives of these parts are much given to implacable quarrels and never-ending disputes. They spend their time fighting each other and shed their blood freely in internecine feuds.' Thorpe, Lewis (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: the Journey through Wales/the Description of Wales* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 96.

⁸² For de Braose's piety see Thorpe (trans.) *Gerald of Wales: The Journey through Wales* pp. 82–83; for Gruffudd ab Ifor's benefactions to Margam see *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, nos. 616, 617.

⁸³ *BT, RBH*, pp. 252–53.

⁸⁴ Smith, 'Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and the March of Wales', p. 13.

⁸⁵ *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, pp. 17–18, 30.

⁸⁶ *BT, RBH*, pp. 202–03.

⁸⁷ For Rhys ap Meurig see note 77 above; for Gruffudd Fychan see British Library Additional Manuscript 4526 ff. 100–08, summarised in Owen, *Catalogue*, iii p. 904. For Gruffudd's house near the Clettwr in Cantref Selyf see *Close Rolls (1253–54)*, p. 425

⁸⁸ Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Drymbenog 3. There is some doubt over this identification. The present writer's copy of Bartrum's *Welsh Genealogies* was formerly owned by the late Sir Rees Davies; it contains, amongst many slips of paper containing observations and amendments in Davies's hand, one that suggests that we should read Trahaearn Tal ap Madog ap Gwgon in place of Bartrum's Trahaearn Tal ap Hywel ap Gwgon, on the basis that 'Trahaearn Tal ap Madog ap Gwgon appears as a grantee in deed of 1314 (or 1333) N.L.W. Penpont, Supp. 141.' But Bartrum's Trahaearn Tal is placed in his generation 7 – that is those born around 1230. Whilst this would accord well with the date of the Trahaearn ap Hywel who appears in record sources, it seems difficult to reconcile that date of birth with a man who appears as active in 1314 or 1333. It is to be noted that the genealogies give Gwgon a son Gwgon Fychan, as well as Hywel, and it may be that Madog was a son of the younger rather than the elder Gwgon. Such a Madog, though not recorded in the genealogies, would be placed in Bartrum's generation 7 and any son of his would be placed in generation 8, those born around 1270. This would tally with the activities of the Trahaearn Tal ap Madog found by Davies. This hypothesis, of course, leaves us with two men in the same family called Trahaearn Tal, but this is not impossible.

⁸⁹ *Close Rolls (1256–59)*, pp. 466–67.

⁹⁰ Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Drymbenog 3.

⁹¹ See King, D. J. Cathcart, 'Camlais and Sennybridge Castles', *Brycheiniog* 21 (1984/5) pp. 9–11. King argues (p. 10) that the most likely period for the construction of Camlais was between 1277 and 1298.

⁹² King had further developed his argument, first advanced in his 1961 paper, regarding Maescar, in a note in *Brycheiniog* 11 (1965) pp. 151–53, identifying the structure as one built by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.

⁹³ King, 'Camlais and Sennybridge Castles' p. 10: the lands conveyed in a deed of 1358 were said to lie between Camlais Fychan and Camlais Fawr in the parish of Defynnog, *quas quidem terras et tenement Dominus Humfridus de Bohun quondam comes Hereford' et dominus Brecon' emit de domino Traharn ap Howell ad firmandum Castrum de Gamleys*. King commented (*ibid.*) that 'Traharn ap Hywel seems to be unidentified', but it is argued above that, *pace* Rees Davies, an identification is possible.

⁹⁴ Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies* sub Rhys ap Tewdwr 26. Hywel is recorded in Bartrum's generation 8, those born c. 1270. This is clearly suspect. But even more so is the fact that his great-grandfather, Philip ap Rhys Mechyll, (*ibid.*, sub Rhys ap Tewdwr 8) is accordingly placed in generation 5, while Philip's father, Rhys Mechyll (d. 1244) is placed in generation 6.

⁹⁵ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls (1260–1267)*, p. 11; *BT, RBH*, pp. 252–53. It is possible that Hywel acted as a royal representative in negotiations with Prince Llywelyn in 1259, when he may be the man noted in the Liberate Roll as Ewen son of Meuri; in the same record Hywel ap Madog of northern Powys is given as 'Howen': *Calendar of Liberate Rolls (1251–1260)*, p. 480.

⁹⁶ *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, p. 49.

⁹⁷ Davies, James Conway (ed.), *The Welsh Assize Roll 1277–84* (Cardiff, 1940), p. 118.

⁹⁸ *Littere Wallie*, pp. 32, 41–42, 44.

⁹⁹ *Welsh Assize Roll*, p. 118; Morris, J. E., *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford, 1901) pp. 131, 147.

¹⁰⁰ Denholm-Young, N., *History and Heraldry, 1254–1310* (Oxford, 1965) pp. 90–94; for Hywel's career after 1277 see *Welsh Assize Roll*, pp. 118–120.

¹⁰¹ Davies, R. R., *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales 1282–1400*, p. 418.

¹⁰² Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales*, pp. 357–58.

¹⁰³ *Littere Wallie*, pp. 28–29, 33–34.

¹⁰⁴ Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies*, sub Rhys ap Tewdwr 8; amongst the sureties were two sons of Einion ap Gwallter, for whom see *ibid.*, sub Trahaearn Fawr 2, and two sons of Arawdr ab Owain, for whom see *ibid.*, sub Rhydderch Ddu.

¹⁰⁵ *Littere Wallie*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–26, 30. For his lands in Cantref Selyf see below. It is possible that Meurig ap

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Gruffudd is to be identified as a son of the Gruffudd Fychan who lived in 1252 in the region of Cantref Selyf in which Meurig subsequently appeared. See n. 83 above.

¹⁰⁷ *Littere Wallie*, pp. 40–41.

¹⁰⁸ Gower was valued at £300 per annum in 1316 and Bultth at £200 in 1398: Davies, *Lordship and Society*, pp. 196–97.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales*, pp. 417, 429.

¹¹⁰ *Littere Wallie*, p. 43. These are described as sureties for Trahaearn in Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales*, p. 460 n. 104, whereas they were standing surety for his son; for the Treaty of Conwy see *Acts of Welsh Rulers*, no. 402.

¹¹¹ British Library, Harley Charters 43 A 71; discussed in Owen, *Catalogue*, iii, pp. 532–33; the charter is transcribed and translated in the Appendix below.

¹¹² For grants to Brecon priory by, or involving, the de Traveley family see Banks, R. W., ‘Cartularium Prioratus S. Iohannis Evangelistae de Brecon’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4th series, xiii (1882), pp. 275–308, and xiv (1883) pp. 18–49, 137–68, 221–36, 274–311, esp. at 22, 34–36, 222–25; see also for a grant to Dore, Owen, *Catalogue*, iii, p. 533.

¹¹³ For the Giffard/Clifford connection see the charts in Owen, *Catalogue*, iii p. 538, n.1 and Morris, *Welsh Wars*, Pedigree VI. The story of Maud’s abduction by, and subsequent marriage to, John Giffard is in Banks, ‘Cartularium Prioratus . . . de Brecon’, *Arch. Camb.*, xiv (1883), pp. 293–94.

¹¹⁴ Morris, *Welsh Wars*, p. 182.

¹¹⁵ Walter was a recurrent name in the Clifford family: see note 101 above. It may be suspected that its use here was imitative. It is not unlikely that Gruffudd ap Cliffo[rd] was an illegitimate son of one of the Cliffords.

¹¹⁶ *Littere Wallie* pp. 40–41.

¹¹⁷ See note 101 above.

¹¹⁸ Stephenson, David, ‘The chronicler at Cwm-hir abbey, 1257–63: the construction of a Welsh chronicle’, in Griffiths, R. A., and Schofield, P. R. (eds.), *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 29–45.

¹¹⁹ The tendency towards ‘lordship solidarity’ under the de Bohuns was to endure. In the confrontation between Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford and Edward I over Brecon in the mid-1290s the earl was able to rely on the support of the leading men of the lordship. The story is summarised in Davies R. R. (edited by Smith, Brendan), *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, University Press, 2009), p. 43: ‘the king was outwitted by the earl who summoned the men of Brecon before his officials, confirmed their laws and usages, made further concessions on forest rights, and used local Welshmen to curry support. The earl won this propaganda battle hands down: as the royal official was forced to acknowledge, ‘they were all at one with their lord.’ This was good lordship at work. And it was at work from one generation to the next, as the men of Brecon stood solidly behind the Bohun earls in the various political crises of the next decades.’

APPENDIX

British Library Harley Charter 43. A. 71.

I am grateful to the British Library for granting permission for the publication of the text of this charter.

Sciant presentes et futuri quod ego Mourich ab Griffin de Kylieu in Cantreselif pro me et heredibus meis et hominibus nostris dedi et concessi et recognovi monachis de Dora et omnibus suis semitam que tendit de Nantheglus iuxta Orrikey per terram meam de Kylieu pertranseuntem Abersor et Kleturmaur versus Wendor ut dicta semita dictis monachis et averiis suis et omnibus servientibus et rebus suis sit comunis et libera in perpetuum absque ullo impedimento vel calumpnia mei vel heredum meorum seu hominum nostrorum. Ita etiam quod quando blada ibidem fuerint levata omnia habeant esiamenta sibi et averiis suis pertranseundi tam iuxta eandem semitam quam in ea. Preterea recognovi pro me et pro heredibus meis et pro hominibus nostris quod nullo iure exigere possumus aliquam semitam de terra nostra de Kylieu ultra Kleturmaur per terram dictorum monachorum versus grangiam eorum de Wendor unde impediri possent ad fossandum et claudendum dictam terram vel boscum. Et etiam eisdem monachis et omnibus suis concessi omnia esiamenta pertranseundi omnes alias semitas et loca per terram meam ubi sine manifesto dampno pertransire potuerint. Et etiam permitto eis fideliter coram Deo et omnibus sanctis quod de cetero ero fidelis amicus et bonus domui de Dora et ubique pro fideli posse meo eam et omnia sua tanquam nostra propria protegam et defendam. Et quod omnes querelas quas habui vel habere potui tam pro me quam pro heredibus meis et hominibus nostris ante confectionem presentis carte contra dictam domum vel aliquam personam domus ex integro relaxavi et omnino in perpetuum quietos clamavi. Quod quia ratum et stabile in perpetuum volo permanere presenti scripto sigillum meum apposui. Hiis testibus: Waltero de Traveley tunc constabulario et senescalco de Brethles, Howelo filio Meurich, Reso filio Meurich, Waltero filio Resi, Griffino filio Cliffo, Ricardo le Brut, Adam capellano de Brentles, Lewelin ab Caradoch, magistro Roberto de Burhull, magistro Rogero Bat et multis aliis. Actum anno domini millesimo ducentesimo septuagesimo primo. In festo ad vincula Sancti Petri.

Summary:

Meurig ap Gruffudd of Ciliau in Cantref Selyf grants to the monks of Dore, on behalf of himself and his heirs, and their men, the path leading from Nanteglwys by Orrikey through his land of Ciliau, crossing Abersor and Clettwrmaur towards Gwenddwr, such that the path may be used freely by the monks and their cattle and their men in perpetuity without obstruction or claim on the part of Meurig, his heirs or their men, and when the crops have been lifted they and their cattle shall be entitled to cross [the land] near the path as well as on it. Further he accepts that he, his heirs, and their men, have no right to demand [the use of] a path from his land of Ciliau beyond Clettwrmaur across the monks' land towards their grange of Gwenddwr such that they may be prevented from ditching and enclosing that land or the woodland. He also grants to the monks and their men the right to cross all other paths and places on his land wherever they can do this without causing obvious damage. He undertakes, before God and all the Saints that he will henceforth be a faithful and good friend to the house of Dore, and that he will protect and defend it

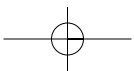
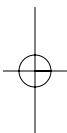
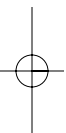
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and its possessions everywhere to the best of his ability. He entirely respites in perpetuity all disputes that he has had or may have had with the monastery or any of its people. To ensure that this agreement is permanent he has affixed his seal, before witnesses [named]. Dated on the feast of St Peter in Chains, [1st August] 1271.

Notes

The seal is missing.

Initial letters of proper names have been capitalised. Letters *u* and *v* have been regularised, *u* for vowels and *v* for consonants.

The place-names of the charter are to be located mainly in the parishes of Gwenddwr and Crickadarn. *Orikey* is elsewhere called *Wuritkey* [see B. L. Harley Charter 48 C 27]; it probably corresponds to the modern Erwood. Nanteglwys is the modern Llaneglwys: see Richard Morgan and R. F. Peter Powell, *A Study of Breconshire Place-Names* (Llanrwst, 1999), pp. 96–97; *Abersor* is as yet unidentified. For discussion see Owen, *Catalogue*, iii, pp. 535–540.



AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT KENSINGTON IN THE TOWN OF BRECON (1817–2012)

There has been a Baptist presence in the former county of Brecknockshire¹ since c.1650. At that time a group of religious dissenters meeting in the parish of Llanigon were visited by the Calvinistic Baptist evangelist John Miles, a native of Newtown parish just over the border in Herefordshire, and several of them accepted believers' baptism by immersion.² These formed the so-called Church at Hay which existed during the Commonwealth, but which was dispersed in 1660 with the restoration of the monarchy and the Anglican Church. Some adherents joined those meeting at Trosgoed, Talachddu,³ a group that eventually became the Maesyberllan Church, whose ministers would play an important part in the expansion of the Baptist Cause in the central part of the county.

In 1787, David Evans (1744–1821) became minister of Maesyberllan, and was assisted by his two sons John (d. 1851) and David D. (1787–1878), both of whom he ordained.⁴ These three played a large part in establishing and serving four Baptist Causes including Pontestyll near Brecon (c.1770–1961)⁵ and Watergate in Brecon.

In 1803, following a public baptism in the river Usk just above the bridge, conducted by David Evans, the first Baptist Cause in Brecon was founded, resulting the building of a chapel at Watergate in 1806.⁶

John Evans moved to Brecon on 1 May 1809, became minister of Watergate and started a school there.⁷ At this time services were held in Welsh on a Sunday afternoon. Later, in 1817, he started evening services in English. This event has always been regarded as the commencement of the English Baptist Cause in Brecon. The union of the Welsh and English members in one cause, under one minister, continued for about six years, but the English element were anxious to form themselves into a separate and independent Church. This they achieved in 1823,⁸ and later, in June of that year,⁹ the Church was recognised as such by the South East Wales Association (Yr Hen Gymanfa) and acknowledged as the first English Baptist Church in the county.

The need for a separate place of worship became evident, and a site was acquired, a little north-west of Watergate Chapel opposite a row of houses, then and still named Kensington. The building was completed and in use by 1824, with a dedication ceremony on 3 & 4 November 1824.¹⁰ This is also the date of the Foundation Deed, which describes the building as a *chapel or meeting house . . . occupied by a society of Protestant Dissenters called Particular or Calvinistic Baptists and the adjoining land as a Burial Ground* – never evidenced as such – or, as occurred later (see below) – *for the enlargement of the said chapel.*¹¹

No photographs or description of this chapel have survived and the best evidence of its shape and size is the map (overleaf) together with the 1851 Religious Census

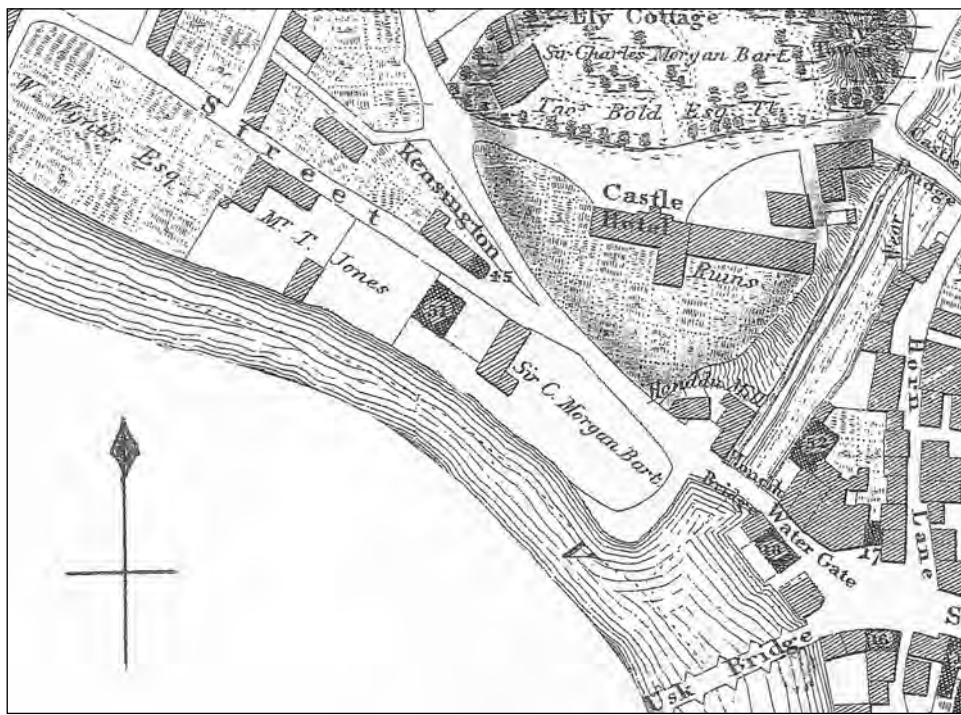


Figure 1 (part) Plan of Brecknock by John Wood 1834
No 51 English Baptist Chapel; No 52 Welsh Baptist Chapel; No 45 Kings Head Inn.

which records 'space' for 240. One can speculate that it was 'classical' in style, as was the practice of the time, with an entrance facing what was called Mill Street. It would have been similar to the 1833 and 1880 rebuilds of Watergate as seen today.¹²

John Evans continued to serve the new Church on a part-time basis, together with students from the Abergavenny Baptist Academy, until the ordination and induction of Benjamin Price on 24 November 1825.¹³ He was a writer of influence in the Welsh Religious Press and a capable preacher in both languages, but in 1828 left for Newtown. For the remainder of the century, and well into the 20th, one sees from Appendix I a succession of short pastorates; ministers to Kensington, as elsewhere, were to find more rewarding pastorates in the expanding communities of the industrial areas.

One exception was James Walker Evans who remained for thirty-two years, the second longest pastorate of the Church. The son of David Evans of Dolau, Radnorshire (who had preached at the 1803 Baptism mentioned above), he studied at the Pontypool Baptist College and was ordained and inducted at Kensington on 12 May 1844.¹⁴ Serving until his retirement, occasioned by ill-health, he died in 1880. A brass memorial plate was placed in the second chapel, and an oil painting

hung in the ministers' vestry. Tradition has it that he was a dynamic personality – a 'law unto himself' – and several factors in the life of the Church can be attributed to him. Membership of both the Church and the Sunday School rose to over one hundred [Appendix II], a certificate for solemnizing marriage was obtained in 1858,¹⁵ and he allowed non-members to participate in the sacrament. When this 'open communion' was proposed, the Church Meeting overwhelmingly approved, but when the matter was raised at the Brecknockshire Baptist Association (formed 1864/5), Kensington Church and its minister were expelled. Soon after, in 1878, the Church joined the Glamorgan & Carmarthen (English) Association,¹⁶ this marking, it seems, the time that the Church changed from being Particular to General Baptist. It was probably late in Evans' pastorate that the plans for a larger chapel and a separate Sunday School building were considered but their implementation fell to the next incumbent.

John Meredith was inducted on 11 June 1877. He stayed for fifteen years, and in 1892 moved to Hereford. During his pastorate the Church reached an all-time peak of 110 members and 234 scholars [Appendix II], a factor which must have influenced the need for new buildings.

The first re-building of the Chapel

After failing to purchase a site at the Watton, it was decided to demolish the 1824 building and replace it with another and to build a separate school-room (hall). The design, which provided seating for 450,¹⁷ was based on a Primitive Methodist Chapel at Pontypool with some 'neo-Gothic' features. The photograph overleaf shows the two buildings which were costed as about £2000.¹⁸ Work commenced in 1878 with completion in 1879 and a dedication ceremony on 9 May 1880. Later, in 1885, three additional classrooms were built linking the two buildings,¹⁹ this to cater for the large increase in scholars, soon to reach over two hundred [Appendix II].

The ministry of Samuel Jones from 1893 coincided with a local agricultural slump which affected commerce and caused distress in the town, to which the Brecon Churches responded with soup-kitchens. This in turn affected Kensington's finances, which depended on direct subscriptions from members, and resulted in Jones moving to Banbury after only five years²⁰ However, within two years the Church had recovered sufficiently to appoint Arthur T. Matthews who stayed until 1907. He was an ardent Liberal and engaged in controversy over the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales²¹ – a story in itself! During his ministry, in 1904, Wales experienced its greatest (and last) Religious Revival but this had little effect in terms of membership for most local Churches, especially Kensington where numbers were falling.

Archibald H. Lewis had a short pastorate from 1908 for five years. A native of Hay, he studied at the Baptist College, Cardiff, taking a BA degree in 1902 and a BD in 1905, the first Baptist student to receive the latter.²² This apparently did



Plate 1 Kensington Baptist Chapel (1880–2010) showing the 1885 extension
of 3 classrooms

Photo: Godfrey Harris

nothing to reverse the numerical decline so that by 1910 there were 73 members and 97 scholars [Appendix II] Moreover, in an article about him in the *Baptist Record* of October 1911 there are references to the difficulties which inevitably accompany a Brecon pastorate, for Brecon ‘was very stony ground’, but no indication is given of the nature of these difficulties.²³ Leaving in 1913, Lewis had several pastorates in England, before returning to Brecon, to minister to Watergate from 1923 to 1926, after which he emigrated to Australia.²⁴

The war years (1914–18) affected the life of the Church: fifteen young men served in the Forces, four of whom never returned. They were commemorated on a memorial plaque which will be placed in the new chapel. The next minister Roger Thomas, who was present throughout the war, did much, together with the ‘comforts committee’, to keep in touch with the men serving. With the shortage of man-power and the demands on fuel and lighting, it was obvious that the two Baptist Churches, a short distance apart, should worship together. After a meeting between the two diaconates it was decided to hold joint Sunday services, alternating between the two chapels. Thus on Roger Thomas’s departure for Calvary Church, Brynmawr, after four years – yet another short pastorate²⁵ – both ministers took part in the communion service which followed his farewell sermon on 29 September 1918. Subsequently, from October 1918 to March 1919, David

An outline history of the Baptist church at Kensington in the town of Brecon (1817–2012) 57

Owen Griffiths, minister of Watergate (1905–1919) acted as joint pastor of both Churches which met at Kensington. Most members favoured this arrangement but within a few months a section of the Watergate Church members decided to go their separate way, a separation which remains to this day.²⁶

David Griffiths, however, decided to stay with Kensington. (He also continued with his oversight of Pontestyll Church until 1923). His popular and fruitful pastorate which saw many innovations in the life of the Church lasted twenty years. In 1920 the young people presented the church with an individual communion service (still in use today) in memory of the organist who was killed in the war. In 1924, five more male deacons were appointed, with the additional appointment of two female deacons, (an early instance of this practice). The fall in membership was halted and by 1923 had reached a new peak of 92 with 132 scholars [Appendix II]; this in spite of the 1930s Depression when there was a movement of population to the Midlands and South of England.²⁷ In 1930 the Church celebrated fifty years of the building of the second chapel and published a Jubilee Souvenir which told the story of its building and the previous sixty-three years.²⁸ Five years later a new Hammond organ was installed which enhanced the annual singing festivals. Church Anniversary Services were always well attended and featured some of the foremost preachers of the day. Much importance was given to the societies and guilds such as youth, choir and women's groups.²⁹ David Griffiths died on 9 March 1939 and a memorial plaque was placed in the chapel.

For about eighteen months the Church relied on supply preachers until the induction of Thomas Richards on 26 October 1940. Serving for forty-five years, he had the longest pastorate in the life of the Church, and this, from 1950–84 included charge of Soar, Llanfihangel-Nant-Brân. In the Second World War, as in the First, many members were away on service, with two never to return. These were commemorated with a small plaque on the communion table and with a flower vase. The Church re-started its 'comforts committee' and provided hospitality for serving men after services on Sundays. The minister became an Honorary Chaplain to the Forces. During 1967 the Church celebrated its Ter-Jubilee (150 years from 1817) with special services, including one at which Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones of London preached, a supper and a concert involving the Sunday School choir. At this time there were 85 members, including 15 deacons and officers, but the Sunday School had dropped to 30 [Appendix II]. Thomas Richards retired to Monmouth in 1984, died in 1998 and is buried with his wife in Brecon cemetery.³⁰

After a vacancy of four years, Vaughan Rees came to Kensington, now part of a group pastorate which from October 1988 included Watergate and Sardis, Llangynidr. The Sunday Schools of Kensington and Watergate combined, but as neither Church was willing to relinquish its chapel, Watergate withdrew from the group in July 1989.³¹ Vaughan Rees moved after six years to Keynsham Baptist Church, Bristol and then in 2004 became a Chaplain to the University of Glamorgan, a post he still holds.

After a year's break, Dr Hazel Sherman was inducted on 1 July 1995. She came from the Bristol Baptist College where she had been a tutor for several years. Her contribution to the life of the Church was considerable: two baptisms, infant blessings, Sunday evening vespers, a chaplaincy in the local hospital and preaching invitations throughout the district. There was an active Junior Church which met during the morning service. Throughout her pastorate the chapel building, then over a hundred years old, was in constant need of repairs, and plans for a new building were considered necessary. These plans were made in conjunction with the Mid-Wales Housing Association; a part of the site would be developed for sheltered housing, the rest for a building suited to the needs of the modern Church. After protracted negotiations the scheme was shelved and eventually abandoned. Hazel left to take up a pastorate in Worthing on 3 September 2006.³²

Another gap in the ministry followed, this time for four years in which the Church had many difficult decisions regarding its future. A pastorate group was appointed which, without success, interviewed many candidates. Due to the dangerous state of the chapel it was vacated mid 2007 and all activities were transferred to the Hall. The plans described above were jettisoned and a new architect commissioned in April 2007, working with a building group from 2008. Following a request from Watergate Church, another attempt was made to reconcile the two Churches, with a view to a joint fellowship. The two diaconates met but eventually Watergate withdrew. A new building plan was prepared, and after three major revisions, the Church approved it in 2009. Subsequent formal planning negotiations, revisions and applications for finance lasted until 2011.³³

The induction of Neil Jones, the present minister, was held, for convenience, at Watergate Chapel on 25 September 2010. After twenty years as a teacher, he had spent five years training at the Northern Baptist College, and then served at the Town Centre Church, Preston, for fourteen. The last service he conducted in the old Hall of Kensington was on 19 December 2010, then, for the next thirteen months use was made of the Westenders' Hall, Llanfaes (formerly Tabernacle Welsh Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, built 1871).

The second re-build of the Chapel

After further delays, the Kensington site was cleared and building commenced mid-2011. Following completion early 2012, a dedication service was held 24 March 2012. The single-storey building, designed to meet the needs of the Church and the wider community, is in two linked sections – a worship area seating up to 80, a baptistry and an electronic organ (a gift from a Baptist Church in Hull); and, connected – the hall, kitchen and six smaller rooms. The overall cost was £700,000, made possible by grants from the Welsh Assembly, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the South Wales Baptist Association and by the donations of members and well-wishers.

R. F. PETER POWELL

An outline history of the Baptist church at Kensington in the town of Brecon (1817–2012) 59



Plate 2 Kensington Baptist Chapel 2012

Photo by Godfrey Harris

Notes

In this paper, 'Church' – earlier sometimes 'Cause' – refers to a group of believers, and 'Meeting House' or Chapel to where they met and worshipped.

¹ Davies P., 'Episodes in the History of Breconshire Dissent', *Brycheiniog III*, p. 19, but for a fuller account see Owen B. G., *The Ilston Book*, NLW 1996, p. 32.

² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³ *Brycheiniog*, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴ *Dictionary of Welsh Biography to 1940*, Cymmrodorion, London 1959.

⁵ Watergate Baptist Church: Ministry and Memories, 2006, p. 6 hereafter listed as WBC.

⁶ WBC, p. 6.

⁷ WBC, p. 6.

⁸ Poole E., *History & Biography of Brecknockshire*, 1886, p. 339.

⁹ *Y Greal* (Welsh Baptist Periodical) 1825, p. 26.

¹⁰ *Seren Gomer* (Welsh Baptist Periodical) 1825, p. 26.

¹¹ Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Reading.

¹² WBC, p. 15.

¹³ Brecon and Radnor Express: Museum News, 18 May 1967.

¹⁴ BRE, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Baptist Union, *ibid.*

¹⁶ BRE, *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Royal Commission on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales*, 1910.

¹⁸ Poole, op. cit.

¹⁹ BRE, *ibid.*

²⁰ BRE, *ibid.*

²¹ BRE, *ibid.*

²² BRE, 1 June 1967.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ WBC, p. 19.

²⁵ BRE, *ibid.*

²⁶ WBC, p. 18 and BRE, 1 June 1967.

²⁷ Davies J., *A History of Wales*, Penguin, 1993, p. 586.

²⁸ Powys County Archive, Llandrindod, Acc. 1508.

²⁹ BRE, *ibid.*

³⁰ BRE, *ibid.*

³¹ WBC, p. 32.

³² Kensington Baptist Church Meeting Minutes, 2004–12.

³³ *ibid.*

APPENDIX I
List of Ministers

The title Reverend applies to all those listed below and to others mentioned in the text
The dates in brackets, where available, are life dates

John Evans (d 1851)	1817–1824		
Benjamin Price (1804–96)	1825–1828	}	
Henry Morgan	1829–1831	}	
Joseph Ashford	1831–1837	}	
Charles Thompson	1837–1838	}	[1]
Henry Williams	1838–1843	}	
James Walter Evans (d 1880)	1844–1876	}	
John Meredith	1877–1892	}	
Samuel Jones	1899–1907	}	
Arthur T. Matthews	1899–1907	}	
Archibald Lewis	1908–1913	}	[2, 4]
Roger G. Thomas	1914–1918	}	
David Owen Griffiths (d 1939)	1919–1939	}	
Thomas Richards (1906–1998)	1940–1984	}	[3,4]
	Vacant		
Vaughan Rees	1988–1994	}	[4]
Dr Hazel Sherman	1995–2006	}	
	Vacant		
Neil Jones	2010–		

Notes

Further details of their ministerial careers may be found in:

[1] Poole E: *History & Biography of Brecknockshire* 1886 pp. 338–9.

[2] Brecon & Radnor Express: *Museum News*, 11, 18, 25 May 1967.

[3] Brecon & Radnor Express: *Museum News*, 1 June 1967.

[4] Minute Books, Registers, correspondence etc from 1876–1986, which were deposited c.2000 with Powys County Archive, Llandrindod.

Records prior to this do not exist.

APPENDIX II
Representative sample of Statistical Records

Date	Source	Members	Scholars	Minister	When Settled
1838–63	BM (Entries but no figures given)				
1851	Religious	<i>Present</i> morning	160		
	Census	evening	140	J. W. Evans	–
1864	BH	100	–	”	1843
1870	BUW	103	100	”	
1879	BUW	110	140	J. Meredith	1877
1890	BH	107	193	”	
1900	”	90	234	”	
1910	”	73	97	A. Lewis	1908
1920	”	75	65	D. O. Griffiths	1919
1932	BUH	92	132	”	
1954	”	82	55	T. Richards	1940
1969	”	85	30	”	
1984	”	61	20	”	
1988	”	48	25	V. Rees	1988
1995	”	36	14	”	
2002	SWBA	28	–	H. Sherman	1995
2007	”	29	–	”	
2010	”	22	–	N. Jones	2010
2012	”	22	–	”	

Abbreviations & Sources

BM	Baptist Manuals held by Regents Park College, Oxford.
BH	Baptist Handbooks held by Regents Park College, Oxford.
BUW	Baptist Union of Wales Handbooks.
BUH	Baptist Union of Great Britain Handbooks.
SWBA	South Wales Baptist Association.

THE CONQUEST OF THE SILURES: A BRECONSHIRE SCENARIO

Our knowledge of the history of peoples who lived in Wales in the middle of the 1st Century AD, is almost entirely due to the Roman historian Tacitus. He recorded the military successes and failures of a succession of Roman commanders in Britain in the years AD 43 to AD 76 against peoples he identified as the Decangi or Deceangli, the Ordovices and the Silures. The boundaries of their territories is a matter of scholarly debate. Tacitus's relation of the campaigns in what would centuries later become Wales are geographically vague. Ptolemy identifies *Bullaem/Burrium*, i.e. Usk, as a town of the Silures and so places their territory east of the territorial town of the Demetae, *Maridunum* i.e. Carmarthen (*Geographia*: 2.3.12) To the east of Siluria lies the territory of the Dobuni with their town of *Corinium* i.e. Cirencester. It can be deduced from other place-names in Ptolemy that the territory of the Ordovices lay to the north of Siluria. It can be further deduced that there were other peoples in Wales and the Marches not mentioned by Tacitus (Davies & Jones 204: 46).

Much of the debate about Siluria is directed as to where the eastern boundary of Silurian tribal territory lay. Webster (1981: 17) considers that their territory was bounded to the north and east by the Wye. Salway (1985: 45) comments that tribal boundaries in Wales are even more uncertain than in England and identifies the Glamorgans, Gwent and southern Powys as the land of the Silures. Jones and Mattingly (1990: 61) suggest that it may have been east of the Wye towards the Severn before the Roman advance, citing signs of conflict at the Sutton Wall hill-fort. The *OS Map of Roman Britain 5th Edition* (2001) has the legend 'SILVRES' stretching across the Glamorgan valleys from the Neath to the Usk suggestive of Silurian territory lying between these two rivers. After the total conquest of the Silures, c. AD 75, the Romans established *Venta Silurum* i.e. Caerwent, as the market town of the Silures, close to the Severn estuary, east of the Usk and west of the Wye. Wherever the boundaries were, it is generally agreed that the river valley of the Usk and its Breconshire surrounding were important parts of Siluria.

After the capture of Caratacus in AD 51, the Silures had continued a guerrilla war, attacking legionary cohorts who had been directed to build forts in their territory (*Annals* 12.38). In one instance, a camp-prefect, eight centurions and many legionnaires were slain; losses even more severe would have been incurred if neighbouring forts had not quickly sent help. In another action, cavalry squadrons on a foraging expedition were forced to flee. This action escalated; Tacitus tells us Ostorius then threw his light-infantry into the battle but they were unable to stabilise the situation. Only when the legionary troops joined in were the Silures forced to flee, but with little loss.

The period of eight to ten years after the Boudiccan revolt was a vital one for the history of Roman Britain (Salway 1981: 125). Salway attributes economic and social recovery of the province from war and famine to the policy of winning over the general support of the native aristocracy. Tacitus refers to the way in which the next governor, Trebellius Maximus, never ventured on a campaign and through courteous behaviour encouraged the barbarians to indulge themselves in seductive vices in order to appreciate the pleasures of peace and civilisation (*Agricola* 16). However it seems that in Wales the *status quo* was maintained with the Silures left alone in their valleys and mountains west of the middle and upper Usk.

Nero committed suicide in AD 68 after a life of debauchery, depravity and perversions. There was no clear successor and the next year became known as the Year of the Four Emperors as powerful men fought a civil war for the purple when it was realised that emperors need not have been born to it, but could use the power of the legions under their command to gain it. Remarkably the civil war did not spread to Britain and the legions that remained there, although possibly favouring Vitellius, did not participate in it (*Histories* 59, 60).¹ On the other hand, there was acrimony between the commander of the *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*, Roscius Caelius and the governor Trebellius, so much so that the governor had to flee to join Vitellius in his march on Rome. This acrimony may have been because of the restraining influence of the governor on the inclination of Roscius to despoil the natives (Salway 1981: 129). The headquarters of this legion was at Wroxeter (Nash-Williams 1969: 13) and units of its battle group were in a position to penetrate Wales and attack, amongst others, the Silures. A new governor, Vettius Bolanus, arrived in AD 69 and was joined by Julius Agricola who had been given command of the troublesome *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* by Licinius Mucianus, a major supporter of the Flavian bid for power (*Agricola* 7).² Agricola was no stranger to Britain, having served under Suetonius Paulinus during the Boudiccan revolt. He brought the legion under proper discipline once more.

The accession of Vespasian brought back as governor of Britain Petillius Cerialis, (*Agricola* 17) the previous commander of *Legio IX* which had been severely mauled during the Boudiccan revolt. A dynamic commander and a survivor of military disasters, he was a clear sign that there would be a new forward policy in the province (Salway 1981: 134). He had Tacitus's father-in-law, Julius Agricola, under his command as the legate of *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* (*Agricola* 7). It was the Brigantes in the north who felt the onslaught of the new policy of subjugating the whole island; a new legionary fortress was established at York. At the end of his tour of duty, Cerialis was replaced by Sextus Julius Frontinus, possibly as early as AD 74 (Jarrett 1965: 35). The Silures were about to experience the forward policy; it was time for a last stand.

A conglomeration of hill-forts was situated along the Usk valley on the escarpment of the Beacons and Black Mountains and the uplands of Mynydd Epynt (Manning 1981: Fig. 9). A large and complex multivallate earthwork,

Castell Dinas, is on a prominence above the saddle between the valleys of the Llynfi and the Rhiangoll. (RCAHMW 1986: 96). This fortification at one time controlled access to the latter valley. It has a southern counterpart in the univallate fort at Myarth high above the left bank of the Usk near Cwm Du, the largest in Breconshire (RCAHMW 1986: 83). North of the close narrowing of the Usk valley between a spur of Mynydd Llangors and Tor-y-Foel, another very large multivallate fort surmounts the long crest of Allt-yr-Esgair (RCAHMW 1986: 91) dominating the Usk valley to the west and the valley of the Llynfi and Llangorse Lake to the east. Further up the Usk valley another large multivallate fort crowns the summit of Pen-y-Crug, 2km north-west of the confluence of the Usk and the Honddu (RCAHMW 1986: 68). This fort was visible from the summit of Allt-yr-Esgair. Equidistant from Pen-y-Crug and Allt-yr-Esgair is another large univallate fort, Hillis Fort near the Alltfilo, that commanded the watershed between the Wye and the Usk (RCAHMW 1986: 104). Many of these forts were visible from one other and together with the restricted topography, might have presented Roman forces with difficulties if re-occupied by the Silures in defence of their remaining territory. The population of this area could put themselves into a significant defensive posture when awaiting a further Roman advance either up the valley of the Usk or over the watershed, or both. Jarrett estimates the maximum population of the Silures c. AD 60 as 40,000 with a fighting strength of less than half that (Jarrett 1965: 36).

Tacitus does honour to both sides in his short description of Frontinus's campaign that may have spanned AD 74 to AD 77, three, possibly four campaigning seasons (Jarrett 1965: 37). He wrote:

He conquered the strong and militant tribe of the Silures, triumphing over the valour of the enemy and the difficulties of the terrain (*Agricola* 17).

Traces of marching camps that were routinely constructed at the end of a day's movement on campaign by legions and auxiliaries might give an indication of the route of a campaign by indicating key assembly grounds (Webster 1981: 41). The dating evidence that is found in permanent fortifications, particularly ceramic sherds, is absent from marching camps because pottery was not normally part of a soldier's equipment on campaign; the evidence is fragmentary and piecemeal.

The marching camps that have been found so far in Silurian territory to the west of the Usk vary greatly in size.³ They are numbered in Figure 1:

1. The camp at Blaen Cwm Bach of 26.69ha (66.19 acres) that lies on a ridge 5km ENE from the fort at Neath (RCAHMW 1976: I.2, 99 no.738). Davies and Jones view it as probably indicating a force moving westward through the Vale of

- Glamorgan then changing direction to ascend the eastern flank of the Neath valley or taking to the high ground before attempting the crossing of the River Neath in a westerly direction (Davies & Jones 2006: 59).
2. A small 4.7ha camp, the alignment of which Davies and Jones hold is suggestive of a force moving north-west towards the middle Vale of Neath, is Carn Caca at Melin Court on the south side of the Vale (Davies & Jones 2006: 112).
 3. A marching camp of about 14ha (34.5 acres) is situated close to the later auxiliary fort at Coelbren at the confluence of the River Pyrdin and the Camnant stream. It is also close to the alignment of Sarn Helen. It has excellent views to the north-west (Davies & Jones 2006: 114)
 4. Another site that lies on the Neath valley axis is the Plas-y-Gors marching camp of 8.7ha (21 acres) that lies east-facing on a slope north of Ystradfellte, adjacent to the presumed route of Sarn Helen (Davies & Jones 2006: 91).⁴
 5. A large marching camp of 17.8ha (44 acres) is located at Arosfa Garreg north of the Black Mountain area. It commands good views to the west and also to the north down the ravine of the River Clydach. The camp is aligned WNW-ESE (Davies & Jones 2006: 101).
 6. Two superimposed marching camps are located at Y Pigwn on Mynydd Trecastell with commanding views in all directions. The larger, older camp of 15ha is aligned NE-SW. The smaller of 10ha is aligned ENE-WSW. 5.5km to the south of these camps is the large Arosfa Garreg camp of 17.8ha with a possible alignment WNW (David & Jones: 103).
 7. Between the Rhondda Fach and Cynon valleys, above Ferndale, with commanding views to the north and east is an irregularly-shaped fort, probably designed to take advantage of the ground. Twyn-y-Briddallt is about 6.5ha (16 acres) (Davies & Jones 2006: 118).
 8. On a ridge to the west of the Taff Vale is the 15.3ha (38 acres) camp at Pen-y-Coedcae, south of Pontypridd, carefully sited with excellent views to the north and south-east; its alignment may be to the east (Davies & Jones 2006: 15, 116).

The locations of the marching camps above are reasonable evidence of routes but only those penetrating Silurian territory up the Vale of Neath, Taff Vale and the valley of the Cynon. The large camp at Blaen Cwm Bach is unusual not only because of its size but also its shape. A typical ratio of length to breadth for a Roman camp of classic 'playing card' shape with four gates is 3:2; this camp has a ratio of 3:1. Vegetius Renuatus, specifying camp construction and writing in the late fourth or early fifth century AD, but drawing on many earlier sources states that:

The dimensions must be exactly computed by the engineers so that the size of the camp may be proportioned to the numbers of troops. A camp that is too confined will not permit the troops to perform their movements with freedom, and one that is too extensive divides them too much (*Epitoma rei militaris* 3.8).

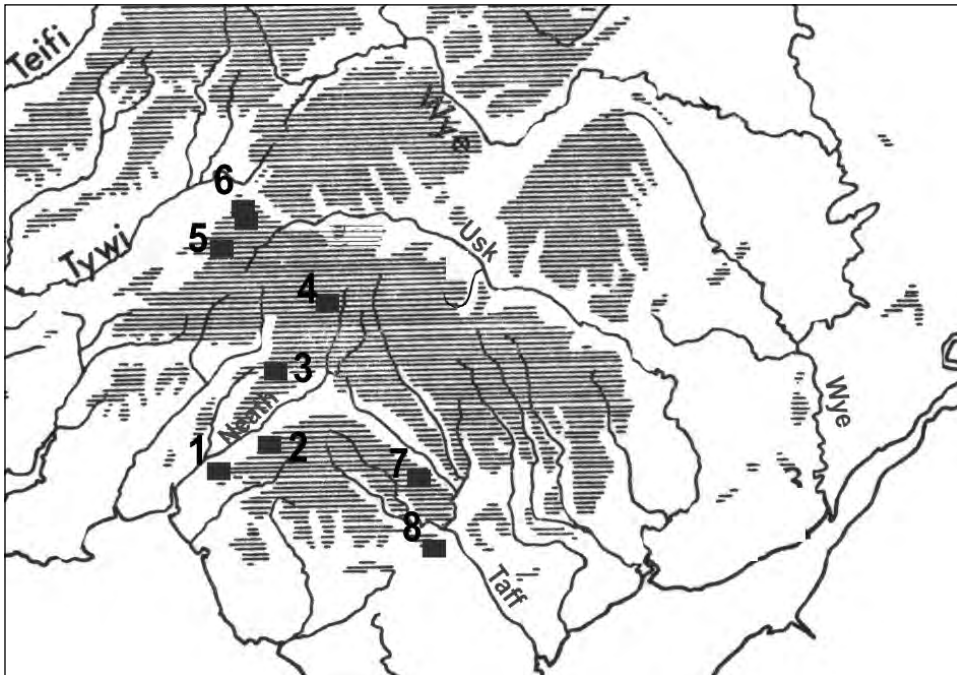


Figure 1 Marching camps in Suluria c. 75 AD (after Davies & Jones 2006)

Jarrett (1965: 35) estimated Blaen Cwm Bach as being of sufficient size to accommodate three legions plus auxiliaries. Davies and Jones, citing Maxwell, give a range between 13,280 and 16,880 troops (Davies & Jones 2006: 42).⁵ Even taking the lower figure, this represents the activities of one of the largest Roman armies assembled on the Welsh front (Davies & Jones 2006: 59). The unusual shape of the camp at Blaen Cwm Bach of a 3:1 profile, is certainly due to its position on a ridge. It may be that the topography prevented the construction of a cluster of separate forts in a ‘gathering ground’ in the style of the five camps in the Walford Basin (Davies & Jones 2006: 35) and so it was then necessary to depart from the classic 3:2 profile.

The likely disposition of legions in Britain on Frontinus’s arrival, c. AD 74, was *Legio II Augusta* with headquarters at Usk but shortly to be involved in constructing a new fortress at Caerleon, *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* with headquarters at Wroxeter, *Legio II Adiutrix* was probably at the site of another new fortress planned or under construction at Chester (Jarrett 1965: 35) and *Legio IX Hispana* at York. The number of auxiliary units is unknown; there was no fixed ratio of legionary troops to auxiliaries (Goldsworthy 2003: 57). Vegetius, writing about campaigns in the days of the Roman Republic, is unequivocal that ‘it was an invariable rule . . . that the number of allies or auxiliaries should never exceed that of the

Roman citizens' (*Epitoma Re Militari* 3.1). Gilliver contends that Vegetius was expressing an ideal to enhance the prowess of the citizen soldiers. She calls attention to the claim by Velleius Paterculus that there were two *socii* for every citizen soldier in the first century BC but remarks that 'the histories of the early Imperial period show little concern for this issue' (Gilliver 2001: 28).

The strategy adopted to finally conquer the Silures is a matter of conjecture but it seems reasonable to suppose that there were two task forces, one providing the hammer that, striking up the Vale of Neath, crushed the Silures against the anvil provided by a task force in the middle and upper Usk valley. The make-up of the armies required to carry out this supposed strategy is itself speculative. Inclusion of a vexillation of *Legio II Augusta* from Usk in one task force is probable together with its associated auxiliaries. *Legio II Adiutrix* may have been brought from Chester with its auxiliaries. Some of the ground enclosed by the rampart at Blaen-Cwm-Bach may have been too steep or marshy for use by troops. If this was the case, then the task force numbers occupying the fort may be seen to have been legionary troops with auxiliary infantry and cavalry totalling in the region of 14,000 men. The second task force, possibly operating in the middle Usk valley, might have been provided by *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* and its auxiliaries, operating out of Wroxeter and very familiar with this ground.

The army commander, Frontinus, in his *Strategemata*, whilst listing successful battle strategies that led to a successful outcomes for many ancient generals, regrettably does not include any of those that led to his own success. However it can be concluded that he was a wily soldier who would be aware of opportunities to crush his enemies. In the case of the Silures in their mountain stronghold, the speculative hammer against the anvil scenario is apposite.

Turning now to the middle Usk valley, the words of Davies and Jones on the lack of discovered marching camps have a resonance:

. . . true of the Usk valley in general, with not a single temporary camp being known until Arosfa Garreg and Y Pigwn are reached on the very uppermost margins of the same. Its flanks from the vicinity of the Neronian legionary fortress at Usk to the W. of Brecon Gaer *must hold clues* as to links between the above-named camps and the starting points for these campaigns somewhere to the E (Davies & Jones 2006: 64).⁶

In a search for clues as to the posture of a task force in the middle Usk valley it seems reasonable that the hammer advancing from Blaen Cwm Bach in the vale of Neath would seek to drive any of the Silures who resisted, against a military anvil positioned in the flat open ground of the Usk valley where legionary power would be invincible if the enemy was foolish enough to enter a pitched battle. Such a deployment would necessitate a campaign base, not unlike the pre-Flavian fort at Clyro, and logistically supported by the fortress at Usk.

Clues that are popular in seeking to determine the routes of the Roman

advance in Siluria are the Flavian forts built after the conquest of this territory, typically to accommodate a cavalry cohort of approximately 500 men. As previously mentioned, Webster considers that although campaign camps, i.e. marching camps, should provide valuable evidence of the direction and scale of campaigns 'in practice they are of little help' (Webster 1981: 41). Associated with forts in general are the roads that they were designed to guard and maintain. In the case of Siluria three post-conquest routes can be identified each with a line of forts, some pre-Flavian (Nash-Williams 1969: Fig. 4):

Usk fortress – Abergavenny – Pen-y-Gaer – Brecon Gaer.

Cardiff – Caerphilly – Gelligaer – Pen-y-darren – Brecon Gaer.

Neath – Coelbren – Brecon Gaer.

The importance of the Usk valley in the Brecon area is emphasised by these routes, and others from the west, north and east, yet no marching camp or campaign base has yet been identified here that might have been used in Frontinus's conquest of the Silures. On the assumption that any such fortification would be close to a road later constructed by the Roman army, it is necessary to consider the modern interpretations of Roman routes in detail in this area to seek the clues that Davies and Jones assert *must exist*.

An antiquarian who showed great interest in Roman roads was Richard Fenton who in his *Tours in Wales 1804–1813* relates how he often went out of his way to view reported remains of such. He visited Brecon Gaer and noted 'the Roman road from Gobannium'. As he travelled to Crickhowell he much admired the vale of Usk and wrote 'A very peculiar feature of it is the endless openings into Smaller Vallies on each side', a feature that daresay was not lost on Frontinus (Fenton 1917: 24).

Theophilus Jones, in his *The History of the County of Brecknock* originally published in 1805, described a Roman road from Caerphilly descending into the Usk valley along the length of the parish of Llandetty, crossing the Caerfanell and reaching the Usk at Llansantffraed (Jones 1898: 428). Thomas Codrington in his *Roman Roads in Britain*, published in 1903, noted possible traces of a Roman road from Clyro to Brecon. He wrote further:

This road was joined near Brecon by a Roman road from Abergavenny, of which however there is little trace. To the west of Crickhowell the course seems to be by Tretower to Pen-y-gaer, where there are the remains of a Roman camp, and along a lane to Ty-maur, about half-a-mile west of which at Bwlch a parish boundary joins the present main road and follows it for half-a-mile, and continues along a lane for a mile, to the southward of Allt-yr-Yscrein. A stone pillar, probably a milliary, dedicated to Victorinus (AD 265–7) formerly stood by the side of the road at Scethrog, and seems to show that the present road follows the course of the Roman road to the west of the Brecon and Merthyr Railway (Codrington 1903: Chap. 10).⁷

Codrington is much more definite in describing the Roman roads leading from Brecon Gaer to Neath *i.e.* Sarn Helen and the road to Llandovery passing close to the marching camps at Y Pigwn but omits any mention of a road from Brecon Gaer to Penydarren, Gelligaer, Caerphilly and Cardiff.

Unlike Codrington, O'Dwyer seems to have seen Roman roads in most valleys of what might be considered to be Siluria (O'Dwyer 1937). A reviewer of his work comments that 'in his determination to fill his maps with Roman roads has led him to use all matters of facts and fancies without discrimination' (P.C. 1939: 57). O'Dwyer did nominate a road from Cardiff to Talybont-on-Usk from the fort at Penydarren that went along the Cefn Ystrad ridge north of Dowlais to a junction with a road from Dol-y-Gaer to Pen Rhiw Calch and Bryn Melyn, then along the western flank of Tor-y-Foel to pass through Maes Mawr Farm to a crossing of the Usk at Llansantfraed. O'Dwyer is puzzled by an OS map of his time; it depicts a Roman road going right over the hump of Allt-yr-Esgair and not taking the easier route closer to the river to join his postulated route through Maes Mawr Farm, at Llansantffraed. This low level route below Allt-yr-Esgair is undoubtedly the one described by Codrington lying to the west of the railway during his time.

The *OS Map of Roman Britain 3rd Edition* (1956) shows a Roman road from Cardiff branching at Dol-y-Gaer, one branch crossing the Beacons through Bwlch ar y Fan, 'The Gap', and along the eastern flank of Bryn Teg to cross the Usk at Llanfaes. The other branch is essentially O'Dwyer's route through Maes Mawr Farm to Llansantffraed from Pen Bwlch Glascwm. This OS map does not show this road joining the road from Abergavenny to Brecon Gaer; that is shown as going along the ridge of Allt-yr-Esgair.

Margary's exhaustive examination of the evidence for Roman roads in Britain created a useful numbering system for the roads (Margary 1967). He identifies the road in the *OS Map of Roman Britain 3rd Edition* from Cardiff to Brecon Gaer as RR621. The Talybont-on-Usk branch is numbered RR620 but the route he chooses is past Maes Mawr Farm through Pencelli and past Llanfrynach to cross the Usk presumably at the ford near Llanhamlach (Margary 1967: 336). He supposes that RR621 is an alternative route to Brecon Gaer that avoids 'very high ground'. The height of Bwlch ar y Fan on RR620 is 604m; the highest point on RR621 is 510m but on the other hand this route has a very steep ascent from Maes Mawr Farm to Bryn Melyn. RR621 has easier gradients in both directions that would have been much better for horse, mule or oxen-drawn transport. Margary does not specifically describe his RR63a as cresting the ridge of Allt-yr-Esgair but refers to it as 'being along an elevation' (Margary 1967).

RCAHMW considers O'Dwyer and Margary in respect of the road connecting Penydarren to Brecon Gaer, RR620, and RR621 past Maes Mawr Farm to Llanfrynach (RCAHMW 1986: 166) but states that no satisfactory evidence of a Roman origin for this branch has been presented. As far as the ascent of Allt-yr-Esgair is concerned:

... there is little good reason why a laborious ascent to the crest of the ridge need have been made when there are viable routes at several elevations along the W. side (RCAHMW 1986: 168).

A report by CPAT investigates the fieldwork evidence for RR620 from Taff Fechan to Llanfrynach and although acknowledging that the track across the watershed has a long history, has to conclude that there is no convincing trace of the Roman road, so concurring with the opinion of the RACHMW above (CPAT 2004: 29). However the same report includes a map entitled '*All known and predicted Roman roads in mid and north-east Wales*' (CPAT 2004: Fig.3). This shows not only RR620 but also shows the route over Allt-yr-Esgair, the route at a lower level next to the River Usk and the road through Maes Mawr Farm that appears in O'Dwyer and the *OS Map of Roman Britain 3rd Edition*. The latter two roads appear to join at Llansantffraed where there was a ford across the River Usk. The road through Maes Mawr Farm is shown in detail in the 1884 OS 1:2500 map and again in the *Ordnance Survey 1904, 2nd edition, Sheet XXXIV.12, Talybont and Llansantffraed*. This sheet also shows a Roman road along the south-west flank of Allt-yr-Esgair passing through Tal-y-Bryn-Uchaf.

The Ordnance Survey no longer holds details of the written details of the survey for the 1904 map sheet above. Normally the Object Name Books of this era are available to view at the National Archives at Kew. Unfortunately the relevant record series OS35 covering Talybont-on-Usk and Llansantffraed is reported by the National Archives as believed to have been destroyed in the bombing of Southampton during the Second World War so the provenance of the Llansantffraed to Maes Mawr Roman road has been lost.⁸ This might be the reason why later OS maps do not show it.

Returning now to Frontinus's conquest of the Silures, having reviewed the possible post-campaign road network in the middle Usk valley, particularly in the vicinity of Talybont-on-Usk, it is necessary to distinguish campaigning from road building. As observed by Hugh Davies, the army in the field would not have waited for properly-engineered roads before advancing into enemy-held territory. If suitable tracks were available, they would have been used. If trackways were not available, the army would have to manage as best it could choosing the most appropriate ground to advance over (Davies 2002: 113).

In the case of a battle group advancing up the Usk valley, possibly cooperating with a battle group advancing in the opposite direction from Clyro, and having defeated the populations associated with the Myarth, Allt-yr-Esgair and Pen-y-Crug hill forts, a suitable place for an encampment could have been close to the confluence of the Usk and the Caerfanell rivers such as the site of Maes Mawr Farm. An advantage of a site there would have been the blocking of enemy forces in Glyn Collwyn and its many re-entrant valleys together with prevention of access to the Usk valley from the Taff valleys and connected valleys further

west. This strategy is seen in many locations in Agricola's campaigns in Scotland where forts are often found at the entrance to glens, observed by Anne Johnson (Johnson 1983: 256). If such an encampment was constructed at Maes Mawr by a task force advancing from Usk or Clyro it would be necessary to build it away from the risk of flooding so a location close to the river junction would have been ruled out. A location at Maes Mawr Farm would probably have avoided the risk.

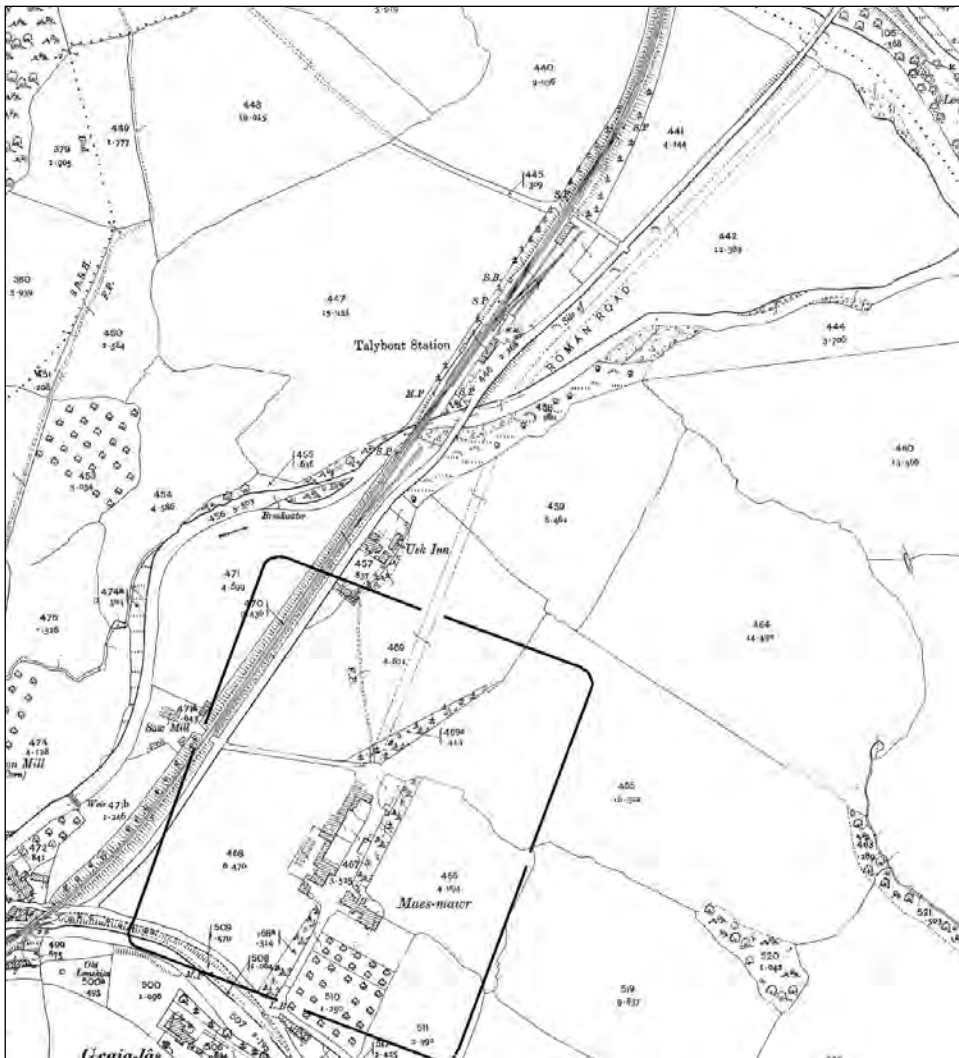


Figure 2 Speculative outline of 12ha (29 acres) fort at Maes Mawr Farm based on Ordnance Survey 1904, 2nd edition, Sheet XXXIV.12, Talybont and Llansantffraed.

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Although the hydrology of the Usk and the Caerfanell may have been altered by man and nature over the centuries, it is relevant to note that Maes Mawr Farm lies outside the present 1000 year flood plain (EA 2010). It is suggested here that the Roman road shown on the OS 1904 map sheet could well be a causeway built *from* the ford at Llansantffraed *to* a campaign base at Maes Mawr Farm. Therefore RR620 would not be the line of a penetration route to this location but possibly a useful ancient track leading from a camp at Maes Mawr Farm, to the high ground dominating Glyn Collwyn and Dyffryn Crawnon.

Sites where an alignment of streets within a Roman fortification camp have been approximately preserved despite later building can be seen at Usk (Frere *et al.* 1987: Fig. 5), Chester (Mason 1987: Fig. 1), Leintwardine (Nash-Williams 1969: Fig. 46), Llandovery (Nash-Williams 1969: Fig. 49) and many others. The lane between farm buildings at Maes Mawr Farm, and taking into account the causeway from the ford over the Usk, is suggestive of the *via praetoria* of a fort. The *porta praetoria* would be to the south, facing any enemy in Glyn Collwyn beyond the Wenallt spur. This would give fort dimensions of approximately 380m x 300m (Fig. 2) and an enclosed area of about 12ha (29 acres). This is approximately 15% larger than the campaign base at Clyro given in Nash-Williams (1969: 77).

Factors that ancient treatises give regarding the siting of a fort include ready access to water for men and animals, fodder for animals and wood for fuel. Pseudo-Hyginus, unknown writer of the work *De munitionibus castrorum* dating possibly from the 3rd century, previously attributed to the surveyor Hyginus Gromaticus, listed desirable topographical characteristics in order of preference:

... in the field, they have as the first choice a rise with a gentle slope in which the *porta decumana* constitutes the highest point so that the camp is subject to view from there; the *porta praetoria* always looks in direction of the enemy. The place they have as second choice is one stationed in a plain, the third on a hill, the fourth on a mountain, the fifth in any place unavoidable but designated necessary (*De munitionibus castrorum.*: 56, trans. SH-K).

Given the above extract, the site at Fig. 2 is a second choice as the site is essentially flat. High ground from which a camp could be reached by missile weapons is advised against by Vegetius (*Epitoma rei militaris.* 3.8). The site is overlooked by the 337m Wenallt that, ignoring the 19th century canal embankment, rises to 15m above the site at a distance of 100m.⁹ It is not possible to determine how close the forest would have been that might have enabled hostile forces to gather unseen. Johnson suggests a distance of 35 to 45 metres beyond the ditch was necessary to give a clear view from the rampart of a fort and, if necessary, would have been obtained by tree-felling (Johnson 1983: 39). Its overall characteristics are sufficient to encourage consideration of this site as suitable for the location of a fort.

Although the ancient sources do not specifically mention the confluence of two rivers as a desirable location for a fort, modern writers have noticed it. John Strange, cited in Manning (1981: 4), visiting Usk in 1779, noted that its position at the junction of two rivers ‘. . . was in accordance with Roman military practice’. Coxley, commenting on Roman connections in 1801, also cited in Manning (1981: 5) noted Usk’s situation at the confluence of two rivers. Caerleon fortress is likewise situated near the junction of the Usk and Afon Lwyd (Nash-Williams 1969: 29). Brecon Gaer overlooks the junction of the Usk and the Yscir (Nash-Williams 1969: 48). However, it is not only the river junction that offers one of the sought-for clues, but the name of the Caerfanell itself that is of interest.

‘Caer’ is well-known as a Welsh name prefix indicating a fortification. As a suffix ‘manell’, subject to a soft mutation following a feminine noun giving ‘fanell’, is unknown. Samuel Lewis, in his 1849 work *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* refers to the river as the ‘Carvenell’, an anglicised version of the name, similar in effect to ‘Cardiff’ for ‘Caerdydd’ (Lewis 1849). Theophilus Jones, historian and etymologist remarks:

. . . so that unless history or tradition has placed a Roman or British fortress or large carn upon its banks, Carfanell may imply the swift stream from the cliff . . . (Jones 1898: 428).

Jones goes on to poetically warn against reading too much into this name, and into others. In a Welsh poem he calls the river the Afon Anell. Dr Christine Jones points out that ‘Caerfa’ also signifies a fortification but the suffix in this case ‘nell’ is unknown.¹⁰ The exact etymology of the river’s name remains hidden but maybe additional research will at last place a Roman fort upon its banks.

Frontinus’s tenure as governor of Britain was from 73/74 AD to 77/78 AD (Salway 1981: 746) but how the campaign against the Silures fitted into this period can only be a matter of conjecture, like so much else. However it seems that the fortresses at Caerleon and Chester were completed during these years (Nash-Williams 1969: 29, 35). Caerleon was situated on the navigable estuary of the Usk and was a more suitable base than Usk from which to ship supplies to a task-force penetrating the vale of Neath, through a harbour at Neath (Johnson 1983: 3). It might be that the final campaign against the Silures commenced after a legionary encampment was established at Caerleon. If this is a reasonable argument, it may have a parallel in the construction of the fortress at Chester that may have predated Agricola’s final subjugation of the remainder of Wales; Chester also gave access to the sea. Agricola returned to Britain as governor after the departure of Frontinus remaining until 84 AD (Salway 1981: 746).

Under Agricola the forward policy continued. The Ordovices had destroyed nearly a squadron of auxiliary cavalry within their territory just before his arrival. He conducted a campaign against this tribe and cut to pieces the whole of their

force (*Agricolae*: 18). Tacitus then sings the praises of his father-in-law as he compelled *multae civitates*, previously belligerent, to treat for terms by bold military operations combined with clemency and inducements to peace. The location of these many polities is not stated. Tacitus relates how a ring of garrisons and forts was placed around them: *praesidiis castellisque circumdatae* (*Agricolae* 20). The time frame of this encircling deployment is not known but it seems to come within the period in which the Flavian forts at Pen-y-Gaer, Brecon Gaer, Llandovery, Coelbren, Penydarren and Gelligaer are thought to have been built.

An earth and timber cavalry fort at Brecon Gaer was originally dated to 75–80 AD (Nash-Williams 1969: 51). RCAHMW (1986: 144) reports that Dr. Grace Simpson prefers to date the earliest occupation to c. 80 AD. This date is in the Agricolan period and might be supportive of this fort and the others above being a *praesidiis castellisque circumdatae* of *Agricolae* 20. If so, then the speculated fort at Maes Mawr may have been in occupation from c. 75 AD to c. 80 AD.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a scenario for the conquest of the Silurian territory by the Romans in the years c. 47 to c. 80 drawing much upon the remarkable work of Jeffrey Davies and Rebecca Jones in relation to marching camps. A possible sequence of events has traced the Roman intrusion into and final conquest of Siluria. In particular, a search for clues that might reveal Roman disposition in the middle Usk valley has highlighted the need for further consideration of the Maes Mawr Farm site as a campaign base during Frontinus's successful campaign. It seems fairly certain that there are fortification sites that remain hidden. It was only in the 1960s that a full-sized legionary fortress was revealed to lie under the town of Usk so it is not implausible that this river valley may contain further surprises.

As far as can be ascertained, no archaeological interest has previously been shown in this site, possibly because of literally earth-moving events of the early and mid-nineteenth century: the construction of a canal and the building of a railway and a road. In addition, modern development has taken place on the site, a development that is likely to continue. Confirmation or denial of the conjecture here presented might be obtained by the use of a non-invasive investigative technique such as magnetometry.

SEAMUS HAMILL-KEAYS

Notes

¹ *Legio II Augusta* at Usk had previously been commanded in Britain by Vespasian AD 43, and although supplied units to Vitellius might have favoured its old commander (Salway 1981: 132).

² The honourific *Valeria Victrix* was awarded after the defeat of Boudicca, likewise *Martia Victrix* for *Legio XIV Gemina* (Nash-Williams 1969: 13).

³ The density of men/acre of Flavian forts has been computed by Maxwell, cited in by Davies and Jones, as lying between 194 and 255 men/acre i.e. 480 and 630 men/ha (Davies and Jones 2006: 39).

⁴ It was standard practice for Roman camps to be aligned in a specific direction with the front gate, *porta praetoria*, facing the enemy and the intended direction of march (*Pseudo-Hyginus* 56). Provided the front and rear gates are distinguishable one from the other, the orientation of the camp can be determined.

⁵ This is close to the size of the force consisting of three legions, six cohorts of auxiliary infantry and three *alae* of cavalry under Quinctilius Varus, destroyed in the *Teutoburger Wald* in AD 4 by renegade German auxiliaries (Keppie 1984: 168).

⁶ This author's italics.

⁷ The stone has been dated by V. E. Nash-Williams to the 6th century AD. It is in fact dedicated to Nemnius, son of a Victorinus (Nash-Williams 1950: Pl.VII & Fig. 54) and was erected next to Cwm Gelanedd (Vale of Corpses).

⁸ Letter from the National Archives in response to a request for permission to view Series OS35.

⁹ Elevation profile data from Google Earth.

¹⁰ Dr Christine Jones; Head of Department of Welsh, University of Wales Trinity St David, Lampeter; by email.

A bibliography for this article is to be found on the Society Website: <http://www.brecknocksociety.co.uk>

FROM CRICKHOWELL TO TEHERAN: THE LIFE AND TRAVELS OF SIR WILLIAM OUSELEY



Plate 1 Sir William Ouseley

On 18 July 1810, HMS *Lion* set sail from Portsmouth on an embassy to Persia. The mission was led by the diplomat Sir Gore Ouseley and accompanying him, as Private Secretary, was his older brother Sir William Ouseley, who was already an established Persian scholar and linguist. The base for his studies however was far from Persia, in Crickhowell. Here he was a prominent member of the local community, corresponding about ecclesiastical appointments and actively engaged in researching local history and archaeology. He mixed in the same circle as Admiral John Gell of Llanwysg; knew the Reverend Thomas Payne of Llanbedr and the historian Theophilus Jones and met prominent visitors to the area such as Sir Richard Colt Hoare. In parallel, he pursued his oriental studies with considerable energy and distinction, producing a steady stream of publications.

The *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB) entry states that William was born in Monmouthshire in 1767, the eldest son of Ralph, an army officer and Elizabeth (daughter of Henry Holland of Limerick) Ouseley.¹ A study of the family

published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* in 1910 offers some further background, noting that the family originated from Shropshire but moved to Dunmore, County Galway in the early eighteenth century and there is some more family detail in a more recent article about the Ouseleys' links with India.² There are, however, discrepancies in the date given for William's birth and in practice, there is no evidence of a Monmouthshire link. In fact, William was born on 13 April 1768 and baptised in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, on 12 May that year.³

Like many others at this time, William was educated privately at home with his brother Gore and a cousin Gideon, who later became a Methodist preacher and missionary. Their tutor was a Dr. Robinson and the family seems to have been one in which study and scholarship was encouraged; Ralph Ouseley was an early member of the Royal Irish Academy.⁴ In 1787, William left home to pursue his studies in Paris and it was here that his passion for Persian literature seems to have begun. He joined the army in 1788, as an officer in the 8th Regiment of Dragoons, the King's Royal Irish Regiment, serving in India in the 3rd Mysore War in 1789–92, but the pull of Persian studies was strong and in November 1792, his brother Gore wrote 'your progress in Arabic and Persian, though extraordinary, does not astonish me, as I have some conception of your talents, and the facility with which you acquire languages is not unknown to me'.⁵ In 1794, William sold his commission and went to Leiden to study Persian.⁶ His first book, *Persian Miscellanies: An essay to facilitate the reading of Persian Manuscripts*, was published in London in 1795.⁷ Returning to England in 1796, he began to acquire honorary degrees such as an LL.D from Trinity College Dublin and, sponsored by Lord Cornwallis, who had been Governor General of India, he was knighted in 1800, in recognition of his oriental studies.⁸

In 1796, William married Julia Frances Irving, daughter of Lieutenant Colonel John Irving and at some point over the next few years they moved to the Crickhowell area.⁹ Their reasons for doing so are unclear, with no apparent family connection to the area, but one can perhaps speculate that they knew others with an Indian background, for example former members of the East India Company, who had settled in the area. In any event, it was to be their home for over 30 years.

William and Julia had ten children¹⁰ and the family was certainly established in Breconshire in December 1801, because William gives this as his address, but without any further elaboration, in a letter to the Earl of Chichester.¹¹ From fragmentary parish records, one can ascertain that one child, probably Amelia Annie (born 6 January 1806) was baptised in Llangattock and four other children (Richard born 29th June 1809; Henry Chambers born 1 May 1818; Cordelia Magdalena (born 31 March 1821) and Reginald (born 14 May 1823) were baptised at St Edmund's Church, Crickhowell. The 1823 date is also consistent with the reference to Crickhowell on the frontispiece of William's magnum opus,

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Travels in Various Countries of the East, published between 1819 and 1823 and of which much more later.

It is however less easy to confirm where the family actually lived in the Crickhowell area. The baptismal records for Richard and Henry give the family address as Rumsey Place but, as yet, I have not been able to establish how long they lived there. Otherwise, surviving correspondence gives no more detail than Crickhowell. *The Cambrian Traveller's Guide* published by George Nicholson in 1808, with further editions and details in 1813 and 1840, includes a tantalising reference to Sir William Ouseley's romantic cottage on the Llangattoch (sic) side and then proceeds to describe an incident which took place in the summer of 1806.¹² Residence in Llangattoch at this time would match the baptismal records, but when and where remains unclear.

There are however various references to William's engagement in local affairs. For example, in a letter dated 9 August 1802, Theophilus Jones informed his friend and regular correspondent, the Reverend Edward Davies of Llanbedr, that his nomination for a preferment had been signed in the presence of Ouseley and himself and forwarded to the Bishop of St David's. Jones also refers to William's views on some Welsh translations which he regarded as nonsensical.¹³

<p>TRAVELS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF THE EAST; MORE PARTICULARLY PERSIA.</p> <p><i>A work wherein the Author has described, as far as his own Observations extended, the State of those Countries in 1810, 1811, AND 1812; and has endeavoured to illustrate many subjects of ANTIQUARIAN RESEARCH, History, Geography, Philology and Miscellaneous Literature, with extracts from rare and valuable Oriental Manuscripts.</i></p> <p>BY SIR WILLIAM OUSELEY, KNIGHT, LL. D. <i>Honorary Fellow of the Royal Societies of Edinburgh, Göttingen and Amsterdam; Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Rostock; Member of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, and of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle; and</i> PRIVATE SECRETARY TO HIS EXCELLENCY SIR GORE OUSELEY, BARONET, K. L. S. HIS MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY AT THE COURT OF PERSIA.</p> <p>VOL. I.</p> <p>LONDON: PUBLISHED BY ROSWELL AND MARTIN, NEW BOND STREET. PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY HENRY HUGHES, BRECKNOCK. 1819.</p>	<p>TO SIR GORE OUSELEY, BARONET; GRAND CORDON OF THE ROYAL PERSIAN ORDER OF THE LION AND SUN; GRAND CROSS OF THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN ORDER OF SAINT ALEXANDER NEWSKI; FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY, AND OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES; MEMBER OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY AT CALCUTTA, AND OF THE IMPERIAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AT ST. PETERSBURGH;</p> <p>THIS WORK IS DEDICATED, <i>As a Tribute of Gratitude, Respect and Brotherly Affection,</i> BY WILLIAM OUSELEY.</p> <p><small>Crickhowell, South Wales, April, 1819.</small></p>
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Plate 2

He was certainly interested in local history. Thus on 26 May 1804, the Pembrokeshire antiquarian Richard Fenton recorded that he had been one of a party, which also included Theophilus Jones, Admiral Gell, Sir Richard Colt Hoare and Mr Everest, which carried out an examination of the Gwernvale cromlech.¹⁴ Their excavation methods were rather crude and Thomas Nicholls later wrote in his *Annals and Antiquities of Breconshire*:

The great antiquarian Sir Richard C. Hoare was himself a party to the gratuitous overthrow of the finest cromlech in Breconshire. During his zealous search of objects of prehistoric interest in these parts he came upon the great monument which stood near the wayside, about three quarters of a mile on the road from Crickhowell to Brecon, and nearly opposite Gwernvale. He was accompanied by Mr. Jones, the historian of Breconshire, and by Sir William Ouseley, probably the owner of the land on which the cromlech, with its magnificent capstone, fourteen feet long and eighteen inches thick, with an average breadth of nearly seven feet, standing on four supporters, had for unnumbered ages been witnessing for the affection and veneration of the past for its dead; and the two baronets, in order to see what was beneath, dug around the pillars, and attaching teams of horses to the mighty flag overthrew in a few minutes what it had cost nameless labour to erect – and for their pains found nothing of value. Considering that it is now settled that cromlechs were but coffins on a colossal scale, and that the body, whether deposited entire or after cremation, was not necessarily interred below the natural surface, it is to be regretted that these savants had not the wit to dig the ample space under the capstone without removing it.¹⁵

Later historians have been more forgiving of the methods used in these early days of archaeology.

On the following Sunday, William was one of the party at a dinner hosted by Admiral Gell. Fenton subsequently noted that he ‘distinguished himself as a scholar and a gentlemen in the course of the conversation’.¹⁶ William also seems to have known the Admiral’s nephew, Sir William Gell who wrote extensively on for example Pompeii and Troy and gave him an arrowhead from the battlefield of Marathon (*Travels*, ii p. 486).

The dig at Gwernvale inspired William and others to explore other local sites. Thus *The Cambrian Traveller’s Guide* recounts another excavation in Llangattock:

During the summer of 1806, Sir Richard Hoare, Sir William Ouseley, and some other gentlemen, proceeded to explore a monument of antiquity situated upon Pen-Cerrig-Calch, N. of the village of Llangattoch. It consisted of a large accumulation of stones, generally supposed to cover the ashes of military chieftains, and to mark the spot on which they fell. In removing these, several workmen were employed for many hours; at length, when they had wrought down to the foundation of the centre of the tumulus, which was nearly on a level with the surface of the mountain, they discovered a square coffin or cist, about 3ft long and broad, formed of four upright stones; one below formed a bottom, and a large flat one at top a lid or cover; one removing this,

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the cist, or coffin, appeared nearly empty; a few small stones and a little fine earth, or sand, being all that it contained. Of the bones, which, without doubt, had once been deposited in it, no vestiges could be found. Another, within a short distance, bore evident indications of having been examined several years ago.¹⁷

This is clearly a reference to Carn Goch, still preserved in the recreational area in Llangattock, which has variously been described as a ruined chambered long barrow or a large cist and dating from the Neolithic or bronze Age.¹⁸ The most recent analysis published by Crampton in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, however, argues that it is a bronze Age cairn.¹⁹

Throughout this time, William continued his Persian studies and associated publications with, for example *The Story of Prince Bakhtyar Nama and the ten viziers: a series of Persian Tales* (London, 1801) and the footnotes to his works show that he travelled not only to London but also to other major European libraries such as Leiden and Paris in pursuit of his research. A letter also survives dated July 1810 which refers to a work commissioned by the Bishop of St David's and which would be printed with a vocabulary.²⁰ It mentions that he has recently returned from Bath and, no doubt, the family like many of their peers would have visited the spa and made regular trips to London.



Plate 3 Garn Coch, Llangattock

William's ambition was however to put his studies into practice and in December 1801, he wrote to the Earl of Chichester requesting that he might be considered as a member of an embassy to Persia:

In studying with close attention for several years the languages and history, the geography and politicks . . . one of my chief objects has been to qualify myself for a mission to that quarter of the world, and particularly Persia, a country now beginning to recover its ancient preponderancy in the scale of nations . . .

A letter from our king to the Persian sovereign would enable me to travel with safety and convenience – and any allowance that would be deemed sufficient to defray my expenses would perfectly content me – even this I would not desire had my publications (although more favourably received by the critics than I could have expected) been productive of any substantial profit – but to them I am only indebted for the honour of knighthood and a variety of diplomas and degrees.²¹

William had to wait a further 9 years before this ambition was fulfilled.

As he enjoyed life in Breconshire and continued his oriental studies, his brother Gore's diplomatic career had prospered and in 1809, he played a leading role in the visit of the Persian envoy Mirza Abu'l Hassan Khan to London. Persia was a key ally in protecting routes to British India and a treaty in 1809 committed the Shah to obstruct any European force attempting to reach India across his territories. In return Britain promised military aid should any European power invade Iran. In this context and against the background of Napoleonic ambitions, the 1809 London visit was of great importance.²² Abu'l Hassan attracted much attention and interest during his stay in London, with his activities widely reported in the press and he was the subject of a number of portraits including one by Sir Thomas Lawrence.²³ William himself stayed in the envoy's house in London and there learned to speak Persian.

In July 1810, Abu'l Hassan returned to his native country as part of an embassy led by Sir Gore Ouseley, with, as already noted, William as his private secretary and James Morier, who had travelled to Britain with Abu'l Hassan as Secretary.²⁴ They set out from Portsmouth on HMS *Lion* on 18 July 1810, with another ship, the *Chichester* carrying other members of the entourage and heavy baggage, which included carriages and presents for the King of Persia (i, 2). Their route took them to Madeira then Rio de Janeiro by late September, reaching Bombay via the Cape of Good Hope in January 1811. They finally disembarked to begin their travels through Persia on 1 March 1811 having sailed a distance of more than 20000 miles (i, 183). On land, they reached Shiraz in April, Isfahan in July and Teheran on 9 November.

For William, it was the fulfilment of a life's ambition and he made the most of it. We have a detailed account of the journey in his *Travels to various countries of the East more particularly Persia*, which was published between 1819 and 1823 and runs to some 3 volumes and more than 1600 pages, with comprehensive footnotes and

a number of sketches and illustrations (some by William himself). His passion for his subject is reflected in numerous diversions from the main account of the journey to quote various authorities and he refers to the patience of his readers, witnessing 'my irresistible propensity to antiquarian researches' (iii, 394). The *Travels*, however, give fascinating details of the journey, encounters with local inhabitants and the sites of historical importance which they visited, for example Persepolis (ii, 227–420). William collected voraciously and he brought many of the artefacts back to Britain. Some subsequently found their way to national collections, for example the Persepolis sculptures in the British Museum.²⁵

William's interests ranged from natural history (locusts' wings preserved between the pages of a book – i, 199) to armoury (the sword, scabbard and shield of Arabian pirates i, 403), medals, gems and engraved stones (ii, 196), books and manuscripts. He already had an extensive collection, so he was an informed and selective purchaser as illustrated by the following excerpt from his time in Shiraz:

(ii, 193–4) before I left Shiraz, a bookseller and painter who frequently visited our tents . . . had promised to collect during my absence whatever uncommon manuscripts, medals and sculptured stones should fall into their hands; and, as I had purchased some articles from each, at the first price demanded, he swore by the head of Ali that until my return they would not offer such things for sale. This promise, however, had been forgotten, and they sold at different times both coins and gems, fortunately to friends who with much kindness have since transferred them to me. They accordingly submitted to my inspection almost every day whilst we were at Shiraz, Arabick and Persian books, engraved gems, extraordinary miniature pictures and pul-i-kadim or ancient money.

William took whatever opportunity he could to visit sites of interest and writes in detail about both what he saw and felt. For example in Kerm in April 1811, he visited a site known as the Castle of the Fire Temple. Keen to see whatever he could, he notes that he 'climbed on the shoulders of a servant to examine the altar at top' and the atmosphere of the place 'brought to my recollection various remains generally supposed Druidical which I had seen in Wales and Ireland.' (ii, 79–83).

The party travelled in some style, bringing beds, chairs, tables and writing desks from England and the caravan must have attracted local curiosity as well as posing some significant logistical challenges in rugged terrain. On the former, William wrote of some Armenian ladies 'who examined with eager curiosity the frame and curtains of my camp-bed; the white English quilt and sheets; the canteens and other European articles of my baggage (iii, 456). He also mentions the surprise shown by some local guides at the range of comestibles which he carried in his canteen, from West Indian sugar to Chinese tea and chocolate made at Rio de Janeiro, along with English cups and saucers, knives and forks. (ii, 90).

Apart from diplomacy and study, there was time for relaxation and William took with him a fishing rod which he used, remarking 'the fishes here seemed ready to seize indiscriminately large and small hooks dressed in Wales with plain

coloured feathers and silk, and those which I disguised with tinsel and gaudy plumage in imitation of living Persian flies'. He observed that an artificial fly had probably never before floated on the surface of the stream in which he often fished in the early morning during their three month stay at Isfahan (iii, 50–1).

William seems to have coped well with the different climate and the rigours of travel but he mentions on several occasions the extreme heat, the difficulty of finding safe drinking water and insects such as locusts, scorpions and even tarantulas. On his return journey he encountered plague at Constantinople and his travels also took him to some areas which had rarely seen European visitors and necessitated an armed guard (ii, 64–5, 177, 213, 215–16; iii, 488).

A year could pass without any news from home (ii, 447) and on occasion his account hints at home sickness. Near Kihrud, he remarked that the wooded hills 'combined with the subjacent valley, its winding limpid streams, the well cultivated fields which they watered and the thickly planted gardens, to constitute such scenery as even in Wales might be reckoned most "romantick and picturesque" (iii, 83). Climbing a hill, the path reminded him of sheep walks on 'our Welsh mountains' (iii, 209) and he wrote that the principal charm of the countryside was 'a resemblance (whether real or imaginary) which they bore to a favourite dingle or stream in Wales; thereby exciting a train of delightful ideas, ever associated with the recollection of home.' He also noted the joy of receiving letters from home (iii, 249, 56).

In July 1812, William began his journey home, bearing a signed treaty for presentation to the Prince Regent and various presents, including two horses (iii, 372–3). He reached Constantinople in September and at the end of the month boarded a ship for England, stopping off at various ports including Gibraltar en route. By the time he arrived back in Portsmouth, on 14th November 1812, he had been away for 2 years and 4 months.

There are differing views on the significance of the embassy and some later historians have been critical of the leadership of Sir Gore Ouseley, whose main focus seems to have been on protocol and ensuring he received what he believed to be the appropriate recognition for his status.²⁶ Unlike his brother, he did not return to Britain until the summer of 1815, travelling on from Persia to Russia, by which time much had changed on the international scene.

Back in Wales, however, William soon began to arrange his record of the journey for publication. This was less straightforward than he would have wished. The preface of the first volume, published in 1819 refers to problems due to the use of a country printer:

I shall not complain of various difficulties encountered during the progress of this volume in its typographical execution. The authors cannot claim much sympathy from the publick, who, merely for their own convenience, and not from necessity, employ country presses while those of the capital would facilitate and expedite the publication of their works (i, xxi).

The delays however proved even greater than anticipated due to the sudden death of the printer Henry Hughes of Brecon.²⁷ William also suffered from the challenge of keeping up with current research and sought help to obtain key works from his sons – William who was by now a diplomat in Sweden and John Ralph who was a Lieutenant in the East India Company.²⁸

He wrote:

According to my original design this volume should have been published in the course of last year (1820); but he who undertakes a work so extensive and of a nature so diversified cannot always calculate with certainty on the operations of a provincial press, whatever advantages may arise from its proximity to his residence; for interruptions of days and even of weeks are caused by such difficulties as in the capital would scarcely be felt and might instantly be removed. The typographical executions of this volume was for a while delayed by the death of Mr Hughes the printer, when several sheets had passed through his hands; and it was also, by my own desire, occasionally suspended while I waited for certain books recently published or announced for publication on the continent, and from their titles promising information on subjects to me highly interesting (ii, 343–4).

The third volume finally appeared in 1823.

William's frustration is understandable, but so are the challenges of Persian script posed to a country printer. Henry Hughes was the son of another printer also called Henry. The father died in 1794 and the son, as already noted, in 1820 and both are buried in the priory churchyard in Brecon. The business based in The Struet was carried on after young Henry's death by his widow Priscilla but sometime in the late 1820s it passed to a William Webb. Much of the tricky typography was done by Hughes' nephew Evan Prosser who subsequently became a master printer at Pontypool. Ouseley acknowledges his debt to Prosser for various woodcuts, 'a young artist whose typographical ingenuity is sufficiently evinced in the numerous quotations from Arabick, and Persian, as well as other languages, foreign and ancient, by him alone arranged for the press; through which he, principally, has conducted these two volumes'.²⁹ The completed work, comprising 1635 pages with numerous illustrations and footnotes, also required good paper and ink, which provided further practical challenges. It retailed for three and a half guineas a volume and £11 6d a set.³⁰

The *Travels* was William's major work, but one can gain some other insights into the range of his research. For example, he was a regular contributor to the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature (TRSL) and a Royal Associate member. In February 1824, he read a paper entitled Observations on the River Euphrates, which drew on his experience during the mission to Persia, but also reveals a bit more about the man himself. He notes that it had always been his ambition to trace the route of the Euphrates; that he had swum across it when in Armenia and his powers of observation are evidenced by references to the sounds

and smells, as well as sights, of the riverbank. Another paper read in November 1826, about the life of Alexander the Great, draws on manuscripts which he had read in various European libraries and manuscripts which he had acquired during his time in Persia, and Cambridge University Library has a manuscript in which he presents some examples of Arabic writing, from an early Koran, to the RSL Library, explaining their provenance.³¹

William also corresponded with other scholars such as John Haddon Hindley, who was librarian of Chetham's Library in Manchester from 1792–1804 and translated a number of works from Persian. Their letters are preserved in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.³²

The range and depth of William's collection and scholarship are evidenced by the 1831 catalogue of his manuscripts which he compiled personally. The introduction to the catalogue, which was privately printed but survives in various copies in for example the British Library, gives a flavour of the man and how he conducted his oriental researches from his base in the Black Mountains:

It is not without some painful efforts that an enthusiast in any line of literature can relinquish these objects which have amused his youth and afforded him solace amid the troubles of mature or declining life. Several times were the names of certain books erased from my list, and again with a reluctant hand inserted as they now appear; and many of these pages had actually passed through the press before I could induce myself to offer for sale . . . are works noticed in the latter part of the catalogue. I am however consoled . . . by the hope that these mss, transferred from the obscure shelves of a private collection to some great national or royal library, and rendered accessible to the public, may furnish interesting subjects for translation into various languages and promote throughout Europe a taste for oriental literature.³³

In addition, William sold several hundred medals and gems, sculptured marbles from the ruins of Persepolis, weapons, musical instruments, mineralogical specimens and 'a variety of uncommon articles collected in different countries'. After the sale, he continued his scholarly work, publishing for example excerpts from the geographical works of the seventeenth century Persian scholar Sadeq Esfahani in 1832.

In that year, however, the family moved to Boulogne sur mer, where there seems to have been an active English community.³⁴ It would appear that William was in poor health and he died in Boulogne in September 1842. The obituary in the *Royal Asiatic Society Journal* states that 'after two or three attacks of paralysis, at long intervals, he died . . . deeply lamented as a man of great and varied learning and most amiable disposition'.³⁵ He was buried in the English cemetery at Boulogne.

William had made a will dated 13 August 1838, in which he left everything to his wife Julia 'knowing that she will use it in the most advantageous manner for the benefit of our children'.³⁶ His widow continued to live in Boulogne,

dying there in October 1845 and one daughter, Cordelia, married Adolphe Dominique Richard de Valmency on 30 December 1840 at the British Chapel in Boulogne.³⁷

One portrait of William survives; an engraving by Samuel Drummond which was published in the European magazine for 1811 and which is now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in London.³⁸

In short, a life of considerable interest which made a significant and lasting contribution to oriental scholarship and sheds a rather different light on life in Crickhowell in the early nineteenth century.

ELIZABETH SIBERRY

Notes

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, pp. 1257–8 and *Oxford Dictionary of Biography*, pp. 137–8.

² Kelly, Richard J., 'The Name and Family of Ouseley', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 1910 (xl), 132–47 and Mitchiner, John 'The Ouseleys – A Family involvement with India', *Asian Affairs. Journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs*, xl (2009), 1–14. Kelly gives William's date of birth as 1771 and states that he was born in the castle at Dunmore, where his father served as agent to Lord Ross; DNB has 1767 and Mitchiner 1768. I have settled for 1768, given the May christening and followed Kelly on 13th April as the actual date of birth.

³ Mitchiner, p. 13 n. 16.

⁴ Gideon Ouseley 1762–1839. See William Arthur, *The Life of Gideon Ouseley* (London, 1876) and F. W. Joyce, *the Life of Rev. Sir F. A. G. Ouseley* (London, 1896). Gideon, Sir Gore Ouseley (1796–1866) and his son Sir Frederick Ouseley (1825–89), the musician and founder of St. Michael's College Tenbury, all have entries in DNB.

⁵ *Biographical Notes of Persian Poets with critical and explanatory remarks* by the late Rt Hon. Sir Gore Ouseley (London, 1846), p. xviii.

⁶ Mitchiner, p. 6.

⁷ Iranica.com provides a detailed list of Ouseley's publications, from contributions to learned journals to academic monographs and editions and translations of Arabic and Persian literature.

⁸ For example, the title page of his *Travels in Various Countries of the East* states that he was an Honorary fellow of the Royal Societies of Edinburgh, Göttingen and Amsterdam and a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

⁹ A publication *The Oriental Collections consisting of original essays and dissertations, translations and miscellaneous papers illustrating the history and antiquities, the arts, sciences and literature of Asia* (London, 1797) gives William's address as 25, Upper Titchfield Street, London. This may indicate that they were living in London in the late 1790s, but they may also have maintained a London address as well as Crickhowell.

¹⁰ The DNB states that they had 6 sons and 3 daughters, but this does not match the baptismal records which indicate 6 sons and 4 daughters. From my research the family appears to have consisted of William Gore (b 26 July 1797); Julia Frances (b 18 June 1799); John Ralph (b 12 May 1801); Eliza Martha Maria (b 28 May 1803); Amelia Annie (b 6 January 1806); Richard (b 29 June 1809); Henry Chambers (b. 1 May 1818); Cordelia Magdalena (b 31 March 1821); Reginald (b 14 May 1823). I have not found a date of birth for another son, Frederick, who died in Mauritius in 1836. See Mitchiner, p. 13 n.26. I am grateful here for help from the Crickhowell District Archive Centre in deciphering the parish records.

¹¹ British Library (BL) Additional MS. 33108, fol.425.

¹²Nicholson, *Cambrian traveller's Guide in every direction containing remarks made during many excursions in the principality of Wales augmented by extracts from the best writers*, 3rd edition (London, 1840), p. 232.

¹³Theophilus Jones, F.S.A., *Historian: His Life, Letters and Literary Remains* ed. Edwin Evans (Brecon, 1905), pp. 65, 80.

¹⁴See W. J. Britnell and H. N. Savory, Gwernvale and Penywyrldod: Two Neolithic Long Cairns in the Black Mountains of Brecknock (Cambrian Archaeological Monographs no. 2) (1984), p. 46.

¹⁵Thomas Nicholls, *Annals and Antiquities of Breconshire* (1875) pp. 74–5. There is no other evidence that Ouseley was the owner of the land; in fact Gwernvale belonged to another member of the group, Mr Everest.

¹⁶Evans, p. 146.

¹⁷*Cambrian Guide*, p. 232.

¹⁸Glyn E. Daniel, *The Prehistoric Chamber Tombs of England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1950), p. 215.

¹⁹C. B. Crampton, 'A proposed reinterpretation of Carn goch, near Crickhowell, Brecknock', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxv, 166–8.

²⁰Letter in author's own collection.

²¹BL MS Addit. 33108.

²²See M. E. Yapp, *Strategies Of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798–1850* (1980), pp. 76–89.

²³C. W. Millard, A Diplomatic Portrait. Lawrence's 'The Persian Ambassador', *Apollo*, lxxxv, (1967), pp. 115–21.

²⁴James Justinian Morier (1782–1849) was the son of the consul general of the Levant Company of Constantinople; travelled to Teheran on an embassy to the Shah and returned to London with Mirza Abu'l Hassan. He wrote two travel books, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor* (London, 1812) and *A second Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor to Constantinople between the years 1810 and 1816* (London, 1818) and was also a novelist. See again DNB.

²⁵T. C. Mitchell, 'The Persepolis Sculptures in the British Museum', *Iran. Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, xxxviii (2000), 51–3. These sculptures were purchased from William's daughter Madame Cordelia de Valmency in 1873. See also, John Curtis, 'A Chariot Scene from Persepolis', *Iran*, xxxvi (1998), 45–51. William visited the site of Persepolis in May 1811 and was joined there by the rest of the party in the July.

²⁶See Yapp, p. 76.

²⁷See Ifano Jones, *A History of Printing and Printers in Wales to 1810 and successive and related printers to 1923* (Cardiff, 1925), pp. 193–5. I am grateful to the National Library of Wales for drawing this survey to my attention.

²⁸Sir William Gore Ouseley (1797–1866) again merits his own DNB entry. He joined the diplomatic service, serving in Sweden, America, Brazil and Argentina and in 1850 published a pamphlet entitled 'Notes on the Slave Trade, with remarks in measures adopted for its suppression.' For John Ralph's career, see Mitchiner, pp. 8–9.

²⁹*Travels*, ii, 344n.

³⁰Jones, pp. 194–5. Eiluned Rees, *The Welsh Book trade before 1820* (Aberystwyth, 1988), provides some interesting detail on the practicalities of book production and trade, noting the key role of book carriers. The paper for Theophilus Jones's *History of Brecknockshire*, came from the Llangenny Mills, but it is not known if William managed to source his paper locally (Rees, p. xxxvi).

³¹'Observations on the River Euphrates', *TRSL*, i, 107–23; Observations on some extraordinary Anecdotes of Alexander and the eastern origin of several popular European Fictions, *TRSL* i, pp. 5–23. 'Remarks on four leaves, exhibiting specimens of ancient Arabian calligraphy' Cambridge University Library, MS RSL D 2/1/9.

³²See Hindley's DNB entry.

³³*Catalogue of Several Hundred Manuscript Works in Various Oriental Languages collected by Sir William Ouseley* (London, 1831).

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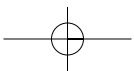
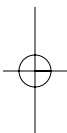
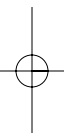
³⁴ See *A Handbook for Travellers in France* (London, 1877), pp. 14–17 and the introduction to Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* ed. Thomas Seacombe (Oxford, 1907).

³⁵ *Royal Asiatic Society Journal*, i (June 1843), xi–xii.

³⁶ A copy of William's Administration (the confirmation of the validity of his will and dated 1843) is in the James Coleman Deeds Collection in the National Library of Wales, D.D.99 and also in the National Archive.

³⁷ A copy of Dame Julia's Ouseley's will is also in the National Archive. In it she mentions all her children, except Frederick who had died in 1836 and also her French son-in-law.

³⁸ Samuel Drummond (1765–1844) was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1808 and known for his portraits and depictions of naval historical subjects.



THE LLANGAMMARCH AND NEATH & BRECON JUNCTION RAILWAY

The railway – as opposed to tramway – history of South Wales dates back to the 1830's with the opening of the Taff Vale line between Cardiff and Merthyr and the Llanelly Railway & Dock Company line between Llanelli and Pontardulais. Within the next eighty years, culminating in the formation of the Cardiff Railway, almost every community of any size in South Wales, with the exceptions of Newquay (Ceredigion) and Crickhowell, came to have its own station. Yet only twenty years after the opening of the Cardiff Railway in 1910, lines which had carried freight and passengers began to be closed, so short was the heyday of the railway network.

Railway building seemed to come in twenty-year cycles, and it was the second great period of railway development, following the initial constructions of the 1830's and early 1840's, which saw the introduction of railways to Brecknockshire.

In only five years the following lines were opened, giving the county a comprehensive network.

- Abergavenny and Merthyr (progressively from September 29 1862)
- Brecon and Dowlais (April 23 1863)
- Talylyn and Hereford (June 29 1863)
- Builth and Talylyn (September 1 1864)
- Llandovery and Builth Road (June 1 1865)
- Brecon and Neath (June 3 1867)
- Pontsticill and Merthyr (August 1 1867)

An inventory taken in 1922, before the railways were 'grouped' into four big operating units, would have shown that, within the county boundaries, there were five railway companies providing services, the highest railway tunnel in Great Britain, the oldest railway tunnel in Great Britain, twenty nine stations or halts (of which four remain) and seven junctions at which passengers could change trains and move on to other lines (of which none remain).

These numbers would be higher but for the fact that the Cambrian Mid Wales line mostly runs up the east (Radnorshire) side of the Wye valley.

However, not included in these statistics – because it was never finished and therefore never opened – was the Llangammarch Extension northwards from Sennybridge which was intended to run up the Cilieni valley to join the London & North Western line at Llangammarch Wells.

This must, arguably, be the least known and the most completely forgotten of all nineteenth century railway constructions in Wales or perhaps even in the whole of the British Isles.

[45 & 46 VICT.] *Llangammarch and Neath and Brecon Junction Railway Act, 1882.* [Ch. ccii.]



CHAPTER ccii.

An Act for making a Railway from the Central Wales Extension Line of the London and North-western Railway Company at Llangammarch to the Neath and Brecon Railway at Devynock in the County of Brecon and for other purposes. A.D. 1882.
[10th August 1882.]

It was never opened for goods or passenger traffic but neither was the Manchester & Milford Railway between Llanidloes and Tregaron, and whole books have been written on that subject.

It was never going to be remotely financially viable but neither was the line from Cowbridge to Aberthaw nor the Golden Valley line, and both these were completed and services operated.

It served no local population of any size but nor did the North Pembrokeshire line and trains ran on that line at least in part until the 1960's.

And finally it was planned to connect two places – Sennybridge and Llangammarch Wells which already had railway stations and which did not remotely require connection: but, again, when Monmouth was linked to Coleford, those two towns also already had railway stations and did not need a further line between them, but, nonetheless, that line was completed and opened.

To add insult to the financial injury that the promoters of the Llangammarch and Neath & Brecon Extension Railway suffered, after two attempts were made to implement their project – one in the 1860s and another twenty years later in the 1880s – local history and specialist railway history books have largely ignored their efforts.

In D. S. M. Barrie's book, Volume 12 in the *Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain*, there are references to 19 railways not built, including a line from Abergavenny to Brecon, a scheme which would have filled arguably the most noticeable gap in the railway map of South Wales but which did not survive the railway mania of the 1860's. However, the Llangammarch Extension does not figure in this list.

The other relevant references in the book are to the 'wilderness' north of the Swansea Valley inhabited only by the Neath & Brecon and sheep: and to Neath & Brecon going into receivership in 1874. This latter reference underlines the precariousness of the Llangammarch Extension project when the company operating the main line from which the line was to diverge was in deep financial trouble.

But there is also mention of the Brecon & Merthyr 'putting down the foundations of a bridge near Sennybridge intended to carry a B&M line, never built, to Llandovery'. This may be a mistaken reference to the Llangammarch Extension.

James Pages's *Forgotten Railways – South Wales* describes the Neath & Brecon as 'a badly managed colliery railway' which 'over-reached itself by extending to Brecon', but no mention is made of a Llangammarch Extension.

The third source is the *Neath & Brecon Railway – a History* by Gwyn Briwnant Jones, Denis Dunstone and Tudor Watkins. This contains numerous references to the Llangammarch Project. From this we learn that agreement was reached with the Central Wales Railway 'to share profits in perpetuity' on a perfectly friendly footing (July 1864) although what profits were likely to result from building a railway up the Cilieni valley and across the flank of the Epynt is difficult to imagine.

Preliminary work apparently began in September 1864 with the intention of completing the line by August 1866 (five months after the Neath & Brecon line was scheduled to be opened).

However in May 1867 a House of Lords committee was informed that work was 50% complete and was continuing.

A period of silence ensues before the line was re-sanctioned by Act of Parliament in 1882 only for abandonment to be finally allowed in 1890.

These then are the sum total of references to the Llangammarch extension in the most commonly available histories of the area.

The first attempt to build a railway north up the Cilieni valley was started with the passage of the Neath & Brecon Extension bill in December 1863.

The objective was to provide a route north for coal traffic from the Neath and Swansea valleys and their various offshoots.

To place this in context, in the mid nineteenth century, railway construction was the great boom industry with ambitious promoters of schemes, both logical and vastly implausible, seemingly drawing endless lines between any two points on a map.

In the vintage and climatic years of railway mania such as 1845, the most grandly named schemes were conceived – the Central Wales Railway between Gloucester and Aberystwyth, the Great Wales Central Railway, the Welsh Midland Junction Railway crossing Radnorshire on its way to Cardigan Bay. In the November 8 edition of the 'Silurian', the distant ancestor of the B&R, there were as many as 5 columns of railway prospectuses.

In times such as these a humble 13 mile mineral line on the west side of the Epynt, intended to carry coal, cannot have appeared that fantastic a project.

The idea behind this project was that coal mined in the Neath and Swansea valleys could be transported northwards more directly than by following the Usk and then the Wye through Brecon eastwards towards Hereford. This would also relieve the Neath & Brecon of total dependency on the Hereford & Brecon and subsequently the Midland Railway which controlled the Usk-Wye route.

By September 1864 preliminary work on the 13 mile line was underway and a year later work on the actual track. However, whilst the main line Neath & Brecon powered ahead, with the first train reaching Brecon in June 1867, work on the Llangammarch extension appears to have just faded away.

A House of Lords committee were advised on May 28 1867 that the Contractor John Dickson had completed 50% of the work but that seems to be where it all stopped.

In 1882 a new Bill was passed for the Llangammarch Extension on August 10 – this time with authorised capital of £130,000 and approved borrowings of £43,300.

Maps were drawn, plans submitted, land purchased but by 1890 this second and final attempt to complete the extension had failed – this time finally.

And that really is about all that is known from the records of a railway which was by Act of Parliament to be precisely 13 miles, 6 furlongs, 5 chains and 30 links in length. From the north it was to start one thousand two hundred and fifty yards in a south westerly direction from the centre of the bridge carrying the LNWR line over the Cammarch river, and it was to be completed within five years from the date of the Act after which the ‘the powers by this Act granted to the Company for making and completing the railway . . . shall cease to be exercised except as to so much thereof as is then completed.’

In the absence however of definitive written records, the evidence of the existence of this railway, as it went north up the Cilieni Valley, lies primarily on the ground.

It would seem that the line was to be built from south to north.

The junction off the line that ran from Neath to Brecon has of course long gone but was sited north of the A40 beyond the now demolished railway-turned-road bridge which for twenty years carried the north bound carriageway of the A4067 over the A40 before it merged with the east bound carriageway of that road.

North of the long disappeared junction and behind the White House Hotel lies a stretch of what was once trackbed – raised slightly above field level with that feel of gravel beneath feet which distinguishes old railway workings from surrounding grass land.

This old trackbed runs as far as the River Usk which would have been crossed by what can be described as a two tier railway bridge – with lower abutments near river level and, at a higher level and further back from the river, higher abutments at track level thirty seven feet above the water (OS SN 926297).



Drawings exist but there is no obvious record anywhere of whether the bridge was ever built or finished – unless of course this article flushes out evidence to that effect.

Going north from the site of the bridge, the line of the railway goes into a short cutting, now heavily overgrown and then into what is now a wall of earth beyond which there may or may not be the remains of an authorised 254 yard long tunnel.

The site of the north portal (SN 925300) has similarly been earthed over.

Without excavation it is not possible to be certain what lies behind the earth.

Older residents of Sennybridge recall reference to ‘the tunnel’ but whether this was actually a tunnel or incomplete workings is impossible to prove either way.

The landowner of the ground where the south portal would have been has no memory of any tunnel.

The north portal – a visible scar on the ground – is said to have been used as a tip but that could have been either a tunnel mouth or the dugout approach to a tunnel that was never formed.

The most convincing case for there being a tunnel is that railway workings extend a further 5 miles north up the valley which seems a long way to have progressed leaving 254 yards of untouched and untunnelled hillside behind.

And the most appealing case is based on local folklore that a train was left in the tunnel when it was finally abandoned over a century ago.

Going north from what might have been a tunnel, the line of the track crosses the entrance to the Sennybridge Hunt Kennels and fifty or so yards further north again there is what looks like a single track bridge over a small stream.

As the assumed track bed is heavily overgrown, the next observation point is on the road going east from Pentre'r Felin beyond the chapel (SN 921304). To the south of where the railway would have crossed the road, there is an obvious track which has been dug out which is far likelier to be railway working than farm lane.

To the east of the Chapel there is what could have been a track bed which then crosses the road north from Pentre'r Felin. As a new house has been built on the west side of this road, it requires considerable imagination to see any traces of railway here.

However, proceeding north up the Cilieni Valley there is evidence on old OS maps published after the Great War (and faithfully reproduced recently by Cassini) of further earthworks and at least six crossings of the Cilieni. There is also evidence on the ground of lineside items such as wire and posts, all gleaned on a wet and dark November afternoon.

A more systematic study of the presumed route might well furnish yet more and more definitive proof of railway construction.

The Landranger OS map (Sheet 160) dating from the 1970's show some of these works but no river crossings but further north shows earthworks at SN 908345 and again beyond SN 911355.

However, the clearest evidence comes beyond this on the minor road leading north on to the Army range from SN 911356. Whatever the construction of this road, it is definitely not a tarmaced farm track and to aficionados of disused railway lines it looks unmistakably like a converted track bed.

Where this road reaches a T-junction, we are nearly five miles north of Sennybridge (SN 905360) and the OS map shows a further mile or so of earthworks, and beyond that nothing.

The Cassini map indicates the same.

This accords with accounts of abandoned workings.

And that is as much as would seem to be known.

The obvious points of interest lie in the bridge across the Usk which must have been an impressive sight and in the tunnel.

Was the bridge built and the tunnel formed?

Without firm proof either way, it seems probable these both were: as it is inherently unlikely that, in the pre-motor age, gangs of navvies would have gone on building a line four or five miles up-country leaving an unbridged river and a 254 gap of untunnelled hillside behind them.

The Llangammarch and Neath & Brecon Junction Railway

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The logistics of moving men, equipment and material without having first bridged the Usk and opened the tunnel would have presented great difficulties.

Long after this railway was indisputably allowed to fade away, the Reverend W. Awbry imagined an engine on a narrow gauge railway in mid Wales which was just left to be covered by mud and stone washed down from the hillside above.

It has to be said that it sounds most fanciful to believe that a Victorian train lies undisturbed within a low hill to the south of Pentre'r Felin.

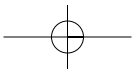
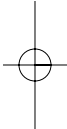
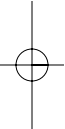
However, it is entirely plausible that a working track was laid to transport men and materials north up the valley – a track which would have been replaced when the line was near completion by one capable of being used by fully laden passenger and freight trains. There are many photographs in existence of such workings in progress on Victorian railways.

And when work on the Llangammarch Extension was finally stopped, the materials – iron and prime timber used in bridge construction would have been of salvageable value.

Leaving behind a small work-a-day engine used in hauling navvies and their equipment to the railhead might have made more financial sense than attempting to move it over a busy network to some undefined point where it might be stored.

And where better to leave it than in a tunnel against the vague thought that one day a use might be found for it?

MICHAEL JONES



A RARA AVIS FLIES INTO BRECKNOCKSHIRE

And who might this very rare bird be? None other than the niece of the one-time Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger (1783–1801; 1804–1806), and granddaughter of William Pitt the Elder, Secretary of State (1757–1761), and virtually Prime Minister in all but name. Her name was Hester Stanhope, born on 12 March 1776 at Chevening, Kent, the eldest of three daughters by the first marriage of Lord Mahon, subsequently the Third Earl of Stanhope. Her mother died when she was four and her father remarried and had three sons. It was a dysfunctional family, the father being more interested in science and politics than in the welfare of his children, so much of the care of her siblings fell on Hester.

Nevertheless she made her escape from Chevening and, for a while, made her home with her grandmother, Hester Pitt, Countess of Chatham, at Burton Pynsent in Somerset, before settling with her uncle William Pitt at Walmer Castle, Kent, in August 1803, where Pitt filled the office of Warden of the Cinque Ports after resigning as Prime Minister in 1801. She virtually became the chatelaine there, since Pitt was a bachelor and, in addition to organising the social life of the house, she set about making improvements to its surroundings by venting her interest in gardening. When Pitt resumed office in 1804 as Prime Minister, Lady Hester moved with him to Downing Street, and virtually ran the establishment until Pitt's death in 1806, Lady Hester having nursed him during the last months of his illness. She had always been Pitt's favourite niece, and he made no effort to curb her headstrong nature which had early become apparent, and he prevailed with King George III to give her a pension of £1,200 a year which, thereafter was her only means of sustenance. She then retired with her half-brothers to Montagu House in London, from where all her correspondence, which we shall later encounter, was addressed. After the hectic social life, political connections, turning among an aristocratic and wealthy circle, she found life in London boring and meaningless and, after two years, sought an escape from it.

In 1808 she followed the fashionable route to Bath for the season, but that was only a repetition of London, and she did not find there the solace which she sought. A pertinent question is, who told her about Wales and, in particular, the Wye Valley? It may be presumed that she hitherto had no knowledge of Wales any more than the average Englishman. Aristocratic gentlemen and country squires from Wales liked to be seen mixing with their English counterparts in Bath, and Lady Hester might have struck an acquaintance with someone there. Lord Kensington, a Pembrokeshire Irish Peer, is a possible contact, since he was later to enjoy her company at Builth. Also, the Member of Parliament for Bath, John Jeffreys Pratt, his second name suggesting a connection with the leading Brecon family of Jeffreys. He had estate in the county, and had been a minister in Pitt's administration. She had one known Welsh friend in the Marchioness of Bute of Cardiff Castle, whose maiden name was Charlotte Jane, daughter of

Viscount Windsor. She must have had particular information from some contact, since she went directly there with all her belongings, and set up at the Royal Oak in Builth, opposite the Wye Bridge, kept by a Mr and Mrs Jones, for whose thirteen year old daughter, Betsey, Lady Hester formed a particular liking, and took her into her service. She had come by her own coach and horses which were stabled at the hotel.

On this visit, Lady Hester made the acquaintance of the Reverend Rice (Rhys) Price, the Vicar of Llanwrthwl and two other parishes, who had lately settled at Builth. Even more fortuitous was meeting with his twenty-one year old son, Thomas, later to win eminence by his bardic name, Carnhuanawc. He was quite enchanted by this unfamiliar, sophisticated and spirited person, who opened up new vistas to his enquiring mind. Lady Hester enjoyed riding and exploring the countryside. One exploit she undertook was a trip to Aberystwyth in her own coach, accompanied by her two maids, her servant-boy Tom, and Thomas Price. After a brief stay there, the party returned via Tregaron, and there to take the mountain road to Abergwesyn. For this part of the journey, the coach could not be used, and so horses had to be hired in Tregaron, riding in single file, Thomas Price claiming a place next to her to enjoy her conversation. For a while, she made her residence above the Pump Room at Builth, visiting various farms in the vicinity, her eye falling on one in particular, Glan Irfon, near Cilmeri. With winter drawing on, she resolved to return to London, but avowed to return the following year.

The winter brought further tribulations and sorrow with the news that Sir John Moore, whom she had hopes of marrying, was killed at Corunna in the Peninsular War, and that her half brother, Charles, had fallen on the same day. It was in a state of melancholy and borne down by sorrow that she wrote to the Rev. Rhys Price, opening her heart to him, and beseeching his help, mentioning the need for a change of scenery, for fresh air and, possibly, the beneficial effects of the waters at Builth and Llanwrtyd. She treated the Rev. Price not only as her confidante, but also as her manager. The nine letters which she addressed to him from Montagu House have an air of familiarity about them, with the assurance that the Rev. Price would make all the arrangements for her proposed return the following May 1809.¹ In these she sets out all her requirements and terms with the utmost precision to be conveyed to Mrs Price and her son at Glan Irfon where she had decided to settle. She took the rooms she needed for six months, offering £25 rent for them. She intimated that she might possibly be away for some time visiting friends in Ireland, but that she would keep the rooms while away.

She needed two bedrooms for herself and two maids, Elizabeth Williams and the daughter of the Rev. Thomas Jones of Glascwm. It has been assumed that Elizabeth Williams was a local Welsh girl, but that is not so. She was the daughter of one Edward Williams, who had been Pitt's equerry, and had been in service in the Pitt household until his death, and had afterwards been taken on by Lady Hester. The two maids were to share the large bedroom over the kitchen, Lady

Hester making do with the smaller one. The maids were to see to all Lady Hester's needs so that there would be no call on Mrs Price. The servant boy Tom was more of a problem. He was a local boy who had probably been taken into Lady Hester's employ on her previous visit, since he was to be sent on with a cart and her belongings ahead of her May visit. Tom did not please her ladyship, since she described him as slow and unresponsive. She probably had not taken into account a language difficulty, since he was probably monoglot Welsh. She threatened to write to his father to complain and, unless he improved, to strip him of his new suit of clothes which she had given him. She ordered Mrs Price to be very strict with him lest he set a bad example to the other servants. She was particularly disappointed in him because she had taken him into her employ out of charity.

Lady Hester gave very exact orders as to her accommodation. She would provide her own furniture which was to come via Brecon and was to be met by a local carrier. She would provide her own camp bed. She gave instructions about decorating the rooms, she sending paint beforehand, light green being the favoured colour. The sash windows needed to be capable of being opened as Lady Hester was very particular about fresh air and hygiene. A carpet was to be despatched from Bath to Glan Irfon which she would leave as a present to Mrs Price. She even gave instructions as to how it should be laid from wall to wall, which shows that she was a very practical person.

Lady Hester clearly expected the household to be self-supporting. She set about improving the garden by bringing in seeds, plants and vegetables, which suggests the prospect of a long stay. The produce of the garden was to supply her table as well as providing her with an absorbing hobby. Likewise, she showed an interest in dairying, her cow 'Pretty Face' providing the wherewithal. Meat for the household was to be bought locally at market prices. The horses were also to be fed with oats bought locally. One much-loved stallion belonging to her brother and which had carried him over two thousand miles, was especially to be cared for.

We can only surmise from what has been said as to how she spent her time. Her interests were mainly in the open air since she enjoyed riding and exploring the countryside. She had a light coach as well as horses at Glan Irfon, the heavier vehicle being garaged at The Royal Oak. She had evidently gathered a lot of local knowledge, and was au fait with such matters as the postal and carrier services. As to her social life we know hardly anything. She was evidently familiar with the family of the Rev. Rhys Price, especially his son Thomas, who was then a student at Christ College, Brecon, and often carried out commissions for her in that town. He could also play the harp for her entertainment. It is to Thomas Price that we owe a description of Lady Hester's physical appearance at this time. He states that she was 'neither handsome nor beautiful in any degree, for her visage was long, very full and fat about the lower part and quite pale, bearing altogether a strong resemblance to the portraits and busts of Mr Pitt'. Thomas

Price was probably too much overawed by her presence to interest her in his own antiquarian and historical subjects. Although she was staying at one of the most historic places in Wales, near where Llywelyn the Last had fallen, she does not appear to have been much moved. Nor does she appear to have shown as much interest in Welsh nationalism as in Venezuelan through her backing for the revolutionary General Miranda who sought to free his country from Spanish rule. He visited her at Bwlth and dined with her at the Royal Oak. He also rode with her as far as Abergavenny, staying at local taverns. Lord Kenyon was another of her visitors as was her younger half-brother, James, who stayed at the hotel and was introduced to the Rev Price and Thomas. Local notables have no mention, though she was sociable and affable, if somewhat condescending. Though there were several gentry houses in the vicinity like Garth and Llwynmadog within calling distance, she does not appear to have bothered. She bestowed more of her attention on the poor, showing compassion and treating them with her medicines, another hobby in which she interested herself.

Lady Hester became tired of the rural life, more given to action than to contemplation. By January 1810 she was back in London preparing for her foreign travels which would take her to the shores of the Mediterranean and beyond. She left behind her with Mrs Price two portraits of William Pitt and Sir John Moore, evidently intending to recover them some day, as they were her prize possessions. The portraits passed into the possession of Mr Thomas Price, the owner of Glan Irfon, who lived at The Strand in Bwlth, and they passed down in the family for generations. It would be interesting to know if they are still in the neighbourhood. Lady Hester also planted an orange blossom tree in Glan Irfon garden which seems to have survived some generations.

Thus ended her romantic sojourn in Wales, starting in Downing Street and ending in a Welsh cottage, before she turned to seek adventure in the exotic east. She was to endure much, and she suffered a lonely end, dying on 23 June 1839 in a villa called Dar Djoun on the slopes of Mount Lebanon.

E. D. EVANS

Note

¹ *The Literary Remains of the Rev Thomas Price, Camhuanawc*, II, cap. IV, Llandovery, 1854.

Further Reading

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ROLAND MATHIAS, WRITER

Roland Mathias had many talents. He was academically gifted, a scholar, an outstanding teacher and headmaster, a tenacious rugby player despite his relatively small stature, an actor, a singer of lieder, a lecturer, a lay preacher, and a sought-after committee member and chairman of committees. He engaged in many of these activities at the same time and, whatever he undertook, you could be certain of the conspicuous energy of his commitment to principles and the task in hand. He was also, as many will know, a wonderfully fluent and witty conversationalist, the most amiable of companions and a great friend. However, the evidence of many successes over the years allowed no ease of self-satisfaction. Measured by the rigorous standards he set himself, he constantly under-achieved.

For much of his life his true vocation as writer was obliged to take second place to his professional engagement in education. The dates attached to final drafts of poems and stories in 'fair copy' Notebooks show how often writing was confined to school holidays. And later, after his retirement from the demanding role of headmaster at a Birmingham grammar school, he still found time for writing constrained by the demands of those unpaid jobs in literature and the arts, which he allowed himself to be persuaded to take on. That he nevertheless wrote and achieved so much is truly remarkable.

As a writer also, Roland was multi-faceted. He was, literally, a first-class historian, Oxford University educated, and this, amalgamated with his firm Nonconformist belief, was the bedrock of his literary development. His output as writer includes lengthy historical studies, notably a major contribution on the Civil Wars in the *Pembrokeshire County History* (1987), and *Whitsun Riot* (1963), about a rising in 1605 among Catholics in Archenfield, part of the southern March, the Monmouthshire-Herefordshire border country. The events described took place during the same year as the Gunpowder Plot, a period of high tension, and involved a certain William Morgan. The identity of this man and the way in which the law finally prevailed are painstakingly unravelled. Served by a plot and a display of painstakingly gathered evidence more typical of a detective story, *Whitsun Riot* was a critical success and, to judge by borrowings from public libraries, probably the most popular of Roland's books. He worked hard, though intermittently, at the research that culminated in *Whitsun Riot* for almost twenty years, becoming thoroughly acquainted with the topography and history of Archenfield (the old Welsh region of Ergyng) in the process. Interest in history did not end in these significant works. A long study of Henry Vaughan, placing him in his historical context, was sadly left incomplete when he suffered a stroke in 1986, and he brought a historian's perspective to all his writing.

In Reading in 1944, he and a friend founded and co-edited *Here Today*, a little magazine with big aspirations. It aimed to cover all the arts and, although its run was short, provided opportunities for Roland to hone his editorial skills and try

his strength at poetry (which he had practised from his schooldays), short story writing and literary criticism. *Here Today* proved to be only a trial run for his major editorial endeavour. Still only thirty-three, in his first year as headmaster at Pembroke Dock Grammar School, he helped to found another magazine, initially with the punning title 'Dock Leaves' and Raymond Garlick as editor. By 1961 he had taken over the editorial chair and the magazine was renamed the *Anglo-Welsh Review*. Subscribers saw the magazine grow in size and importance year by year, because Roland wanted it to reflect not literature alone but the entire spectrum of Welsh interests in the humanities in the English language. He succeeded in achieving this goal by dint of his prodigious work rate and versatility. The magazine is a monument to his acumen and skill as editor, and his unflagging patience and zeal in the task he set himself. As with *Here Today*, only on a grander scale, he contributed to its pages poems, stories and especially literary criticism in the form of articles and scores of carefully considered book reviews. The identity of the magazine was developed in editorials that are as thought provoking as they are entertaining. Most are of considerable length and deal with controversies in contemporary Welsh life as well as literary matters. Inevitably, while he moulded the magazine into a comprehensive expression of the culture of English-speaking Wales and a bridge with Welsh-speaking Wales, it absorbed a great deal of his time and intellectual energy.

Among Roland's voluminous papers is a diary for 1941 in which he listed some 260 magazines, editors and publishers and later recorded the fifty-three publications to which he had submitted work and, with a cross or tick, whether he had been successful. This is evidence of a serious and systematic approach to writing for publication early in his career, which he maintained notwithstanding the pressures of teaching. A fair proportion of these efforts were short stories, which had a considerable vogue during the war years. He enjoyed notable success in the 1940s with the publication of a short story in a journal as august as John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing*, but this clear endorsement apart, critical opinion of Roland's stories is largely confined to *The Eleven Men of Eppynt* (1956). It says a great deal for the stories and Dock Leaves Press (hardly a household name among publishers) that the book secured reviews from *TLS*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Spectator* among others. Reviewers recognized the sheer variety, or even disparateness, of the stories. The collection differs in this respect from (if we consider Anglo-Welsh contemporaries) those of Rhys Davies, Geraint Goodwin, Caradoc Evans or Glyn Jones, for example, where stories have a good deal in common stylistically and are sometimes quite similar thematically. Whether 'rag-bag' (the term used by Vernon Johnson in an otherwise favourable review in the *Manchester Guardian*) is a just description is another matter. With regard to the writer's personal vision, however, there is an interesting confluence of critical opinion. Roland Mathias is recognized as 'an acutely intelligent, acutely sensitive writer', his way of seeing his fictional world, or rather his verbal

representation of what he sees, is original, fresh and sharp: 'everything is first-hand'. Commonplace events have their place in his narratives but are transformed by his rhetoric. The obverse of this is a grumble about the richness of the imagery, which in the view of at least one critic prejudiced the pace and contributed to the obfuscation of stories.

Complaints of this kind seem to be founded on a misconception about the writer's creative processes. They assume that the stories were laboured over intensively, so that the unique flavour of the language is, as it were, a mosaic in which the pattern is gradually achieved by the diligent accumulation of highly coloured fragments. There is the suggestion that the dictionary and thesaurus were always at his side. Roland's response was clear and categorical. The stories were not worked-up in this way but written fluently and very largely in one or two sittings. The relevant Notebook and a few remaining manuscripts testify to this. The latter rarely indicate more than the sketchiest of planning, a marginal numbered list of three or four phrases suggesting order rather than content, while ink and handwriting and the paucity of amendment all strongly indicate prose written at speed and with little pause for thought, far less elaboration or second thoughts.

What is to be made of the accusation of obscurity, focused particularly on those stories founded on historical events? Glyn Jones, for example, in a radio broadcast (13 January 1957), spoke of Roland's venture into 'that minute class of fiction, the historical short story' and concluded 'I don't think his valiant experiment quite comes off'. He could not come to terms with historical references that, in his view, 'blur and becloud [the picture] with an excess of care and labour'. But if we consider, for example, the stories 'Digression into Miracle' and 'The Neutral Shore', we can soon grasp their origins. The former arose out of Roland's interest in Thomas Bushell (1594–1674). He first learned about this staunchly royalist engineer and entrepreneur at Enstone, the home of Molly Hawes, who would become his wife, and Bushell was doubly attractive because he had connections with the mining and minting of silver in Wales. The history is very largely given in the narrative and only certain mining terms and the phonetic spelling of the miners' dialects might hamper the normally careful reader. 'The Neutral Shore' is an imaginative projection of a byway of Roland's Oxford research on 'The Economic Policy of the Board of Trade, 1696–1714', and an extraordinary *tour de force*. If the reader admits bafflement, it is not so much lack of information about characters and events that obscures the story as obscurity itself. It is a tale of plot and counter plot in which uncertainty abounds and the reader, like the chief protagonists, Ellesdon and Manley, can apprehend only dimly the true meaning of the transactions in a candle-lit room and, until the denouement, what waste of effort, and life, has occurred on a darkened shore. Stylistically, 'The Neutral Shore' is a daring story. Convention leads us to expect smugglers' yarns to rattle along, but this one does not. The writer wants us to see as Ellesdon sees, and as Manley (who brashly gets it all wrong) fails to see.

It is difficult to conceive of 'The Neutral Shore', or the other thirteen stories that make up *The Eleven Men of Eppynnt* as 'slight' (as the *TLS* proposed). But if we draw up a balance sheet of opinion, views of this colour, and the complaint addressed in the previous paragraph, are outweighed by the favourable impressions the book made on reviewers. Whatever else may account for his relative neglect of the genre subsequently, it was not the unfavourable comments of a few critics. Nevertheless, he was chagrined by some of the criticism. In a lecture delivered in 1962 (to whom and on what occasion is now beyond determination), he said: 'It was one of the considerable disappointments I experienced when my book of short stories . . . was reviewed in 1956, that I was slated, even by critics I respected, for stories in which I had genuinely tried to break new ground and praised for those which were according to formula.'

The short stories are not the creations of a spontaneously inventive story-teller. Plot and, in most cases, character, are derived from identifiable sources. Roland drew upon his own experience of prison, memories of early childhood in Germany, friends and incidents from his schooldays, his enthusiasm for rugby football, observation of the melancholy decline of his father's scattered kin and stories of peasant life on the Rhos, passed on by other members of the clan, his historical studies, his own emotional attachment to and exiled detachment from his Breconshire birthplace. They are interesting narratives not least for what they convey about the writer, his life and preoccupations. Furthermore, the psychological insight they afford into the motivation of characters is often profound. But they are chiefly memorable for their idiosyncratic and bold use of language: they are stylistically innovative and exciting, the stories of a poet. This was insufficiently recognized by reviewers of *The Eleven Men of Eppynnt*, but it is what finally distinguishes them, makes them memorable and worth remembering.

His last two stories, 'A View of the Estuary' and 'Siams', were published in the 1970s and are different in character from those collected earlier. They are fictionalised versions of visits he made to aged members of his father's family, still living in Carmarthenshire. He knew their personal histories, the short-lived successes, failed relationships, loss and sickness, and feels an obligation to them, but little pleasure in renewing the acquaintance. He cannot help comparing their drab circumstances with the relative comfort of his life: he acknowledges his debt to his kinsfolk, while at the same time being glad to get away from them.

The key to Roland's outstanding contribution as a literary critic was his close reading of texts unadulterated by pre-conceived notions and irrelevant theories from other disciplines and cultures. He is invariably and endlessly painstaking, the most assiduous and productive critic of his time, matched only, towards the end of the twentieth century, by a few among the younger generation of academics, notably M. Wynn Thomas and Jeremy Hooker. The former considers him 'clearly one of the most important [of] committed critics' who discussed the works of other writers 'in a style that is consistently saturated with

thought'. At the height of his powers, Roland was particularly concerned that the highest standards should apply in criticism of Welsh writing in English. 'A reviewer,' he wrote, 'has to begin somewhere, of course, but he ought not to do so until he is a relatively experienced reader in the Anglo-Welsh field. And having begun, he should *apply* himself. Read the book, every word. Compare it, if that's possible, with what the [author] has written before.' His severe intellectual scrutiny confronts every difficulty and consistently challenges the writer's intention from a strong moral base. A selection of his longer critical essays was gathered in *A Ride Through the Wood* (1985). This aspect of his output also includes book-length studies of individual authors: *Vernon Watkins* in the *Writers of Wales* series (1974), and *The Hollowed-out Elder Stalk* (1979), about John Cowper Powys as a poet. He is still the best interpreter of Watkins' style and substance, and the only critic to have explored the philosophical and poetic development of Powys, a challenging and eccentric late Romantic.

All this work, as editor, and writer of short fiction, criticism and creative non-fiction – and much more (we have only to think of his enormous contribution to the *Companion to the Literature of Wales*) – belongs in Roland's bibliography. But he was first and foremost a poet.

In poems written in the early 1940s, he began developing a theme drawn from the history of his father's family that would become one of the features of his poetry. About the same time his mature voice began to emerge. Intimations of it had registered earlier, for example in 'Balloon over the Rhondda', a jaunty tale of the RAF's destruction of a barrage-balloon that has strayed from its moorings, the poem selected by Keidrych Rhys for *Modern Welsh Poetry* (1944), which is unusual in the concentration of its language and imagery. Most of the other poems in Roland's first book, *Days Enduring* (1942) are very different in character. The poetry of his teens and early twenties had been based on Victorian and Georgian models – a consequence of his education at Caterham, the independent school he attended as a boarder. In a note contributed to *Poetry Wales* (Vol. 13 No. 4, 1978) that touched on his school days, he wrote, 'It is perhaps galling to admit that Flecker, Newbolt, Charlotte Mew and Walter de la Mare were more to my taste than [than Edward Thomas, the subject of the note], but every reader must need begin from the ethos in which he grows up.' Writers, he might have added, usually serve an apprenticeship in the forms with which they are familiar. He practised the conventional prosody that he found in school texts like *An Anthology of Modern Verse* (1921), in which there are only four unrhymed poems, and *Poems of Today* (1915), in which there are none. He was strongly attracted by the traditional lyricism of the anthologised poets as well as by their response to the natural world and swallowed them up, archaic poeticisms and all. While most of the poems he wrote under this spell are accomplished metrical exercises, they tend to be emotionally void. Their sentimentality contrasts with the puritan honesty of later poems.

Though it did not alter his principled stand against the war, prison affected him profoundly. Aspects of the experience are portrayed in half-a-dozen poems at the heart of *Days Enduring* – the menace, the monotony, and the tantalizing distant sounds and glimpses of normal life beyond the walls:

Sun-in-my-window-shine
 And skirl of gulls around the stack,
 And spire burning up out of the blot of brown
 And children's cries –
 None of you give me back
 My feel of air and back
 My hold of heaven,
 For daylight dies
 And night is a ten-paned vault of black
 Too still to break with words
 Too tired for eyes. (‘Bars’)

One inflection of Roland’s mature voice is derived from his early exposure to Georgian prosody; a little later, while he was at Jesus College, Oxford, two more powerful influences combined to give it a distinctive complexity. His First in history in 1936 earned him a college prize. Among the books he bought with his prize money was Edith Sitwell’s *Aspects of Modern Poetry* (1934). In an essay he contributed to *Artists in Wales* (1971), he describes how Sitwell made him aware of ‘the concept of *texture* in poetry and . . . the conflict of ideals and attitudes in contemporary writing’, and concludes, ‘what I wrote from that moment was in very vital respects different.’ Fragments of an article written in one of his notebooks about 1945 say a little more:

It was [in *Aspects*] that I first saw, and indeed first accepted, the dictum that metre should be adapted to matter, that there is such a thing as texture, to which shape and stress and length of line all contribute . . . Most moments of living have an essential unity of feeling, and most poems should have it too . . . I am quite sure that [Sitwell’s] talk of *texture* – that feel of the poem which is both the thing said and the various aspects of the way it is said – was fundamentally right.

In a note to me he identified ‘Knapweed’, another poem from *Days Enduring*, as the first written under this new influence. A recollection of his childhood in Germany, it reveals his understanding of Sitwell clearly enough in its use of rhyme and half-rhyme (unusual in this book), in the repetition of words, letters and sounds and in curious gradations of similar sounds. It points the way to the development of a style in which verbal texture is a characteristic feature and language may be bent and compacted to serve the poet’s purposes.

It is unclear when Roland was first attracted to Hopkins, the second major

influence on his poetry. In an interview with Cary Archard (*Poetry Wales* Vol. 18 No. 4, 1983) he says the he 'began to write influenced by Gerard Manley Hopkins, with whom one obviously couldn't compete'. But there is no sign of Hopkins in his earliest poems. The impulse might, once again, have been Sitwell's book, as the reference to 'shape and stress and length of line' in the essay fragment quoted above suggests. Sitwell begins her chapter on Hopkins with an explanation of 'sprung rhythm' and goes on to discuss the poet's powerful realization of his subjects 'produced not by a succession of images alone, but by the movement of lines, by the texture, and by [his] supreme gift of rhetoric'. What she had to say about 'rhetoric' was also instructive:

It should be realized that rhetoric is not an incrustation, a foreign body which has somehow transformed the exterior surface of a poem . . . it is, instead, an immense fire breaking from the poem as from a volcano.

In Roland Mathias such ideas would have found receptive soil and flourished. His metrical accomplishment, his love of language and delight in moulding words (almost like a malleable material) would have made him peculiarly fitted to interpret them. Yet only a very few of his poems reveal any indebtedness to Hopkins. One of these, 'Fulwell', appears in his second book, *Break in Harvest* (1946):

O mine, O tension in the main
Unmoving helplessness, O pain
Untenable but shaped as round
And equal as the ungiving ground,
How may I hold, then, tell me,
Hold this great drop from the sound
Of misery, keep me so that I feel
Not empty, not feel passionless and punished?

Love ('Fulwell' is a love poem) is one of the themes of the book, for it is in part a celebration of his courtship and, in April 1944, marriage to Molly Hawes, whose home was a farm named 'Fulwell' in the Oxfordshire village of Enstone. The many historical associations of that part of England – Civil War battles, Thomas Bushell, a great house nearby at Ditchley – brought out the historian in the poet and, in individual poems, generated a metaphysical conjunction of past and present:

Walls cannot hold the wind against me now:
I am the one to walk the rows at Tew
Believing jasmine breathes the shape of you
And Lucius Carey makes you his first bow.

I am with Hampden in his ragged charge
 Hoping for Chiselhampton held or down:
 I ride with Bushell into Oxford town
 To mint the college loyalty in large.

More intensively thereafter, history provided another dimension to landscape in his mind's eye.

Links with Wales were already being pursued in *Break in Harvest*. Roland's parents had settled in Brecon in 1940, on his father's retirement, and from this time the Brecon Beacons became part of his mental landscape. The book also has an extraordinary poem about the origins of his father's family in rural Carmarthenshire. 'Grace before Work' is in part the confession of a man who has been a little through the mill, now has his own family responsibilities growing around him and, in all honesty, sees the striving and the daily grind of his forebears of so much more worth and so much less rewarded than his own. The poem begins as it were in the middle of a confession or catalogue of faults:

Then in remembering I do not enough
 To integrate the present with the past.

Making the cast with simples I must try
 The last-born, least bred herb twopence
 Of the soil, plenish my little moor or die
 With its denuded symbols and go home
 No more. In that exordium of fixity
 The dark, long-headed men recovered heart,
 Built shacks, saved landlords from prolixity,
 Beat tedium out of doors and kept
 The chapel bare, unbettered, for eternity's room.
 Hope in the squatter's heart was a high door
 And life beyond.

Roland carefully researched his family history, but this is more than an expression of interest in genealogy. It is self-admonition and solemn promise that the work of the peasant labourer will be remembered in the words of the poet:

I must recall the rock, the beaten husk
 Beneath, and the first builder to whom fell
 Much less of tack and harvest. In that sense
 The century has done justice to his hopes.

Each has his earth and mulches in it good.
 O backbreak past, share in the present's food.

The language of the poem has a craggy muscularity, to which the diction (complicated by archaic and compound words) and unconventional syntax contribute. The imagery is often compressed and occasionally ambiguous, but read aloud, the poem releases its texture of end and internal rhymes, its echoing vowel sounds and its incantatory power.

Poems included in *Break in Harvest* had first appeared in magazines like *Wales*, *The Welsh Review*, *Poetry London* and *Life and Letters Today*. In 1948, J. R. Ackerley accepted several for *The Listener*, a cultural institution of the time, and *Tribune* took others. It was a year of successes, crowned by his appointment as headmaster of Pembroke Dock Grammar School. During his eight years there his third book of poems, *The Roses of Tretower* (1952), came out. The book opens with a group of poems that recall 1945–46, a year spent at Carlisle Grammar School, when with his wife and young children, Roland lived in rented (former admiralty) accommodation on the edge of Solway Firth, near Gretna. Looking back, the poet assured me that his Gretna/Carlisle experience was happy enough, not least because, having attracted some notice as an actor at both Caterham and Oxford, he became involved in amateur drama again. This does not appear from the poems, which are all bleak and gloomy. In ‘The Mountain’, the wintry Solway shore is a dismal setting for contemplation of the altered landscape of the soul:

I have been in the fields a year
And never felt so far, desperately
Far from the course of Christ
And of His star.

Skiddaw, visible far to the south, seems to symbolize a distant promise of redemption; but it must be earned and the poem ends with a prayer:

Give me the punishment that saves,
A mountain ministry, appraising Lord,
Give me the counter fit and finger
For the pointers in the pit.
By all that common is and suffers hunger
Compass it, compass it.

These poems from that other border, between England and Scotland, set the predominant tone of the book: religious concerns are never far away, death haunts life and faith is usually assailed by doubt. In order to understand and appreciate Roland’s poetry fully, the reader must come to terms with his sense of belonging to the Nonconformist tradition and his self-questioning Puritan outlook. Few poets have so sharply and consistently interrogated their own

motives; fewer still have so often found themselves wanting in faith or in the will to do good.

The poet's psychic landscape changed little with his return to the south. He is often a hair-shirted writer, who finds inspiration in rough rurality and the raw end of the year – autumn, winter, uncertain spring. 'Hawk' typifies his view of the world in a comfortless season:

There are marks of snow on the goitered neck
Where the cut begins. Grey clouds concentrate
In a mountain hurly-burly shoulder
To shoulder. Buffet and Jehu-crack
Predominate. Slowly the day grows colder.

Already the cart-tracks are stiff and red
Pointing like chapped fingers from the gate.
Above the perfunctory grass a level
Eye-flight off, look close, rigid,
A hawk, irate as a stone, with the squireen's cavil.

The red soil of Breconshire, dank or frost-bitten, would become as characteristic of his verse as the textural knitting of lines, the biblical reference and the unusual, archaic word, in this case the surprisingly apt onomatopoeic 'squireen'.

The Roses of Tretower also has poems that confirm the poet's self-appointed role as remembrancer, especially of those who laboured long for smaller returns than he has enjoyed. 'The Flooded Valley' speaks for the families ('Kedward, Prosser, Morgan') displaced from the valley where he himself was born when the river was dammed. Others open up a new geography and history, that of Archenfield, the old name for the border land of Monmouthshire and Herefordshire. They include 'Thomas ap Richard of Doier to the Tower, These', which introduces some of the places, like 'Doier' (that is, the parish of Dore, Herefordshire), Wormbridge and Hungerstone, the scene of the 'commotion' among Catholics, and a number of the characters involved. He re-visited both in later poems that focus on the rivalry between supporters of the Earl of Essex and the Cecils, father and son, Elizabeth I's secretaries of state, whose families had roots in Archenfield.

The ventriloquial habit, with colloquial speech rhythms, linguistic invention and the flashing images that make a distinctive tone of voice, also begins in *The Roses of Tretower* with 'A Letter':

Eight years ago come Tuesday now I walked
Big as a brown wind angry from your door.
Mad you had made me, Ellen Skone, talked
My tongue out of duty, crossed me more
That day than I remember. And the sun came down

Like a bakestone. Well, that was it! –
 The widow lost her lodger in a fit
 Of temper and the whole cliff laboured under frown.
 I am no more a scrallion than I was,
 Brawned out a bit as a haulier over Roose
 As a matter of fact . . .

At readings, Roland and his audience enjoyed poems in this actorly vein, which seem easily made so confident is the poet's handling of dialect and otherwise idiosyncratic language, whether the adopted persona was nameless, as above, or a historical figure such as Henry Vaughan, Sir Gelli Meyrick, staunch supporter of the Earl of Essex in Wales, or Paul Delahay, the Cecils' agent.

The poet's linguistic virtuosity is on display throughout *The Roses of Tretower* along with those concerns – mortality, faith, guilty awareness of human failings, the debt owed to our forebears – that distinguish so much of his verse. His feeling for place, particularly Welsh places, can never be taken at face value because of the play of ideas that lies behind the descriptive surface. In a letter written in 1952, soon after the book was published, he said that he considered his writing 'metaphysical', and so it is.

After the youthful creative surge that fed his first book, Roland was never a prolific poet. As we have seen, writing was usually confined to holidays. In 1958 he left Pembroke Dock to take on the headship of the Herbert Strutt School, Belper and he was in exile once more, in Derbyshire, when *The Flooded Valley* came out in 1960. Twenty-five of the poems had already appeared in *The Roses of Tretower*. The eight new poems that represent the years 1952–60 exhibit the range of the poet's rhetoric and foreshadow developments in thought and technique that were to gather momentum through the 1960s. They are all rhyming poems and in several the compression of language challenges the reader. 'Marston Sicca' corresponds to the civil parish of Long Marston near Stratford-upon-Avon on OS maps. More importantly, it is a few miles from Offenham and the home of Molly Mathias's sister, where the poet and his family spent holidays. The poem is a meditation on death. It is densely textured and its diction is archaic, but it has (like 'A Letter') a transforming quality of dramatic utterance when read aloud:

I watch the muster of grasses between the stones,
 The wind pitching dead in the porch
 As the afternoon passes,
 And I feel my free soul bounden, all of a sudden lodged,
 its habit bones.
 There is nothing to say, or have said, now the news has run
 Like a rabbit about the apostles

In their yards: not one unread
 Apprentice gravelled in his piece will cry covenant with me,
 never one.

What the poor scholars mutter, the poor I laid
 In the gown, I hardly know.
 The alphabet I utter
 Graves every mound with a title to blame. In its vowels am
 I too mort and unmade.

I watch the muster of grasses between the stones,
 The wind pitching dead in the porch
 As the afternoon passes,
 And I feel my free soul bounden, all of a sudden lodged,
 its habit bones.

Twenty-three poems were composed in the decade following *The Flooded Valley*. The Notebooks show they tended to be roughed out and put aside, often for several months, before being amended, and usually worked on once or twice again some time later before being considered finished. This may have been in part a consequence of work-load (in 1961 he had added the onerous task of editing *The Anglo-Welsh Review* to his multifarious responsibilities), but most of all, perhaps, it was because he found fluency irreconcilable with the expression of emotions and ideas that were deeply personal and the honesty demanded by his Puritan conscience.

In 1969, Roland quit education. He and Molly moved to a new home in Brecon, only a few hundred yards from the house where his widowed mother maintained her sturdy independence. He joined the congregation of The Plough, where his father had been a member. The poet's steadfast Nonconformist outlook has always been central to his existence and questions of belief and morality, never far from the surface in *The Flooded Valley*, occupy the foreground in his next book, *Absalom in the Tree* (1971), along with the habit of self-deprecation, quietly revealed in earlier poems. Sins of omission and commission, the sinful thought, somehow more reprehensible because the sinner is fearful of the deed, backsliding, inactivity, failure to be strong in the true cause – these invite the severest of censure and, arraigned before his own conscience, he does not spare himself. His sense of unworthiness compared with earlier generations returns redoubled in 'They Have Not Survived', which concludes:

For this dark cousinhood only I
 Can speak. Why am I unlike
 Them, alive and jack in office
 Shrewd among the plunderers?

Roland Mathias, *Writer*

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A strongly elegiac current runs through the book, for loss and death are themes that constantly return as the poet considers graveyards in Breconshire, the Border and Brittany, the deaths of biblical characters, Holy Fools, communities and ways of life and close friends and family. These poems tend to be more subtly textured; their language is more relaxed, less rhetorically tangled, and their climaxes have a liturgical resonance. The best known of them is 'A Last Respect', which describes his father's funeral at the height of summer:

All that was left of breath suddenly ruffled the flowers
On the bier ahead . . .

. . . and all

But the elm and the brass handles had air
About it and petals flying, impassioned as
Wings, an arc of will prescribed, mounting
And Sion crying, quick in the eyelash second.

Who are you to say that my father, wily
And old in the faith, had not in that windflash abandoned
His fallen minister's face.

The book won the Welsh Arts Council poetry prize, which came not only as deserved recognition of the quality of his writing but as a much appreciated boost to his income. Since 1969 he had lived by his pen and, although well known as the editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, he had found it far from easy at first. Gradually he gained a fresh audience and, as his reputation increased, took on lecturing and reading tours at home, in Brittany and the United States. His life was as constantly busy as that of any of his ancestors but, as the poems he wrote at this time continued to show, it was still too comfortable to mollify his conscience. When he took stock, in the poem 'Burning Brambles', he found nothing in his life that could afford him a moment's self-satisfaction:

The sea at a distance glints now and again, as though
This upland corner, puzzled with smoke, had a new heart to show.

But the land is unhealthy, smelling of green-cut bramble
And rotting sticks; bumps in it, bare of all grass, resemble

Boils that the bold rooting whips had crossed, lanced once of their pus
And left, foetid and out of sight. It is an old covert, the fuss

Of discovery long muted: in the back ditch the tins are so many
Rust-flakes that part in the fingers, dusting on black bottles rainy

Yet stoppered, a heap of old sins without consequence, save
Deep in the land's heart where the sods of the field wall gave

Summons for turbulence.

The long, run-on lines mimic the coiling brambles and the melancholy process of meditation and, although there was a real neglected garden within sight of the sea, the final lines leave us in no doubt about the allegorical purpose of the poem:

It is enough to unpile and shift

The endless loops of this waste, hearing the crackle behind
And knowing the smell of a life ill lived as it passes down wind.

'Burning Brambles' was collected in Roland's fifth volume of poetry, *Snipe's Castle* (1979). By this time he had renewed his connection with Pembrokeshire, having restored a condemned cottage at St Twynells and finally subjugated the waste that had once been its garden. The much-loved, sea-girt county in the far south-west of Wales provides the background of several poems in the book and is the subject of the celebratory sequence, 'Tide Reach', that ends it. Intended as the text for an oratorio, it was the occasion for a display of the poet's metrical virtuosity, his ability to see together the historical past and the present and, more joyfully than elsewhere his writing, his Christian belief. On the way to this conclusion, however, the quest for redemption is, as ever, baffled by self-doubt. A promise of grace can be glimpsed in harsh places, as in the epiphanic moment of 'A Stare from the Mountain', but not yet for him:

. . . I stand on Yscir mountain,
Head above the wind level, hearing the north's
Voice at my nape, putting the frozen
Questions that the poles demand . . .
. . . The fetlock
Hairs, the mane, the portly grassblown
Outline of a pony natured white
Shine between me and the sun, the animal
Marked with redemption from a hidden
Source. I look involuntarily, all
Of a sudden in need of a gleam
Lining my shadow. But nothing there
Satisfies . . .

The poem has its own subtle music, and its rhythm and diction are those of thoughtful, everyday language: no problem of accessibility here. Roland can bring off the same trick as easily within the constraints of stanzaic structure, as in 'Porth Cwyfan', where half-rhymes and run-on lines disguise the regularity of the pattern:

June, but the morning's cold, the wind
Bluffing occasional rain. I am clear

Roland Mathias, *Writer*

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What brings me here across the stone
 Spit to the island, but not what I shall find
 When the dried frubbles of seaweed
 Are passed, the black worked into the sandgrains
 By the tide's mouthing. I can call nothing my own.

The place is a small, Celtic-church-crowned islet near Aberffaw, Anglesey, far from his Breconshire mountains. The admonitory encounters in this poem, first with a small dog that barks violently at any approach and then with a family whose accent identifies them as Lancastrian, lead the poet to consider his assumptions of patriotic exclusivity on the basis of history. The characteristic honesty of the poem affords an antidote to R. S. Thomas's views about the English tourist in Wales. Both poems are parables, a form of doubling (to be added to those of imagery and linguistic texturing) that comes naturally to a profoundly Christian poet.

To self-knowledge, guilt and doubt is added the burden of seeing the faithful dwindle towards the earth, congregations declining and chapels falling into disuse. 'Brechfa Chapel', a haunting poem with its own allegory of raucous seabirds and a swan that 'dreams', unaffected by their 'militant brabble', asks 'Is the old witness done?' There is no consoling answer; the poem ends not with hope but a kind of desperate courage:

The hellish noise it is appals, the intolerable shilly-
 Shally of birds quitting the nearer mud
 For the farther, harrying the conversation
 Of faith. Each on his own must stand and conjure
 The strong remembered words, the unanswerable
 Texts against chaos.

There is a great deal more to *Snipe's Castle*, which thoroughly merited the 1980 Welsh Arts Council prize for poetry.

Another sixteen years were to pass before the publication of Roland's next book of poems. In the meantime, *Burning Brambles: Selected Poems, 1944-1979* appeared in 1983 and, in 1985, during one of his several reading tours in the United States, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. It was in May 1986, in the midst of a hectic schedule of writing, lectures, readings and committee work, that he suffered a stroke. All the work in hand was set aside, including the major historical study of Henry Vaughan and a number of poems that were at or near final draft stage. Almost a decade later he completed revisions of the latter, added poems that had appeared in magazines between 1979 and 1986 and a few written slowly and painfully in the 1990s to make *A Day at Vallorcines* (1996). Although he had little patience with those who withhold appreciation of a poem if they are unable to

grasp it entirely and at once, he added notes on some of the poems. The book was received by respected critics as the work of a writer at the top of his form – as indeed it is, for the great majority of the poems were written in the same confident maturity as those that appeared in *Snipe's Castle*. And, as before, the concerns of family, mutability, history and landscape, and the lessons the natural world has for the conscientious observer, penetrate the book. There are further examples of metrical accomplishment, not least among them 'Tŷ Clyd' ('Cosy House') – the name of his parents' house in Brecon, and the poet's last word on the tensions in their relationship and in his relationship with them, summed up in the lines 'two storeys of deed/Slapped on word, a house with all chance crusades/Abandoned, a crux of definitive shades/Attacking the quiet'. The epistolary poems reach apotheosis with 'The Steward's Letter' to 'the Lo. Burghley' in which Paul Delahay describes the arrangements he made for the funeral of his master's 'late couzen/William' in a facsimile of early seventeenth century English. Even those poems written in the 1990s, though they lack the verbal inventiveness and metrical facility of earlier poems, have the capacity to stop the reader short in admiration of some idiosyncratic quirk of language, or honesty of observation, or sudden actorly tone.

The metre of the title poem, written in triplets with a rhyme echoing from the middle of the first line to the end of the third, is far less complex than the early love poems of *Break in Harvest*. That was the time for verbal back somersaults, but after forty years of marriage (the poem was written in 1983, following a holiday in Switzerland) he and Molly could look back in quiet contemplation. Even here allegory becomes the medium:

But the station building, the immediate goal,
 Has a kind of grace, a fluted, fine
 Semblance of gothic tricked into metal.
 The run down the gorge to the frontier, the silent place
 We peered at this morning with so little
 In mind, will be full of jerks and slowings
 Like the blind climb up. But the station has grace. It has borne
 The faces of doubt, the comings and goings
 Of millions. We shall stand there solid in
 The goodly counsel with which a world back we set out.

Some of these poems, it seems to this reader at least, have a quality of serenity that is often intensely moving. Of one such, Roland, ever his own harshest critic, so doubted his own motives in wanting to make some larger significance out of the beauty of a day walking with his daughter in the Swiss alps that he discarded it. It only came to light out of the circumstances that created *A Day at Vallorcines*,

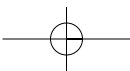
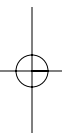
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where it bears the title 'Grasshoppers'. Although they do not exemplify the poet's metrical and linguistic inventiveness, the final lines will serve as well as any to represent his thought and writing at the height of his powers:

It is right
To climb as we can, to the limit
Of will. To do less
Is unworthy of such sun, such far
Blue purpose as the distance is,
Folded back and back, fainter
And fainter always, surpassing
Peak with peak, till the day
Is what we can never be and scarcely comprehend.

SAM ADAMS



THE ROLAND MATHIAS PRIZE

It is two years since I gave my last update on the Roland Mathias Prize and much has happened in that time. The Prize itself has undergone a fundamental transformation, becoming part of the much bigger competition for the Wales Book of the Year. It still operates under the auspices of the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends, but now I believe has a more stable and prominent position as part of the award run by Literature Wales.

I will come to the detail of how that has played out in just a moment. Before then I need to go back to 2011, which was the last year the Prize (for books published in 2010) was awarded in its original form. The successful format of previous Prize events was repeated, with the same positive response from those who attended at Brecon Guildhall. Presided over by the BBC Wales presenter, Nicola Heywood Thomas, it involved the four shortlisted writers reading from their work before the eventual winner was announced by the poet and critic, Sam Adams.

The range of work considered for the Prize covered poetry, short stories, literary criticism and Welsh history and, as chair of the judging panel, I commented that it was probably the strongest collection of writing since the Prize began. It was fitting that the Prize, now worth £3,000, was won by a poet who lives here in Powys. Ruth Bidgood's collection of poetry, *Time Being* (Seren), was described by the judges as "the crowning collection of her long career. It is so evocative of place and time and she packs such an emotional punch. The quality of writing is sustained throughout and yet she makes it look so easy."

Why change what was a successful formula? In fact, there were a number of reasons. First of all, the contribution made by BBC Cymru/Wales, both financial and organisational, was coming to an end. All the costs associated with staging the Prize had previously been carried by BBC Wales, including the receptions, and my thanks go to Cath Allen and her team for that support. That meant that only the Prize money itself came from the fund which is held under the auspices of the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends. In addition, it was proving increasingly hard to achieve much of a public profile for what was an all-Wales literary Prize. While it had acquired a high reputation in Welsh literary circles, that reputation did not extend to the wider public. Publishers in Wales were very supportive of the Prize, appreciating the attention it drew to works of particular relevance to Wales, but it was increasingly hard work securing copies of books from publishers elsewhere.

When the opportunity arose to incorporate the Roland Mathias Prize into the Wales Book of the Year, it seemed sensible to take that opportunity. The Book of the Year was being divided into three different sections, fiction, non-fiction and poetry, and the Academi (soon to become Literature Wales) was looking for sponsors. Poetry had always been by far the biggest category considered for the

Roland Mathias Prize, and all but one of the winners had been a poet. So it seemed appropriate to designate the poetry section of the new-style Book of the Year as the Roland Mathias Prize. There were rightly some concerns that literary criticism and Welsh history might not now get the same degree of consideration as they did under the stand-alone Roland Mathias Prize, but overall it was considered to be a beneficial move. The award would now take place every year, with a prize of £2,000, instead of every two years as before.

One part of the agreement was that an event connected to the Wales Book of the Year would be held in Brecon. And so on May 10 this year Literature Wales staged the announcement of the shortlist for the 2011 award at Theatr Brycheiniog. Taking their cue from previous Prize events in Brecon, the event began with poetry readings, but this time in both Welsh and English. There can be a mutual lack of knowledge between the two literary cultures, and this event helped to bridge that gap. Eurig Salisbury and Ceri Wyn Jones in Welsh, together with Gillian Clarke, the National Poet for Wales, and Carol Ann Duffy, gave readings which were at times striking, funny, intelligent and moving.

Adjudications were then given in the new Wales Book of the Year categories for both languages. I shall confine myself to reporting the shortlist for the Roland Mathias Prize, and you only have to look at the names of the authors on the shortlist to realise how strong the competition was this time. Tiffany Atkinson was shortlisted for *Catulla et al*, Philip Gross was on the shortlist for a second time for *Deep Field*, and the former National Poet for Wales, Gwyneth Lewis, was shortlisted for her collection, *Sparrow Tree* (all published by Bloodaxe).

There were a number of complaints that this event, although held in Brecon, did not give enough recognition to the role of the Roland Mathias Prize, and there were a number of failures to get the branding right through the whole of the competition organisation. Some representations were made by the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends, and my thanks to Lleucu Siencyn and Casia Wiliam of Literature Wales for ensuring these omissions were put right when it came to the main award event in Cardiff in July.

This took place in the impressive surroundings of the newly built Royal College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and was well-attended, including by press, radio and television. I shall again confine my account to the contenders for the Roland Mathias Prize, for which the judge was Sam Adams, who has already appeared in this article. Sam paid a generous tribute to the work of my father before giving his adjudication on the shortlist. Tiffany Atkinson, he said, had transposed the satire and eroticism of Catullus's Latin poems to present a keen, satiric vision of the way in which people today are driven by the old imperatives of sex and death. Most of the poems in Philip Gross's collection were a frank description of the illness and frailty of his father during his final years and the writing about loss – loss of language and everyday social contact – was acutely observational. Gwyneth Lewis' *Sparrow Tree* revealed, he said, an outstanding

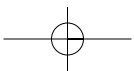
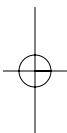
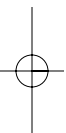
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talent for coining unexpected images from a great range of sources, but with her thoughts returning again and again to the many pains of absence, the absence of children, the suspenseful anticipation of loss and the threat of sickness to loved ones. Sam described her poems as brilliantly clever but also deeply felt.

It was a hard task to choose the winner of the Roland Mathias Prize for 2011, but Sam and his fellow judges in the end decided the award should go to Gwyneth Lewis. The overall winner of the Book of the Year was Patrick McGuinness for his novel, *The Last Hundred Days*, but this in no way diminished the role of the poetry prize. It is a significant boost for poetry in Wales that it now has its own prize as part of the Book of the Year, and that it is in the name of Roland Mathias.

GLYN MATHIAS



ILLTUD – A FOOTNOTE

A footnote to the article on Illtud in *Brycheiniog* XLII

In an article in a publication by the Presses universitaires de Rennes, ‘Les premiers Bretons en Armorique’, which appeared simultaneously in English as ‘The British Settlement of Brittany’ (Tempus Publishing, Stroud, ISBN 0 7524 2), authors Pierre-Roland Giot and Phillipe Guignon refer on page 211 of the English version to Plouguerneau/Plougerne ‘as one of the more important arrival places of the sixth-century Britons.’ At a Gallo-Roman site at Porz-Guen, nearby, erosion by the sea has revealed potsherds and glass beads, and similar erosion of a loam cliff one kilometre to the south ‘has gradually spread large quantities of Gallo-Roman material onto the beach, indicating the presence of a probable villa’.

The authors speculate that ‘This Roman site may well have attracted our Dark-Age settlers’.

The site bears the name ‘Kelerdut’, Cell Illtud or Illtud’s Cell. ‘Erdut’ appears several times as a version of Ildut, (Ploërdut, Morbihan; Pleurtuit, Côtes d’Armor), the change of ‘l’ to ‘r’ being influenced by the previous final consonant of ‘Kel’, and would seem to offer a direct link with our Saint Illtud, and his early presence in Brittany.

However, the relentless erosion by the sea resulted last year in the final collapse of the cliff, and the subsequent replacement of the collapsed road with a new road involving large-scale earthworks and sea defences, finally obliterating any archaeological remains, just two months before a visit by the author in the hope of locating another Illtud connection, the only remaining evidence being the village place-name.

BRYNACH PARRI

