

THE HISTORY OF GWENT & BRYCHAN'S TREDEGAR DIARIES

Part One:

The History of Gwent from the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd
until the Present time – By Thomas E Watkins (Eiddil Ifor)
1801-1889

(One of the subjects of the Abergavenny Eisteddfod held in November 1836.)

Part Two:

The Tredegar Diaries of John Davies (Brychan) 1784 – 1864.

Translated by Colin Morgan (2009).
Edited by Colin Morgan & Peter Morgan Jones

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR, THOMAS E. WATKINS (EIDDIL IFOR), (1801 – 1889):

Thomas Watkins was born in Pwll-yr-Hyward, Llanfoist, Monmouthshire on May 1st 1801. His father had worked in Abertyleri [Abertillery] but returned to Llanfoist to work in the limestone quarries belonging to the Blaenafon iron works. The family were members of the Baptist chapel in Llanwenarth. Thomas Watkins kept the White Hart tavern in Blaenafon before going to work as a weigher in the iron works of Blaenau Gwent where in 1859 his wife died in Blaina, after which in 1860 Thomas Watkins returned to Blaenafon to keep the Three Cranes tavern for the remainder of his life. He was an original and leading member in its early years of the Abergavenny based group of people - *Cymreigyddion y Fenni* - who established the series of Eisteddfodau that created such a stir in Gwent between 1833 and 1854. Thomas Watkins was a regular competitor in the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau and won many prizes for his essays of which this is one. He is best known for his history of Llanfoist parish - *Hanes Llanffwyst* – which won first prize in the first Abergavenny eisteddfod in November 1834. He was not as successful as a poet but he certainly was as an essayist in these eisteddfodau, winning competitions on a dozen occasions. Nine of his essays survive, five in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and four in Cardiff Central Library.

About the Editing of Watkin's History

The original essay in Welsh by Watkins approaches 20,000 words, all written in splendid longhand! The text covers a span of some six centuries without any chapter or sub-headings. To assist the reader it was felt that headings needed to be added to the translation. The topic which was set for competition and Watkins response to it covers the period between 1282 and 1837, a period when the history of Gwent was set against the activities and whims of semi-autonomous Marcher Lords; the reigns of no less than twenty four English monarchs; and the tempestuous histories of the Houses of Lancaster, York, Tudor, Orange and Hanover of the crown of England, in their engagement with a part of Wales!

The Eisteddfod topic specified a treatment of the history of 'Gwent' but throughout his essay Watkins employed a range of territorial terms for this region, i.e. 'Gwent', 'Monmouthshire' and his clear favourite 'Esyllwg'.⁽¹⁾ Sometimes these are interchangeable, but on other occasions they are used to convey a discrete territorial reference. The translation attempts to clarify this by using 'Greater Gwent' when Watkins refers to the wider historical territory of 'Esyllwg'. However, where Watkins has used this to convey the particular spirit associated with the Silurians, its historic inhabitants, it has been retained because the text makes clear he still considered himself a 'Syllwr' and inheritor of historic Esyllwg. It must be emphasized that Watkins was not a member of an intellectual profession, but an individual earning his living in a labouring community who wrote the essay at a time when Wales had no university, no public education system, and no library services as are available today. By any standards this must be considered a remarkable achievement.

(1) Esyllwg or Syllwg is an ancient name applied to the district where the inhabitants were called Esyllwr or Syllwyr and Silures by the Romans and is likely to have covered the territory watered by the Severn, the Wye, the Usk, the Taf and the Towy. According to Iolo Morgannwg, a "Syllwr" means a lover of the landscape because the territory of Esyllwg was a country with many beautiful landscapes. The term was still in use in mid-nineteenth century Gwent. For example the Risca Welsh Society was called *Cymreigyddion Isca Esyllwg*.

The History of Gwent from the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd [1282] until the Present time [1836] – By Thomas E Watkins (Eiddil Ifor), 1801-1889

Introduction

Gwent in the period under consideration [1282 – 1836] has never been devoid of people to govern it. According to the records left us, our early leaders were exceedingly famous and had headquarters of their government in a court at Caerleon-on-Usk until they were forced by the English to move it to Glamorgan, their former city being erased by their enemy [that was a] huge loss to the whole of Eryllwg. The topic asks for a history of Gwent from the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd up to the present, so perhaps it is not unbeneficial to say something about this never-to-be- forgotten prestigious hero.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (b. 1282?)

It is said that the date of his birth has not been recorded, more is the pity, nor is it known at present, but it is estimated that he was born during the reign of Henry III (1216-1272) and before the birth of his son Iorwerth. Llywelyn's father was an illegitimate son of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and consequently he never expected to possess the honour of attaining the Prince's chair, and lived peacefully in a place called to the present day Maesymynan in Swydd Gailestr. He owned the cantrefs known now as Engfield, Dyffryn Clwyd, Rhos, and Rhyfoniog, an inheritance which had justly come to him from his father. He lived like the other gentry of an independent Principdom, according to the main practices of that time, but in an unexpected way he was elected to take over ruling Wales on the death of his uncle the very famous prince Dafydd.

At this time, namely the around the birth of Llywelyn the last Prince of Wales, Gwent included the shires of Monmouth, Hereford (Eirinawg), Radnorshire, a part of Breconshire as far as the River Neath in Glamorgan, and as far as the Severn and Gloucester. Its separate parts had a variety of names: the provinces of Glewysig; Erging, Ewias, and Ystrad Yw. When Llywelyn was born there was much spilling of blood and many battles over a period of years between the *Gwenhwyswyr* – the men of Gwent - and the Normans. But in time the Normans came to a union with the Sylllyrwyr – the Silurians or men of Gwent - through emulating their ways and marrying the daughters of the Welsh gentry, so that it was not long before they both became peaceful towards each other with the appearance of being one nation.

A few years prior to the birth of Llywelyn there had been major contestation between the English and the men of Gwent for the town and castle at Caerleon on the Usk. Iorwerth ab Owen the prince of Gwent and Glamorgan won and held the place over his enemies. But it appears that subsequently about the time of the birth of Llywelyn, Caerleon fell in 1218 for a second time into the hands of the English at the hands of William Marshal who behaved extremely roughly and cruelly towards the inhabitants. In 1231 the noted hero Iorwerth ab Owen made a committed attack on the town and castle which were in the possession of the English, and won back the main town of Gwent government. It was kept in Welsh hands until the union of Wales with the crown of England (1536).

Gwent During the Reigns of Henry 3rd & Edward 1st - 1216 to 1307.

Gwent continued to keep its identity as a Princedom, its princes, its kings, and its famous armies during the reign of Henry 3rd and Edward 1st, and until the death of Llywelyn the prince of the whole of Wales. It seems that Gwent was considered by the English King Henry 3rd to be under the control of those Earls and gentry which His Majesty thought deserving of his trust; such a one was the noted the Earl of Pembroke who was much respected by him in those days. Because he had so much of his lands in Gwent, the consequence was that he had a great deal of authority over its inhabitants during the childhood of Llywelyn. Some have shown that several parts of Eryllwg – i.e. Greater Gwent were taken away from those of the Welsh gentry who were opposed to Henry and given to those who supported the Anglo-Normans. It was obvious that some of the leaders of Gwent in those days preferred to serve the king of England rather than strive to keep their own rights and princes, hence supporting the very person who had his mind set on subjugating their country and removing their nation from the earth.

As an example of this we have evidence that Robert ap Hywel accepted from the English the post of Chief Keeper of Ysgenfraith Castle on the Welsh border together with the post of Recorder of the Monmouthshire lordships of White Castle, Grosmont Castle, and Ysgenfraith Castle, under licence for his lifetime, something which appears amazing because Gwent should be governed by its own princes. But perhaps this was not that surprising. The Silurians – the “Men of Gwent” – had lessened their striving to protect, keep, and maintain their independence because they had lost focus on what had previously been dear to their forefathers, namely to defend their country and its rights at all costs. But when some of their princes did awake from their sleep, they were as alive to the situation as ever, and this was the case when Llywelyn came into power. Knowing he was the correct inheritor and Prince of the whole of Wales, all the men of Gwent began to pull together and count themselves under his banner and hence enemies of Edward 1st who had drawn his sword and threatened to wipe our name from all the nations of the earth if we did not bend to his laws and be faithful tenants to him. Despite the severity of these threats the men of Gwent did not hesitate to support their Prince, and like the remainder of Wales, gave him a great welcome when he visited the south. It is said that the majority of the owners of the Gwent castles submitted willingly and with great rejoicing in recognizing Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as the true Prince of Wales, and great was the rejoicing throughout the whole area of Greater Gwent. In 1233, Bishop Bland of Cambridge achieved great success in the kingdom which brought many changes on the island and particularly in Gwent. King Henry 3rd was persuaded to obtain foreign soldiers from Ireland and, out of sight of the King, these were attacked by the Earl of Pembroke who became an enemy instead of a friend to him. When the King learned of the Earl's intentions he was totally enraged and ordered all his lords to attend a meeting in Gloucester at a time appointed by him. Following the decision of this meeting a large army was gathered together and came to Wales, but the Earl of Pembroke had taken great care to move all food supplies out of the areas the King and his troops would be passing through. This forced the King to discontinue his journey into Gwent, and the disappointment meant that he, his officers, and a large number of soldiers had to stay in Grosmont castle whilst planning the best way forward to defeat the inhabitants of Eryllwg – Greater Gwent.

When it became known to the Earl that the King and his army were in and around the castle, he attacked in an unexpected way during the night, and caused them all to

flee despite him having only a small number of soldiers compared with [those of] Henry, and they were forced to retreat to Gloucester. Following this the Earl of Pembroke attacked Monmouth Castle and took possession of the greater part of the King's war armament, his army and the castle. The keeper and defender of the Castle had judged that the Earl had taken the castle with only a small number of men, so he laid siege a short distance from the castle intending to rush them from the rear without warning, and it seemed likely he would have succeeded in carrying out the plan, when he received a fatal injury from an arrow from one of the Earl's soldiers. Because of this his men and many inhabitants of Monmouth town were taken prisoner. By now Hubert de Burgh had learned that his life was in danger and escaped from Devizes Castle and was successful in making his way to Gwent where he joined William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke. The coming together of such notable individuals as these two was sufficient to create terror in the bravest heart. In 1234 the Earl of Pembroke defeated the small army which was led by John de Monmouth, a gentleman committed to Henry 3rd and with much influence in Gwent. The Earl destroyed much of the King's lands on the borders of Wales and burnt to ashes the town of Shrewsbury. All of this happened when King Henry and his men were camped in the town of Gloucester.

So great was the Earl's grandeur, ability, and fame that the King did not consider himself safe within the strong walls of Gloucester, so he hid himself in one of the monasteries leaving his supporters scattered along the banks of the Severn to the care of their enemies. In those days there was more security in a monastery than any other place because of its sacredness. Despite all the contestation between the Earl and the king and the oppression which the king intended to impose on him, it seems that the Earl was prepared to compromise with him on terms which would promise security for his life. But such a submission was not acceptable to the King unless the Earl would come and submit at his feet, have a halter round his neck and in his presence confess that he was a traitor. The Earl had a great deal of land in Ireland which was then greatly destroyed by the King, and this had such an adverse effect on him that he quickly died. One recalls that many men of Gwent took up arms for the Earl and it is true to say that this had been influenced by the treatment their fellow countrymen had been getting. Also by the fact that the King was obliged to send the Archbishop of Kent together with the archbishops of Chester and Rochester to Wales to make peace with Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, who was at the time the Prince of North Wales. When the Earl of Pembroke departed this life, his brother Gilbert was elected by the King to the Earldom.

In the years 1244-5 Gwent was as independent as England itself and was led by its own princes who were prepared to defend Llywelyn and all his rights. It is said that during this span of time the Earl of Pembroke died without leaving an heir, so that the Earldom passed to his brother Anselm who also died within a matter of months of receiving the honour and hence the prominent Earldom of Pembroke and Strigyll [Striguil] ended after providing five Marshals of England.

So great was the contestation between the Welsh and the English on the fields of Gwent within a short time after the birth of Llywelyn that it is not easy to do justice to the subject. At this time King Henry sent Hubert de Burgh together with a hundred other gentlemen to defend his lands on the borders of Wales, ⁽¹⁾ when it is said that the notable princely family of Gwrgant received a great deal of bad treatment from Fulk, whom Henry had made the Lord of Cardiff and keeper of the boundaries between Wales and

England, so that several of the family had taken themselves un-noticed to mix with the ordinary people, at this time when Welsh castles, especially in Greater Gwent, namely Brecon, Abergavenny, Pencelli, White Castle, Ysgynfraith and Grosmont were being taken into possession by the de Braose family.

(1) King John made Hubert de Burgh 'Warden of The Welsh March' in 1201 when Henry was still a child.

Llywelyn ab Iorwerth made many conquests about the time of the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, which are recorded in the old Welsh stories. He took into his possession several Gwent castles, and among them Cemys and Newport, and proclaimed himself the 'Chief Lord and Prince of Gwent and Glamorgan', and took control of the fortress and castle of Senghenydd and other places.

Hence, there was a different situation in Gwent at this time from the one several years earlier when William de Braose had great authority in Gwent and was killing and destroying the Welsh and causing others of them flee to the wild rocky and mountains of their country in order to enjoy some peace and avoid being deprived of their wealth and property. But it was apparent that the spirit of Llywelyn was great and in full of heart, and one judges that he would have achieved his aims of restoring full Welsh freedom from the yoke of the English had it not been for the endurance and inventiveness of William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke.

Whilst Gwent and other parts of Wales were not in union with the King of England, the Earl attacked and plundered Gwent and the borders of Wales. He took possession of the town and fort of Caerleon where he met with the committed opposition of Rhys Fychan from one of Gwrgan's bravest families. Despite this opposition, much damage was done and valuable artifacts destroyed which if there had been some respite, they could have been saved to be available for the enlightenment and satisfaction of the present age. But Llywelyn took Senghenydd camp and cruelly destroyed the place which at that time was full of soldiers and English defending the fort. Llywelyn ab Iorwerth was obliged to give up fighting the forces of England because of the severe attacks on him by the Earl of Pembroke. Several of the gentry of Gwent swiftly became his followers.

The arrival of the Irish at the invitation of King Henry had quite an effect on the mentality of a number of the gentry of Wales and England, with the consequence that it was not easy to eliminate the envy between the prominent people and the King. After much trouble, and a number of battles between Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and Henry, the lordship of Gwent was taken from its owner Morgan in 1236 when Caerleon castle was taken by the Earl of Pembroke who had restarted the fighting. In the end they came to a decision to get hold of arbitrators from both sides to broker peace between them. Whilst the arbitration was supportive of the aims of Llywelyn, it was much more so to those of Henry because it was proposed to place the youngest son of Llywelyn in authority, and not the oldest who was a nephew to him, the son of his sister Joan of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. This would have naturally led to the the Principality of Wales coming under the patronage of the King of England. And it is said that Llywelyn would have been satisfied to lead the Principality under the wing of England and to give up the independence of his country but war broke out among his children, and before it came to an end, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth died. Dafydd ap Llywelyn (who is sometimes called Dafydd ap Llywelyn ab Iorwerth) of Joan sister of King Henry, followed his father as leader of the Principality and he made homage to Henry in Gloucester, and conditions and agreements were made for both sides to consider and keep. If in the future there

were to be disagreement between them, the Pope was to arbitrate if he happened to be in England, or otherwise the archbishop of Canterbury would stand in to bring them to a compromise.

The passing of the title to Dafydd was a cause for Gruffudd to attack his brother, and he was caught by the King of England and sentenced to death for his impudence. But Ralph Mortimer - Lord Wigmore - was married to a sister of Gruffudd and oldest brother of Dafydd, who was held in great respect by King Henry 3rd succeeded in overturning the punishment intended for Gruffudd replacing it with permanent imprisonment in the Tower of London. It was not long before Dafydd, although a close friend of the King of England, made an attempt to seize and keep the Principality on the authority of the Pope. But King Henry was successful in preventing this, and the result was that much fighting broke out in Gwent about this time. The Marcher Lordships aimed to put a stop to the Men of Gwent - y *Gwenhwyswyr* - who had been attacking the Earl of Hereford, Earl de Clare, Thomas de Monmouth, Roger de Mondalto, and Herbert Fitz-Mathew. Henry came with a large army and limited Dafydd's territory greatly so that he died from all his worries. The King deprived Maelgwyn Fychan and Hywel ap Meredydd, close descendants of the princes of Deheubarth, of all their lands in Gwent. He gave all their possessions to Lord Clare and these native heroes were forced to leave Gwent.

After Dafydd, the Prince of Wales, died King Henry considered himself in a better position to get complete control of Wales and announced that his son Edward was now the Prince of the whole of Wales. Despite the death of Dafydd, Welsh independence did not go to the grave with him, but rose again to be very alive in the person of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd - to whose time we now come – and who with his brother Owain assumed the Princely authority. Henry insisted that they should pay homage to him and recognize his authority as owner of the Principality and ruler of the Welsh Barons. There was no peace for long between the two brothers and responsibility landed completely on Llewelyn ap Gruffudd and in the face of the destruction done by the King's men in the Welsh Marches, the Prince, some prominent leaders and thousands of ordinary Welshmen started to gather together and register under his flag to oppose the forces of [Edward] the son of England's King Henry. According to one historian *'though Edward had been born into more comfort than Llywelyn, he possessed less human feelings, ability and knowledge'*. It seems that several of the castles and forts of Gwent were in the possession of the King of England when Llywelyn ap Gruffudd ascended to the Princedom. His leadership and good name came to be greatly recognized and respected, and in a short time, as even Polidore Virgil showed, he was able to create terror for Henry and his son Edward so that they were close to despair. But Henry was not willing to let Llywelyn have Wales and keep England alone for himself, and sent his armies against Llywelyn, but it is said they turned back without doing anything of note. Clear proof of the skill of the Welsh prince in his speech addressing his men before venturing to the field of battle, were his observations about defending his country, his strategic aims, his confidence in his God for success against his oppressive enemies, and which without doubt ought to be a shield for every soldier. What was explicit was that the Prince was a brave soldier, a skilled leader, and a good Christian. It is reported that the fighting at this time was continual and very extensive because Gwent was totally open to surprise English attack and geographically located to be the battleground for war between the Princes of Wales and the Kings of England.

The consequence was that agriculture was neglected and Gwent fields were left to go wild.

About this time a parliament was called in Oxford to which the Prince of Wales and some of the Welsh Lords were summoned, when peace terms were agreed between Welsh and English forces, but it seems that this peace did not last long. It was alleged that Llywelyn had broken the agreement made in Oxford. The reason why Llywelyn broke off the agreement was because the Marcher Lords at the order of the king had been restricting the freedom of their tenants in contradiction of the agreement at Oxford, by refusing the people to hold law courts according to the practices of Welsh law. When Llywelyn saw that his people were being greatly oppressed in this way, he stood openly in opposition to the King and all the Marcher Lords. He attacked Builth Castle in Breconshire which had been given to Sir Roger Mortimer and held by him through the authority of Prince Edward. Mortimer was accused of being too supportive of Llywelyn because he had yielded the castle to him. When the king saw that Llywelyn had taken possession of Builth Castle he sent an order to all his people along the borders of the Principality to assist the Earls of Hereford and Gloucester in defeating the Welsh. This war in Wales was left in the hands of the Marcher Lordships, and Gwent and Glamorgan at that time were considered by the King of England to be part of the Earldom of Gloucester and hence under his government. But only a handful of the men of Gwent considered themselves under his authority. Llywelyn also asserted his right to Gwent and all other parts of Wales at that time. Soon after this the greater part of Monmouthshire and other parts of greater Gwent came into the possession of the Clare family and remained so until William Marshal married a daughter of Strongbow [Richard Marshal, Earl of Pembroke] and through this marriage received most of the wealth of the Clare family.

But despite receiving the huge estates and wealth, he did not get the expected post of Earl of the Marches, because that honour was given to the Earl of Leicester, a person who was a major enemy of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. The behaviour of the king towards William Marshall caused him to change his attitude towards his majesty and in a short time he and Llywelyn became friends and agreed peace terms, despite this being so unlikely in the first place. The armed forces of Henry at that time were weak and failing, and with no ability to frighten Llywelyn and less still when the quarrel between the King and Earl broke out. The King would have had no means to oppose him if Llywelyn had taken advantage of this weakness at the time, when he could have made successful attacks against him especially in Gwent and other border parts of Wales where there was general hatred by - *y Gwenhwysiaid* - the 'men of Gwent' towards Henry and his son Edward.

The first task of de Montfort, Earl of Leicester after he made peace with Llywelyn was to bring his forces together to support Llywelyn in getting possession of the Principality. As a result of all the fighting which took place at this time, the greater part of Gwent and especially Breconshire, became an area of bare, rather than fruitful fields. About this time the Earl of Leicester, de Montfort, took King Henry 3rd and his son Edward as prisoners in the major battle of Lewes. The Lordship of Gwent and Glamorgan was held in the name of the Earl of Gloucester, and when Prince Edward escaped from prison, it was a signal to the gentry of the Marches to take up arms and for the Earl of Leicester to attack this district and for it to be exceedingly critical for him around Newport and from there to Hereford, when fleeing from the king's forces. After

this came the major victory at Evesham which brought death to de Montfort and relief to Henry. As swiftly as it had enjoyed freedom, the borders of Wales came under attack again as soon as the king had got his forces together in order to prevent further success by Llywelyn.

The Prince of Wales in order to avoid the spilling blood was prepared to submit on condition he would get to keep his honour, the name Prince of Wales, and receive faithfulness, benefits, and taxes from the Welsh Barons as previously, except for Meredydd ap Rhys who was from the Dinefwr family and who held his lands by the direct authority of King Henry. So fickle was the reliability of the inhabitants at that time, that no one could easily depend on them for a single day, because some of the gentry of Gwent at the time were totally supportive of the authority of Henry because as had happened before, in the event of Henry's death Gwent would get their share of a thousand miseries like all other parts of Wales.

In 1273 King Henry 3rd died and Edward his son took possession of the Crown of England whilst he was on a pilgrimage to the land of Canan, which was the practice for really important people at that time. On the day of his coronation many important people were there paying homage to him, but Llywelyn did not obey the king's demand for submission made to him by all the Barons, Lords and gentry of the Kingdom, unless there were suitable hostages or pledges as proof that he would be safe. What drove the hero Llywelyn so much against King Edward 1st was the theft of de Montfort's daughter, the one who was to be a wife to the Prince. It is said that if Rhys ap Meredydd had had a grain of faithfulness in him towards the land of his birth, Edward the first would not have been able to subjugate Wales or see the nation brought under the yoke of England as quickly as was the case. So little was the effect that the actions of Sir Roger Mortimer had along the borders of Wales, and especially in Gwent, that he was not sufficiently able to keep the inhabitants happy, any more than other parts of Wales, because the fame of Llywelyn was huge, and the very mention of him gave new heart to the men of Gwent. It was said that they were extremely supportive of his cause, and because of it, the fields of Monmouthshire came to be covered with blood

But it was not an easy task to subjugate them in the time and day of Llywelyn, any more than their ancestors Cadwallon and Caradog of Siluria and Gwent were forced to submit to the authority of the Romans. Because the borders of Gwent terminated over many years and for many miles at the banks of the Severn with its' famous great current, the great estuary being the frontier between the two nations, the residents of the borders had to suffer many treacherous attacks. For their country to be made a safe place, many of their brave ones had to stand and fall at times and fight though injured at others in order to possess freedom for their country, well being, and fame for their nation. The inhabitants of Gwent had to live like this for many ages after the birth of Llywelyn.

Although Edward was so strong in his aims and intentions against the brave Llywelyn and although he had given away the whole country of Gwent with the purpose of obliterating the influence of all its inhabitants - by binding together the families of William Marshal, the Clares', the Bohuns' and Mortimers' in the whole lands of Gwent which they had been able to steal by force of arms, and other forces on the borders, Llywelyn secured his Snowdonia headquarters and came to the aid of his supporters in Gwent. The main support came from Rhys Fychan who kept all the mountainous military camps in Gwent going without anyone being able to take them

from him, so much was his bravery and especially in part of the old Principeddom of Glywsig. Examples of this were Twmbarlwm, one of his sanctuaries like a look-out tower, and Senghenydd castle in Glamorgan was another of his impregnable fortresses.

In the event, as one now sees, the end of Welsh independence was getting closer, and Prince Llywelyn could no longer travel to Gwent at this time, in fact no further than the mountainous country around Builth in Breconshire, where he fell prey into the hands of his enemies. With the death of Llywelyn, Rhys Fychan was forced to give-up in Gwent and several of the castles passed into the possession of the Earl of Gloucester. Thus it was that Llywelyn's life ended defending his country and his people just like the forces of the nation did against the well ordered legions of the Romans in the very earliest times before Christianity.

Thus it had taken the Normans who came to this island, longer than 250 years before they had the ability to subjugate the inhabitants of the vales and mountains of Gwent into their possession entirely. Only then could they say: '*we subdued Gwent and conquered its' people*' and the splendid immortal Princes of Wales who had continuously defended the freedom and country against campaigns by thousands of English – those who swarmed along the borders from the time of King Arthur to the day of the famous law maker Hywel Dda, and from then to the period of the birth of Llywelyn, throughout his life until the day of his death. When the life of Llywelyn ended, King Edward's next task was to replace the laws of Wales with those of England; to abolish the authority of the Welsh Gentry, and that of the Marcher Lords.

Edward's path took him to Wales, and particularly to the south and Gwent as often as he could; he stayed in Ceredigion, came to Gwent and Glamorgan, and visited the Earl of Gloucester to order the repair of several Gwent castles, which over so many years of war had badly deteriorated. He took these into his ownership and started with Cardiff, Caerphilly, Newport, Caerleon, Usk, and Chepstow. The main thing Edward aimed for was to achieve total control militarily. He was resentful and envious if any sign of Welsh independence appeared and gave full reign to these jealous passions by nipping in the bud any expressions of national feelings on the part of the Welsh. It was Edward who proclaimed that all the poets in Wales were subversive and deserved immediate death. But such was the general respect of the Welsh towards their poets that a number of them were able to escape with their lives despite the persecution. Some of them continued to prosper at this time in the high mountains of Gwent and Glamorgan. The greatly respected Iolo Morgannwg has said that the genre and rules of Welsh poetry from its' primitive beginnings on the island in Caerleon, have been kept more pure and unaltered from generation to generation by the diligence and thrift of Gwent poets, than those of any other part of Wales.

After Edward had finished his campaign in Wales and judged that all was secure and safe regarding the Principality he went on a journey to Guyenne. Rhys ap Imerdydd, a close descendant of the princely lineage of Deheubarth (Dinefwr) was displeased in that he felt he did not enjoy sufficient reward for his great service to Edward in selling-out the land of his birth by being an enemy to Llywelyn, received odium and ignominy at this time. Disputation broke out on this matter quickly after the king had left England and it became an armed struggle when the Earl of Cornwall commanded all the Marcher Lords to prepare for an attack on Wales under the helm of the Duke of Gloucester. He brought together his forces and stationed some of them in

Gwent and others in Llanbadarn in Dyfed. Rhys ap Meredydd in serving the King had been so instrumental in the destruction of his country, that it was not surprising to hear that a reward was being offered for his head, and he fled to Ireland from Tiptot [Baron John Tiptoft] and the Mortimers', and their small army he had taken as prisoners. In 1290 Rhys ab Meredydd returned to Wales, but was swiftly murdered and his lands and his castle were given to Tiptot.

Dafydd, Llywelyn's brother made an attempt to take over government in Wales, but it did not continue long until he was killed cruelly by his enemies and his head taken and set alongside the head of Llywelyn at the Tower of London. His family and relatives, and the greater part of the Welsh gentry suffered the most cruel treatment that could ever have been recorded in the pages of history. In the middle of the above disputes at the end of an independent Wales, with the day approaching that would see the nation eliminated from among the nations of Europe and its name removed for ever from the list of trading countries, it is said that once again the Gwenhwysiaid or the Men of Gwent were the last of the different parts of Wales to withstand the oppression against them. When King Edward demanded from them 15 percent of their produce, it appears that the offspring of the princes, gentry and prominent people of Gwent stood together to oppose this request to the utmost of their ability, by attacking the king and his men. The leader of the Men of Gwent in this duel was Morgan, a hero who was wise and full of heart and who emanated from the lineage of old Welsh princes, and who got assistance from tenants and hostages of the Earl of Gloucester. So great was the opposition of the men of Gwent to the Earl, that he was forced to leave Gwent having lost many men and the greater part of his wealth which Morgan from Gwent had taken from him into his own possession, and which was more rightfully his than the Earl of Gloucester's. It is clear that the men of Gwent did not find it easy to suffer the fact that their country had been taken from them by the oppressive means used, and for an enemy gentry to increase their prosperity. Consequently they frequently behaved towards them with the same cruelty as their enemies had used against them when the opportunities were available. Roger de Puleston, the tax collector, was killed and all his friends dear to the King, and other English who supported them, hanged. They also took back several Gwent forts into their possession at this time.

When King Edward got to know of what had happened in Gwent and other parts of south Wales, he sent his brother the Earl of Lancaster and Henry de Lacy to Gwent and the borders, and took Maelgwyn a prince of Dyfed and all his men prisoners. He and a number of his gentry were taken to Hereford where they were sentenced to the cruel punishment of being dragged by horses along the public streets until they were dead. Morgan of Gwent together with seven hundred of his followers and relations capitulated to the King on condition they would hold their land and possessions directly from the King and not under the authority of the Earl of Gloucester or any other of the Marcher Lords. One historian says that the king personally came to the Marches and to Gwent to deal with the requests of the men of Gwent, when Morgan and the others of his gentry obeyed. It was said that the greater part of the gentry of Wales was imprisoned by Edward in different castles and the towers of England with the aim of preventing anyone becoming their leader for an attack against England. Also, that their land, wealth and animals were given by Edward to his various friends, and as a consequence of this huge amounts of Welsh historiography and useful knowledge were lost, because the Welsh gentry sent for their books in order to entertain themselves during their imprisonment, and when they died the books passed into the hands of those

who did not value them, had no respect for their owners, and consequently one could only expect that they either went into the fire or onto the rubbish heap

Unambiguous proof of King Edward's generosity to his friends, was his giving the Lordship of Monmouth to his brother Edmond the Earl of Lancaster and vastly increasing the wealth of the following families: the Earls of Gloucester, Wigmore and Pembroke, thus obtaining the surety of their utmost protection. He transferred to them responsibility for the administration and the establishment of English law in confidence of success under their leadership. The inhabitants of Gwent like other parts of Wales had to accept it. Despite the territory of Gwent being so close to the boundary of England, and a target location for the enemies of Wales to attack it, the inhabitants never gave up defending their province. Others in less danger did give up defending their property and their opposition to Edward and his forces. All of which is proof that the bravery and fortitude associated with Arthur [the legendary king] had not entirely left Gwent in those days, and it is easy to see, despite all the efforts of Edward that the people of Gwent were not themselves satisfied with the unification of Wales with England and with Edward in control. Some of the towns of Monmouthshire were very much against Edward 1st's government because he had attacked Chepstow at the very time Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was the other side of the river. He was invited across by the King so that they might speak to each other about some dispute. But the prince refused to concede to the King's orders, so the king started crossing the river. When the Prince saw the King's willingness he jumped into the water to receive the King saying: *"your humility has conquered my pride; your wisdom has trounced my foolishness"*.

The monasteries, castles, and churches of Gwent at the time of the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd until the end of the reign of Edward 1st were kept in beautiful condition. Both large and small monasteries were full of different orders of monks together with priests to administer the duties of the Church according to the Pope's organization under the authority of Rome. And the least of them were kept fortified and occupied by different gentry as store places of military artifacts and heirlooms. Wales was considered to be in name a protectorate in part of Edward's father King Henry's time, but not united to the crown of England, and large parts of the Principality and the borders of England were in the possession of different Marcher Lords. Thus it was that Gwent continued as an entity over a number of years after Edward 1st made the division of five counties to Wales, namely: Carmarthen, and Cardiganshire in the south, Anglesey, Caernarfon and Merionydd in the north. The district of Gwent kept its name and boundaries nearly the same and Maesyfed (or Radnorshire), Brecon, and Glamorgan were made into shires. This was (or nearly so) the situation of historic Gwent until the end of Edward 1st's life.

Gwent During the Reign of Edward 2nd (1307-1327) & Edward 3rd (1327 – 1377)

When Edward 2nd took over the English crown his way of running his realm was similar to his father, and just as hostile to Wales. He took care that Wales would get only a small amount of national expression and it seems that he was also really neglectful of some of his Lords, and preferred to put his trust in foreigners rather than his own people. The Marcher Lords and Earls and those of Gwent became annoyed with him because he took no notice of them and elevated [Piers] Gaveston who was a Frenchman to his Council. And so much so that Thomas the Earl of Lancaster and

Lord of Monmouth, Aymer de Valence Earl of Pembroke, and Humphrey de Bohun Earl of Hereford, rose up against him with the result that Gwent became an area of general warfare. Gaveston was married to a niece of the King, the sister of Gilbert the Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan, and he quickly became a figure of hatred in Gwent and other parts of Wales and England until he was killed by the Earl of Warwick. Gaveston was followed in the same office by Hugh Despencer, who was a grandson to Eleanor, joint heiress with Gilbert de Clare the Earl of Gloucester, and received the Earldom which encompassed several lordships in Gwent and Glamorgan.

Consequent on the opposition of the Marcher Lords and their uprising with their associates. Thomas the Earl of Lancaster was executed, and in the middle of this insurrection the Queen turned and fled to France [where] she became conversant with Mortimer. On her return from France the civil war broke out and the Queen and Mortimer were supported by Harry the son of Thomas Earl of Lancaster and by the Earls of Pembroke and Hereford against the King and the Spencers who were forced to flee to south Wales, and who hid themselves on their journey in the Glyn Neath Monastery. It is said that the Queen and Mortimer led a large force in Gwent and attacked and took Caerphilly castle which was the chief fortress in those days within Greater Gwent, and took the King and Mortimer as prisoners to Glyn Neath. After this they called a parliamentary meeting in Hereford, when they proclaimed the Prince as defender of the realm, executed Despencer and gave to Mortimer the lordships of Gwent and Glamorgan and took the King as a prisoner to Kenilworth.

The preceding wars in the time of Henry 3rd, Edward 1st and 3rd had left an impoverished appearance to parts of the Island, and particularly all the borders of Wales and the greater part of Gwent, and to the extent that their inhabitants were in those days suffering great need and generally eating dogs and horses which, given all that had happened, is not as astonishing as all that. When Edward 3rd came to the throne in 1327 the Welsh were no happier than in the time of his parents and he appointed Earl Mortimer as the Welsh Marcher Lords who consequently had great authority over much of Gwent. Although Edward was skilled in arms, brave and noted as a war leader and had been very successful in putting down the many insurrections which flourished in those days, it was said that many Gwenhwyisiaid – ‘Men of Gwent’ - were living in the mountainous parts and never subjected themselves to pay tribute to English government.

Gwent was often made a territory for revolution by Edward’s family. The famous John of Gaunt or Ghent came to possess a great deal of authority from the House of Lancaster by his marriage with the heiress Blanche who was later the mother of Henry who came into the Crown of England as Henry the 4th, the noted enemy of Owain Glyndwr, and the founder of the House of Lancaster. The only daughter of his third son, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, married Edmund Mortimer the Marcher Lord who had a great deal of wealth in Gwent and he was the father of Roger, the father of Anne of Cambridge the mother of Richard the Duke of York the father of Edward 4th. During these times Gwent was under a cloud. With all the cruelties and fighting during this reign, its fields were neglected and its agriculture left to fall into decay and no one among its inhabitants was able to trust their security to the King of England, to the Marcher Lords, or to their own Welsh lords because of the low state brought about by recent events. Nor could the boundary commissioners be depended upon because their major aims were revenge on those who opposed them for their pillaging in order to enrich themselves. Least of all did they trust the king because of his bigotry towards the

Welsh who had stood-up for their independence against the authority of England or so long.

During the war between England and France in this reign, some of the Lords of the March and Gwent (namely the families of Lancaster, Gloucester, and Pembroke) went over to France where they stayed for a good period of time. They were not idle there and their stay proved of great benefit to the inhabitants of Gwent, because when they came back they showed the people of Gwent what they had gleaned from the ingenious Gallic [peoples] by making the soil of dear Gwent as rich and productive as the soil of France. They planted fruitful woodlands, created gardens, and sowed their fields. Within a short number of years they were able to easily say that the best wheat and honey was from Gwent.

Around this time there were major changes of earldoms in Gwent. The Earldom of Hereford was co-joined with Lancaster, and the Lordship of Monmouth. The Earldom of Gloucester was given to Hugh Audley and Siôn Hastings. The Earl of Pembroke who was held in such great respect by the King that he gave his sister Margaret in marriage to him, but there were no heirs from it. When Richard of Bordeaux (later Richard 2nd) was created a Marcher Lord, he was satisfied to retain Builth Castle by payment, though normally it was given [without charge] to the Marcher Lords by the King of England. When Edward the Black Prince, so called because of the colour of his hair and beard, (1) was granted the honour of being Prince of Wales in the seventeenth year of the reign of his father, he was given several lordships and manors to maintain the dignity of his new situation, but he never took possession of any district in Gwent. We will mention no more of Gwent in this reign but move on to the reign of Richard 2nd.

(1) Certain mediaeval chroniclers claim this name derived from the Prince wearing black armour at Crecy.]

Gwent in the Reign of Richard 2nd (1377-1399)

Richard 2nd was crowned in 1377 which brought Gwent into the history of this period through John of Gaunt, his uncle, the Duke of Lancaster, who was chosen to be Defender to him; and the Earldom of Gloucester was made a Dukedom which was occupied by Thomas Woodstock another of the King's uncles and who was made joint Defender with John of Ghent. The Duke of Lancaster's connection with the Spanish Royal Family caused him to fail in his role as Defender for he neglected these duties which Edward had at all times carefully fulfilled in co-ordinating unity of action by the Dukes of Gloucester, Lancaster, Hereford, by the lordships of Gwent and Glamorgan towards the inhabitants of their different districts.

Because John of Gaunt failed to discharge his duties, the honour of doing so fell on the Earl of Gloucester, who though popular was weak and incapable of keeping an eye on the behaviour of Richard's friends. It was not long before the Earl of Gloucester fell prey into the hands of some of the king's friends, and the death of John of Gaunt the Duke of Lancaster also pleased him. By this time the rights of Harry of Bolingbrook had come to receive general acceptance, and to be secretly supported by several dukedoms, earldoms and the lordships of his different relations on the borders of Wales,

the very districts considered the most belligerent on the island. When Richard who was in Ireland at this time got to hear what was going by way of opposing him, he decided to put an end to those who were so full of insurrectionist spirit.

He landed in Milford Haven - *Aberdaugleddau* – and disposed of the Earldom of Gloucester and the Lordship of Glamorgan of Thomas Lord Spencer, but left Gwent alone where here the Lancaster family was in great authority and enlarging it through the Beaufort family which hailed from John of Gaunt through Catherine Swinford, and was a family well established in the district. Richard went on to Conway where he quickly fell into the hands of his enemies and the crown was taken away from him. When [Henry 4th] came to the throne it was said that he was very popular and that most of the prominent people of Gwent supported him so he was generally accepted and it was thought he liked the people of Gwent because he stayed in Gwent on times as we will show again later. The reign of Richard 2nd ended and like other areas Gwent became under the government of Henry.

Gwent and the Reign of Henry 4th , House of Lancaster (1399-1413)

When Henry 4th came into possession of the crown of England, he also showed however, like his predecessors, that he wanted to place the yoke of England more strongly on the Welsh than on other areas of his subjects, because they had opposed England with all their ability in order to retain their independence in the face of so many opponents, and had stood over the ages as unconquered pillars despite the kings of England and some of their sons who had been named as princes of Wales. Henry had great surliness against the Welsh and as proof of this consider his behaviour against Owain Glyndŵr when he was in legal dispute with Lord Grey of Rhuthun over a piece of land which divided their estates, land which had justly been judged to belong to Glyndŵr at the time of Richard 2nd. Because of Henry's violent disposition against the Welsh, this piece of land was no longer to remain in the possession of this Welsh gentleman although it was his property. It was instead given to Lord Gray who was held in great respect by the king. After a long time trying to get justice Glyndŵr's patience was exhausted and he started showing Grey that not all of the brave ones of Wales had died out. He attacked Grey and his tenants and cruelly devastated his lands. As one of his letters to the Welsh nation shows, his name was Owain ap Gruffudd but because he lived in Glanydyfrdwy and was the Lord of the area, his neighbours called him Owain Glyndŵr. He was a son of Gruffudd Fychan one of the sons of Gruffudd ap Madog, and Lord of Brwmfield, and a descendant of a succession of Welsh princes, on both his father's and mother's side but we will not enlarge on this at present.

If they had behaved justly towards him he would not have been looking to fight; he had sent his case and complaints for the attention of Parliament with the intent of maintaining his uprightness. But his case was disdained by some of the Lords, and the bishop of St. Asaph who was a dignified gentleman, wise and knowledgeable, and exceedingly well known and held tender by the Welsh, warned and urged them to give a hearing to the Welsh Chief because of the danger of neglecting the case, but he did not receive so much as a gentlemanly word in response save that *'they were not in fear of any bare-footed Welsh outcasts!'* Glyndŵr seeing himself getting this sort of treatment made an armed attack on Grey, overcame him and took him prisoner. Now, news of Glyndŵr and his bravery and of his personal status as a descendant in the lineage of Welsh princes spread across Wales. Thousands of inhabitants rejoiced believing that the hour had now dawned and that the prediction of Myrddin was being realized that

they would get their ancient rights restored . People flocked from every corner of Wales and from the main locations to join the forces of Glyndŵr the defence of their country and its identity against the destructive forces of Henry. A shooting star had been seen about the time of the birth of Glyndŵr, and this sign made the Welsh ardent in his cause, because the prophet Myrddin had declared there would be the appearance of such a star prior to the birth of the person who would restore Welsh independence. Mortimer, who was the just inheritor of the Crown, raised a large army in Herefordshire- part of greater Gwent - and went against Owain Glyndŵr and his forces but Glyndŵr and his forces defeated them, scattering them, taking Mortimer and many of his men as prisoners.

Henry 4th's view was that all needed to quell the war was his own presence and he came to the borders with a large army against Glyndŵr, but he, with his leaders was obliged to flee leaving Glyndŵr and his men victorious. This was how the intentions and adventures of Henry were vanquished and turned into disappointments in their attacks on Wales and her people. Although the wrath of Henry was great, and he was very eager to attempt to free Mortimer who had fallen into Glyndŵr's hands, it seems that the prisoner had become a friend of Glyndŵr's, thought the same as him, and cherished the same beliefs and shared affiliations with the Marcher Lords, the Earl of Worcester and Northumberland, and Lord Percy who had made an alliance to dethrone Henry and divide the kingdom among them. These ambitions were extinguished in the major battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. Henry led part of his army towards the north of Wales, and let his son [also Henry] who was 'Prince of Wales' and known as Henry of Monmouth, and another part of the army go after Glyndŵr and his troops.

The greater part of the castles of Gwent and south Wales had been put in the care of those considered supporters of the King, by a written authority dated in Worcester on the 8th of September. To Guy Mohun, Bishop of Monmouth, treasurer and keeper of the Private Seal, went Llangadyn castle; Llandovery to John Touchet - Lord Audley; Crickhowell to John Pauncefoot; Tretower to James Berkley; Abergavenny and Ewyas Harold to Sir Gwilym Beauchamp; Goodrich to Sir Thomas Neville de Furnivale; Caerleon and Usk to Sir Edward Charlton of Powys; Caerphilly and Gwiallacey to Lady Constantia Despencer; Castell y Paun ['Painscastle] to Thomas Earl of Warwick. In order to secure many of the Gwent castles, the Prince was empowered to make peace with particular gentry who had in the battle of Shrewsbury been opposed to his father. The main aim was to widen the king's authority and to extend security.

From among the various gentry who had authorization to make peace with different people in Gwent, he appointed William Beauchamp to conciliate with many of the tenants who held land around Abergavenny and Ewyas the very people who had been fighting together with Glyndŵr for the freedom of their country. Sir John Oldcastle, Siôn ap Harry, and Siôn Fairford the Recorder were licensed to make terms with the inhabitants of Breconshire. What this shows is that Gwent men were very committed to the cause of Glyndŵr and desired its success when assisting him in the battle of Shrewsbury. The conditions set were not as agreeable as people had hoped for, as everything else was ruled out except the sparing of lives. Their lands and animals had to go as fines to the king for their unfaithfulness to him in their attachment to Glyndŵr and his followers, who were considered extreme revolutionaries. Glyndŵr's enemies aimed at putting every stain on his personal character and his popular intention by saying that he was cruel towards his tenants and soldiers, and lacking sufficient knowledge for the leadership of a country.

Nevertheless, he certainly possessed the means to light a really lively fire against Henry 4th throughout the whole island. His authority and praise quickly extended throughout the greater part of Gwent by his daughters marrying several of the gentry of this country: the oldest with Adda ab Iorwerth Du; the second with Sir John Ysgwyddmawr (Scudamore) of Ewyas or Eglwys Cent (Kentchurch) as it is presently called; the third with Sir John Croft of Castell Croft in Herefordshire, and the fourth with Lord Grey of Ruthun (Ruthin), who was imprisoned by her father; and, the youngest with Roger Monnington from the borders of Hereford and Breconshire, all of which strengthened the ability of Glyndŵr within Gwent and surrounding districts.

Charles 6th of France and the father-in-law of Richard 2nd had intended attacking England to revenge the murder of Richard, had not there been disputes in his own kingdom. Knowledge of these intentions caused Glyndŵr to send ambassadors to France to make joint terms, and these were made, and sealed in Llanbadarn castle. He sent to Scotland where his cause was supported and a large army raised to support him, whilst he himself was painstakingly bringing his armies together near Pumlumon, the mountain which separates south and north Wales from each other. Soon afterwards he was defeated in Montgomeryshire and brought his army to Gwent and at this time fought the noted battle of Craig-y-Dorth, near to the town of Monmouth.

Richard Earl of Warwick was obliged at this time to collect all his tenants together under the protection of those the king had put in charge of the districts around Abergavenny with the aim of keeping these parts of the country out of destruction. It was said that other things were afoot and about to start in Gwent that could have been a cause of revolution. Constance, the widow of Lord Spencer and sister of the Duke of York, was in possession of Caerphilly castle and made a proposal to free Earl March and his brother from Windsor and to bring him here secretly for the defence to Glyndŵr. Glyndŵr had softened in his intentions regarding the Gore family, but then revived them again. Many supported the House of Lancaster, as a strong army was raised in Glamorgan and Gwent, which created much destruction in these districts in support of Glyndŵr and the Lancaster family, and who set the town of Grosmont and its neighbourhood on fire.

It is recorded that Henry 4th's son Prince Henry, who was considered to be the Prince of Wales according to the laws of England (despite Glyndŵr being crowned as their Prince in Machynlleth by all the gentry of Wales), came as far as Hereford with the purpose of bringing to an end Glyndŵr's revolt. Others say he came on to Monmouth and fought in the battle of Brynbuga [Usk] where one of Glyndŵr's sons was captured, but other accounts suggest the battle was over in Gwent due to the efforts of Sir Gilbert Talbot before he set foot there. This is more likely to be the case as Harry was only 17 years old at the time. However, the historian Pennant says that the latter is not likely to be true for the young prince had been sent as part of his duties and disguised as a monk to report back to his father on what happened. as an act of duty to inform him of what had happened. Reading all of this the record shows with much proof, that it was at the battle of Pwll Melyn in Breconshire that the Prince took Owain's son Meredudd a prisoner and killed Tudur the brother of Owain.

This was the battle that proved to be the downfall of the Welsh hero and his power in general. When the news spread regarding the end of Glyndŵr's hopes, and word got

about that it was he who had fallen on the battle field and not his brother who was so similar to him in looks and complexion that you could hardly tell them apart, the men of Gwent and Glamorgan capitulated to the King. Also the others who had joined their prince at Pumlumon [Plinlimon] to jointly suffer the same hardships as him and enjoy his friendship as far as they could, capitulated as well as those injured who had continued faithful until the day of his presumed death. One could have thought that Glyndŵr's war was over, but talk soon spread that Glyndŵr was still alive, and about this time a large force of Frenchmen had landed in the main port of Dyfed came to assist him. These included twelve thousand troops under the leadership of Marshal Rieux. Glyndŵr got to use these and started moving through Glamorgan and Gwent taking into his possession all the castles and fortified camps on his way, putting his opponents to the sword and their possessions to flames as far as the gates of Worcester.

But Owain did not get as many achievements as could have been expected with the help of the French. Such was the story on Woebury hill in the parish of Whitley within ten miles of Worcester, that they returned to Wales. Many injured went swiftly back to their homes and there were more than fifteen hundred by the following Spring in Wales with all their prior intentions uncompleted. Having survived the storm and believing that Glyndŵr was nearing the end, Parliament decided that Prince Henry of Monmouth and his troops should remain on the borders of Wales to monitor Glyndŵr's intentions and abate his insurrection. About this time when the Earl of Northumberland and Lord Bardolf were patronized by Glyndŵr (with several others lurking at his side) the English parliament expressed its gratitude to the Prince for his efforts in extinguishing the Welsh rebellion. But this was expressing gratitude too early for Glyndŵr was not finished yet. The Cistercian monasteries had suffered much by him as those of their monasteries which had been opposing him pillaged, but the Franciscans supported his cause and were free from harm. Glyndŵr had kept his mountain camps and such still was his standing that King Henry was obliged to send people and securities to plead with him for the release of Sir Dafydd Gam who had been a prisoner for ten years.

Soon after the battles of Craig-y-Dorth, Brynbuga and Pwll Melyn, Henry had passed stringent laws against the Welsh for their attachment to their Prince. They were driven from their homes with the most inhuman harshness; they were not allowed to buy lands even if they had the financial means or diligence to achieve them; and they were not allowed to be members of parliament nor hold any civil or military office. In legal cases between the English and Welsh, the Welsh were not allowed to have the trial in their own language and only before a judge and jury of English people. If an Englishman married a Welsh woman all his rights were taken away. To crown it all in terms of inhumanity, their children were forbidden from receiving any teaching in knowledge, the arts or science. So great was the king's desire to punish the Welsh that he set every wheel to turn in order to humiliate them until the day of his death in 1413.

Gwent and the Reign of Henry 5th (1413-1422)

When Henry 5th came to the throne the inhabitants of Gwent, as in all other parts of Wales, were being greatly oppressed by the laws made by his father to deprive them as a nation from the same rights as other regions under his government. Henry 5th was born in Monmouth on 9th August 1387 and because of that he was called Henry of Monmouth. He was renowned as a Prince, skilled and wholehearted as a soldier. He

was remarkable for winning several victories in his lifetime. As a Prince his behaviour towards the Welsh had been severe. Perhaps his actions were worse because of the prompting of his father who had been so great an enemy of them in his time. Also because of the fame of Glyndŵr who struggled more than anyone to restore independence for his people and looked as though he would humble England under his feet. Henry of Monmouth had been made Prince of Wales in 1399 when he was thirteen years old. It is said that he soon began practicing the skill necessary to the honour of a Prince, and on July 21st of 1403 at 16 years of age he led his troops against the enemy in the hard battle of Shrewsbury, and was injured with an arrow in his cheek. Despite this he did not lose heart but pushed ahead with praiseworthy audaciousness. In 1405 in the Spring he was empowered by his father to bring a large army to Gwent against the forces of Glyndŵr, and attacked the Welsh army at Usk - *Bryn Buga* - and sent them to flight. Within two months of that he fought another battle near Grosmont against eight thousand men of Gwent who were being led by Gruffudd, Owain Glyndŵr's son who was taken prisoner, and Tudur Glyndŵr's brother who was slain in this battle in the countryside of Gwent.

So extensive was the fighting in these times in Gwent that many valuable documents were lost, and among them the Charter of Usk was stolen and lost, a charter given to the town by Earl Roger Mortimer. Also, it is worthy of mention that it was in this town that Roger Mortimer who became a Marcher Lord was born. He was to be the next heir to the throne of England, as Richard 2nd had proclaimed, and he was baptized in Usk the following Sunday by William the Bishop of Hereford and as his godfathers Roger Bishop of Llandaff and Thomas Horton the Abbot of Gloucester, with the Prioress of Usk his godmother. The loss of Rhys Ddu and Phillip Ysgwyddmawr – Skidmore whose forces had fought in Shropshire and Cheshire were a huge loss to Glyndŵr.

The arrival of Henry 5th as King of England brought a different dimension to the circumstances of things at this time, despite the fact that the Welsh had hated his father for his early barbaric deeds towards some of them. Harry quickly saw that the best thing was to take measures to achieve peace and bring the nation to support him was by taking their thoughts away from the aims and actions of Glyndŵr which had become second nature to them. This was not surprising for they supported freedom and independence for their Princedom and had appetite for their national customs and practices which had been kept and sponsored by the Bards, the Welsh poets who loved their country and who encouraged the people to defend their leaders. The chief of these was Iolo Goch poet to Glyndŵr's family, and others such as Gryffydd Llwyd who were very much in flower at this time, and whose compositions have been kept in the literature manuscripts up to the present. Harry was not as successful in getting the attention of the Welsh as he thought he could. The only thing going for him was that he pretended to be a Welshman because he had been born in Gwent, and saw this as a pathway for many men of Gwent to support him and to submit to his terms as they saw Glyndŵr's situation weaken and likely to come to an end.

By now, Henry 5th considered that the war in Wales was over, and that everything was now under his authority so he decided to get revenge on the French and gave control and authority over the borders and Gwent to various lords who he thought deserving and who he could trust. This took the whole of Gwent and the Marches back to a situation of as much disagreement as ever, because those who had been set in

government upon them behaved with much violence and cruelty towards the inhabitants. In order to keep the Welsh quiet, they exiled those of the prominent people they thought of much importance and imprisoned them in different castles in England. What caused Gwent to suffer so much whilst the king was absent in France and more than would have been the case if he had been in control, was that he had taken the most notable barons with him to France and left Gwent in the care of unjust overseers who enriched themselves at the expense and destruction of others, and ran the country more like a place of feuding and servitude than a residence for humanity. This was the situation of Gwent from this time to the end of Henry's reign.

The families of Lancaster and York were by now starting to war with each other and with supporters on both sides it brought much trouble to Gwent like other places in the Kingdom,. But perhaps more came to Gwent because the founder of the family of Lancaster was a brother to John of Gaunt who was a noted and well respected gentleman in the province of Gwent. After Henry died he was succeeded to the throne by his son who at the time was a baby under the protection of his two uncles, the Duke of Bedford – the French Consul, and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, the Defender of England. In this reign the greater part of Gwent was under the control of the Duke of Gloucester whose popularity swiftly ended with his marriage to the heiress of William of Bavaria.

It was expected that this marriage would disturb the peace of France but that did not exactly happen, because on the death without heirs of Earl March his wealth went to the son of his sister Richard Plantagenet the Earl of Cambridge. All of this greatly weakened the House of York in Gwent and the borders, brought about an end to much disputation, the elimination of warfare, and peace to the inhabitants of Gwent. It ended the jealousy which had existed among families in order to be big names and seek possession of the crown of England. It seems that the Duke of York in the face of growing unpopularity, and by direction of the Queen, again asserted his claim as heir of Lionel, Duke of Clarence the eldest brother of John of Gaunt.

The two sides started gathering their armies together in Gwent with the result that the cruellest fighting was to be seen [here], which was hardly a delight to a nation who had suffered so much persecution and in the end had lost its independence. As the Duke of York was preparing his army on the borders he was overthrown by the Beaufort and Somerset families in 1452. Catherine the widow of Harry 5th gave additional support to these families because she had married Owain Tudur of Penmynydd, Anglesey with whom she had three sons: Edmund, Jasper and Owain. Edmund who through the entitlement of his mother was made Earl of Richmond, had married Margaret the daughter and heiress of John Beaufort Duke of Somerset, the son of John Earl of Somerset, the son of John of Ghent and Catherine Swinford. Jasper was made Earl of Pembroke by Harry V1 and he steadfastly clung to the role. The Duke of York was supported by the Earls of Warwick and Salisbury in the borders where controversy over control was the basis of fighting. They were opposed by the Earls and Dukes of Somerset, Pembroke and Richmond. On his death the Earl March raised a large army of twenty three thousand men from among the followers and patrons of the Mortimer family in the Borders. When Jasper, Earl of Pembroke, learned what was afoot he raised his forces in Gwent and went to confront them but was defeated by the Duke of York at Mortimers Cross not far from Hereford.

The Earl of March came into possession of the Crown under the title of Edward 4th but it is not relevant to our topic to pursue this. At his death the Prince, who finished-up as Edward 5th held his small court in Ludlow under the protection and direction of his uncle Lord Rivers for the purpose of abating revolution and war by the Welsh who would rise to in order to restore their own laws and take revenge for the mistreatment which they and their forefathers had received and against the many oppressive laws which had been made against them. This was to support those wishing to be protected, as if his presence in the guise of a Prince would have been sufficient capacity to keep everyone silent.

It is suggested that his stay there was a means for some of the Welsh to influence him somewhat as he did hold the title Prince of Wales. However, this had no effect on the inhabitants of Gwent who took action against him through Henry Stafford, the Duke of Buckingham who had much of his wealth in Gwent, asserting a right to the crown and was opposed to the Queen and her family. He was supported by William, Lord Hastings and other old Gwent families. They went ahead with their destructive plans of transferring the young Prince from the protection of his uncle Lord Rivers to that of his uncle Richard, Earl of Gloucester. All of this once again put the district in great danger as the two sides started to collect Gwent men once again to war against themselves in the support of these families. Richard had a great deal of authority and influence in Gwent and particularly from relations and friends. His father, Sir Richard Plantagenet, the third Duke of York, was a son to Lady Cecily, the daughter of Sir Ralph de Neville, Earl of Westmorland, and Joan de Beauford [Beaufort] natural daughter of John of Ghent, [Gaunt] Duke of Lancaster and Lord of Gwent. His mother was Anne de Mortimer, daughter and heiress Philippa Plantagenet the wife of Earl Edmund Mortimer. She was the daughter and heiress of Duke Lionel Clarence, the second son of George 3rd. Richard who married Anne de Neville, daughter of Earl Warwick and widow of the late Prince of Wales the only of Harry VI. Consequently Gwent was always in crisis and subject to war, either because of the major families fighting with each other or because of the Kings fighting against the major families.

The Reign of Richard 3rd 1483-1485 , House of York

When Richard came to the throne in 1483 he made his son Edward Prince of Wales, and the Howard family was awarded the dukedom of Norfolk. This was energetically opposed in the Marches by the Richmond, Pembroke, and Somerset Families. Edward 4th at that time had great enmity against Henry, Earl of Richmond, who was only a young lad who had been placed in the care and protection of the notable Sir William Herbert, Lord of Raglan Castle in Gwent. Sir William Herbert was from the high placed family of Wernddu about two miles from Abergavenny. There is nowhere in Gwent more ancient nor any Mansion - *Plasdy* - which has had more famous people living in it. It was from here Peter ap Herbert married Alice the daughter and heiress of Bleddyn Darian Fras; also Lord Llanllywel of Gwent, and Adda ap Reinold. Lord Llanllywel married Christiana daughter and heiress Gwarenddy, and as one sees from the coat of arms he is from the lineage of Ynyr Gwent. Siencyn ab Adda married here Gwenllian daughter to Sir Aron ap Bledry, Lord Culsant Gwilym ap Siencyn who married here Gwenllian daughter of Hywel Fychan ap Hywel ab Iorwerth, and Thomas ap Gwilym Siencyn who married Maud daughter of Sir John Morley, and Sir William Thomas who married Gwladys daughter of Sir Dafydd Gam. It is said that Jasper who since the battle of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, a battle which brought destruction to

the Lancastrians, and who had been living in France, made a secret visit to Raglan Castle in the absence of Sir William Herbert and poisoned the thoughts of her Ladyship to a great extent, in taking his nephew Harry to Pembroke Castle the place of his birth and swiftly afterwards sending him to Brittany in France.

Sir William Herbert famed in Gwent for his bravery, decency and his greatness as the founder of the Herbert, or Hirbert, family had been the Treasurer to William Rufus and Harry Beauclerk. He was the Herbert from whom had emanated the families Pembroke and Montgomery and other noble families in Gwent and the Marches, and from him also the noted family of Beaufort derived. Buckingham was supporting and copying the intentions of Richard, and he had been made High Custodian of England and been given the Lordship and Castle at Gallt y Coed [Caldicot] in Gwent to hold for his service as Custodian, but he considered that it was his property legally as a descendant of the Hereford family, so he was not happy with the situation. Richard, who had arranged and completed his coronation and made his son Edward Prince of Wales, visited Gloucester and gave many gifts and rights to the residents of the city. It appears that Buckingham left the king on a mission the king believed to his castle in Gwent but instead of going there as Chief Keeper to occupy it, he went to Brecon where he held a meeting with Morton, the Bishop of Ely, whom he held as a prisoner for being a supporter of the views of Earl Richmond.

At this meeting of the Duke's, a decision for revolution was made, but it is not easy to know for certain what the exact reason was, was it to attack Richard directly for the crown or to side with Henry Tudor's envy. Buckingham had shared in many of the cruelties of Richard, and for this he had been rewarded with much control in Wales and particularly parts of Gwent. When Richard was Duke of Gloucester and Defender of England, he gifted Buckingham the following jobs for life: the Chief Justice (and Ystafellydd) of North and South Wales; the Pembrokeshire Peacekeeper of castles and lordships of Milford Haven - *Aberdaugleddau*, Walwys and Tenby; the castles of Carmarthen and Ceredigion, and the Lordships of Cilgerran and Aberystwyth. In Gwent he was appointed Overseer, Peacekeeper, Receiver of Lordships, Manors and the Castles of Caerleon, Usk, Wigmore, Ewyas Lacy, and Monmouth. Also, all the towns, castles, manor and lordships which had been part of the Dukedom of Lancaster in the Marches. He was made overseer of Forests, the keeper and custodian of all the woodlands, the hunting grounds and manors, which were part of the Earldom of the March. His authority was similar in North Wales. It seems he came into possession of the lot through his own integrity rather than by favours of the King. Such were the ways Gwent was governed at these times.

Humphrey, the recent Earl of Hereford from the Bohun family and a Lord of several pieces of land in Gwent and High Custodian of England, had two daughters by Lady Jane the daughter of Richard Fitz-Alan the Earl of Arundel. One of them married Thomas Plantagenet (or Thomas of Woodstock) the younger son of George 3rd, the Duke of Gloucester and the Earl of Buckingham, and the other married Harry Plantagenet, the Duke of Lancaster, later King of England, by which the Earldom of Hereford through the wife's claim, came to be a Dukedom with rights to remain in possession of the King and successors to the throne. Buckingham asserted a claim to the Dukedom through his grandmother Anne daughter and heiress of Thomas de Woodstock. Ann, had been married to Edmund the Earl of Stafford, grandfather of the claimant, Harry Duke of Buckingham. With the aim of mollifying those who were

asserting claims by family or privilege, those who could have put many obstacles in the way because they derived from the stately line of Buckingham, Richard when he was Duke of Gloucester (and in contact with others of the same view) agreed to give his son in marriage to her Ladyship Anne Stafford, the Duke's daughter. However, on the elevation of Richard to the crown of England, he devalued his vow and showed not one inclination to fulfill what he had previously intended, or recognize the merit of Buckingham's demands.

Hence Buckingham left Gloucester for the Marches and Morton counselled him to assemble an army from the different lordships which were in a sense were under his authority, and then make for England to depose the King. Morton was a supporter of the Richmond family and acted in concert with Dr. Lewis under direction of the Duchess, and he laid plans to get the jealousy of Buckingham in support for the benefit of Richmond, because they were really close relations. Namely, Richard was a son of Margaret and heiress of John Beaufort the Duke of Somerset; and Buckingham was a son of to Margaret the daughter of Edmund Beaufort, who followed his brother to the Dukedom of Somerset. Buckingham made the assault and fulfilled his aims reflecting his character, and once again putting Gwent in a state of revolution and the raising of a large force in order to go to war with Richard. Part of this army was lost crossing the river Severn which had over-flowed its banks. Because of the accident the remainder lost heart and scattered leaving their leader on his own and he was treacherously negotiated into the hands of the king and executed in Salisbury in 1484. The alliances of supporters of the Earl of Richmond gave up but not one of them was destroyed in the fall of Buckingham, but Gwent was so unfortunate as to harvest the greater part of the consequences of the insurrections of those days.

At the death of Edward, Prince of Wales, Richard organized measures to halt the attempts of the Earl of Richmond, but not in a just way. He proclaimed John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, the son of John de la Pole Duke of Sussex and Lady Elizabeth Plantagenet, sister of the King, the heir of the kingdom, so that the next family to the throne was kept away from it, and among others the Beauforts' and Somersets' who did not dare to use the name Lancaster but were allowed to keep dukedoms, and possess the honour to be Earls, Lords and Dukes. This was what Gwent and it's Gentry were like at this time, and up to the time of Henry VII. With the arrival of Henry 7th to the English crown, the Welsh gave him affection to a great extent because he was descended from Kings of the Britons and could trace his claim from Owain Tudur, and from his mother who was the wife of Henry V. Through her there was a close relationship to John of Ghent [Gaunt] and his father was a descendant from Rhodri Mawr and Cadwaladr the last king of the Welsh. He was looked upon as a Welshman which gave the nation confidence in him, far more than had been the case in previous reigns, but he was not as supportive as the nation expected him to be. This could not really be expected as he had been completely brought up in the English and sombre way of that age, and was perhaps wholly ignorant of the conquests and bravery of his nation. Only a small number of things deserve mention regarding Gwent in this reign. Henry had armies in France and Brittany and received military assistance in south Wales through his freeing of the Earl of Oxford, who was imprisoned in Hammes Castle by supporters of Edward 4th.

The Welsh had great enmity towards the English during this reign, but pride that one of their own race was in authority. Whilst there were many cruelties being committed in the Marches, [Henry Tudor] landed in Milford Haven where he received a

very warm welcome by the Welsh as their Prince and a relative. He received assistance and secret and personal advice from Sir Rhys ap Thomas, Sir Walter Herbert, Sir John Savage, Sir Gilbert Talbot and the Earl of Shropshire and Northumberland. His supporters in Gwent and the Marches had started raising an army to prepare for the battle of Bosworth, the battle which brought Henry to possession of the throne. The Rhaglan family of Gwent were prominent in this reign and were supporters of Harry's cause. Sir James Tyrrell who had been suspected of the murder of the children of Edward IV and who held many offices among them the governor of Glamorgan was removed from his position, which soothed the thoughts of the people, as he had pretended to respect everyone. Henry's son born in 1485 was called Arthur which was dear to the people because of Arthur of Caerleon for whom there had been, and still was, a huge amount of pride.

The unacceptable laws against the Welsh made by Henry 4th and Henry 6th were repealed with the assistance of Sir William Stanley who took over the seats of the harsh warring men of the Marches, that is the lordships. Arthur kept his court in Ludlow for the purpose of listening to complaints of his tenants and to free the Welsh. In this way, he was aiming to humanize the minds of the nation so that they would adapt to enjoy the great changes that were taking place in the realm. Gwent continued to be an area [of conflict] where there had been more fighting than any other part of Wales since the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd up to the end of the reign of Henry 6th in 1509. Most of the Gwent castles were occupied by different families and in good condition in respect of their construction, and within them one would find the greater part of the wealth of the grandees – the really important people. They were the safest places in the dangerous and troubled times we have discussed. Also the Gwent monasteries at the end of this reign were full of scholars, monasteries such as: Llanthony, Tintern, Llantarnam, and Grace Dieu. In addition there were various monastic houses such as those in Abergavenny, Usk, Caerleon, Newport, Goldcliffe, Monmouth and Chepstow, and others in the shires of Glamorgan, Brecon, Hereford and Radnor, such as Llantwit, Cardiff, Caerphilly, and Llandaff, with Cwm Hir in Radnor and others in Breconshire. It is likely that they possessed many manuscripts at that time which if we could get hold of them now, would be most valuable for us in the present day. But because so much hatred was raised towards the monasteries around this time, it was considered that the manuscripts contained nothing of worth and so they went into the fire or suffered other damage, more is the pity. The greater part of the work of the monasteries was therefore lost in an age full of capricious and partisan darkness.

There have been many famous men in Gwent from the time of the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to the accession of Henry 8th to the throne of Britain. One may consider that it was in [Greater] Gwent that Glyndŵr spent his last days and that in its soil lie his remains. Here the famous and knowledgeable Sion Cent lived, who enacted so many marvels, many of which are still mentioned with respect by the inhabitants of Gwent to this day. One leading man of Gwent was Sir Dafydd Gam, a contemporary of Owain Glyndŵr and an opponent of his in every way possible. He was the son of Llywelyn ap Hywel Fychan from near Brecon and his mother was Maud the daughter of Ieuan ab Rhys ab Ifor o Elwel. He was a prisoner of Glyndŵr's for a period of ten years. Sir Gwilym ap Thomas was one of the famous family of Wern Ddu and was married to Gwladys the daughter of Sir Dafydd Gam and was greatly respected by Edward IV in whose time he was made the Earl of Pembroke, the Lord of Raglan Castle Gwent and Gower. At the command of the king he adopted the name Herbert. He and his father

brought together a legal army of men of Gwent for service with Harry of Monmouth, and they went with the king to fight the French, and the both of them fell in the battle of Agincourt. Gwilym ap Thomas was living in Rhaglan Castle and Sir Dafydd Gam lived in Henllys near to the present great house of Llandeilo Croes Ynry where the remains of his old palace are not yet completely obliterated, and in the area which Glyndŵr and his army had ravaged, and where he said to one of Dafydd's servants: "*have you seen a red headed lame man* [ie. Dafydd Gam]?"

Sir Richard Herbert was notable in Gwent and lived in Nant Oer (Coldbrook) House near Abergavenny, but he and his brother the Earl of Pembroke were executed by the Lancastrians against whom they were great enemies. By marriage Elizabeth the only daughter of William Herbert the Earl of Huntingdon and grand daughter of Earl Rivers and Sir Charles Somerset later the Earl of Worcester, brought the whole wealth of the Herberts to the Beaufort family who continue the same line at the present time, and whose character is held highly in Gwent and who still own much of their lands and castles to this day.

The gracious Ifor Hael lived in Gwent and was noted in his day for sponsoring poets and Welsh literature. He lived in a place still known today as Gwern-y-Clepa and some of its' remains can still be seen. He lived there between 1310 and 1370. He was a descendant of Cadifor Fawr and a line of Welsh princes and consequently one of the honoured family of Tredegar Fawr who were famous before and after his time, and up to the time we leave this account of Gwent. It was here at Gwern-y-Clepa, Gwent that the Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym was supported under the tender wing of his uncle Ifor Hael who was a gentleman from Cynin in Cardiganshire. This famous Welsh poet flourished between 1330 and 1370 when his inspiration was never idle and he produced over two hundred and sixty poetic compositions and many of them are considered truly Herculean. He was imprisoned for a short time (but was quickly released.) for luring his former sweetheart Morfudd away from her husband Rhys Gwgan who at the time was taking part in the battle of Cressy,

The Tredegar family were industrious and faithful in Gwent to the cause of Henry, Earl of Richmond – later Henry 7th. Evan Morgan of Tredegar, Morgan the Bishop of Cydweli [Kidwelly], and Siôn Morgan to whom can be added the immortal Rhys ap Thomas, took a grip on much of Wales during Henry's absence and the most prominent and bravest of them was Evan Morgan whose house was as superb and honoured as any other gentleman's house in Monmouthshire.

There were also other noted families in Gwent in these days: such as Sant Pierre, Llanywern, and Hen Castell where the amiable John Oldcaster resided, and after him Lord Cobham, The lineage of Iestyn ap Gwrgant had gone quiet by this time so that Caerleon was no longer inhabited by native princes of Gwent. The days of the reign of the amazing Harry VIII were dawning, and Wales and its' different districts of that time were coming to an end with Greater Gwent - *Esyllwg* to be divided between England and Wales; its' independence about to sink into a sea of oblivion!

The Reign of Henry 8th - 1509-1547 - of the House of Tudor

By now we have come to the period of Henry 8th when there many changes in England and Wales and no less so for greater Gwent when considering its size. Few changes had taken place in the different districts and parts of Wales since the time of Edward 1st which had kept their original name such as Brycheiniog, Maelienydd, Eirinawg a Mynwy [Hereford and Monmouth] as districts. These were part of the Marches and were ruled by the Lords called after them. The whole purpose of the setting-up of the Marches in the first place at the time of the Normans was to subject the countryside and make it obedient to them by the use of many oppressive laws. There was no control on the way these Lords governed until the time of Henry 8th who demoted them, dividing their territory into Shires all subject to the laws of England. Thus it was that Wales was divided into twelve shires besides Monmouthshire, which is currently called Gwent, and the only one which has kept a name from old Eryllwg or Siluria without it being obliterated.

The present-day Monmouthshire [ie. of the 1830's] had been a part of the Marches and under the authority of their lords until Henry 8th put an end to them. Despite the endeavours of these lords to retain their authority and powers they were obliged to conform with the terms set by Harry and give possession of many of them to the Crown. Monmouthshire represents a bringing together of 24 lordships or manors, and the complete connecting of Wales to the Crown of England under one authority and the same laws. Some say that Henry when he came to the throne was strict and cruel in his behaviour regarding problem matters and especially regarding the Marches, but the Welsh nation in general considered his coming into government a blessing. When he took over the throne, it seems that his grandmother Lady Richmond was allowed to choose some of his main ministers and particularly some who were faithful to his father, those who had not wavered in the hours of his difficulties. Among these were: Sir G. Somerset, Lord Herbert of Rhaglan, partly because of his wife the daughter and heiress of Sir William Herbert. The authority of the Dukedom of Gloucestershire over Gwent and Glamorganshire was abolished, and Gwent was divided into several parts which were given to heirs and descendants of several of the old Marcher Lords. On the distribution of the religious houses and monasteries at that time – which had been cherished and had had facilities open to all, the ancient family of Wernddu distributed them in various districts and under different names, such as the Morgans of Acton, the Jones of Treowen and Llanarth; the Powells of Perthhir, the Herberts of Nant Oer, Saint Julian & Ewyas, the Lewis's of Saint Pierre, and the Williams of Llanybi and Llanfoist from the lineage of Caradog Fraich Fras.

All of these families who now came into new prominence, had notably flourished in Gwent over the ages, and their names cannot be erased from the record of the British as long as there is a Welshman and a historiography of Wales. Much disputation arose among the Deputies first appointed in the time of Henry 4th and still functioning at the time of Henry 8th who looked after in quite a domineering way the walls and dykes which kept the sea from the marsh pasture along the shore of Gwent. Frequently their hard rules would bring about bloody conflict in Gwent. This can be seen from the written notes that they kept before the excellent art of printing was first seen – and many years before it had any effect on the minds of the Welsh because they had no benefit from it until the Holy Bible which few were able to understand, was translated into Welsh.

King Henry 8th divided Wales into shires as already noted, and Monmouthshire or Gwent was united with England and under English judges yet it was still considered by us, the Welsh, to be a Welsh Shire at this time. But this would not be worth observation if the above was the only foundation of its status. What follows shows clearly that it is one of the shires of Wales. It has been entirely in the possession of the ancient bishopric of Llandaff except for one or two parishes which were part of the episcopacy of St. David's. If the historian Camden is correct, he clearly shows that Gwent is full of old war sites and that the vestiges of 24 of them could still be seen in Herefordshire or *Eirianawg* in his time, which had been part of Gwent, and which all proves that the Men of Gwent were brave. Also, Gwent has no less the number of Welsh poets at the present time than it had for more than the thousand years which have gone by, but because the territory of Gwent is now restricted to Monmouthshire only, one aims to give the history of this area only from here on. Of course the Cymreigyddol meetings [of Abergavenny] and the provincial Eisteddfodau draw their support from the poetry districts within Monmouthshire, Glamorgan, and Breconshire.

By now therefore, Gwent had become part of a Princedom, not independent, and restricted to Monmouthshire, and with its people subject to the laws of England and not those of their own. Henry VIII succeeded in subjecting the Marcher Lords, and Gwent, and all the other parts of Wales without a Glyndŵr or Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, so this is the period when Gwent was made totally subject and when its independence totally ceased. Following this Harry turned his attention to religious matters, to freeing the kingdom from the yoke of the Pope and Catholicism, to putting Protestantism in place, and with a mission for the scriptures to be read in all churches. This was of no benefit to the Welsh because Welsh was not used in this important task nor had the bible been translated into Welsh in his time, nor was there any aim that this would take place swiftly so Gwent like all parts of Wales was deprived of the privilege of hearing the bible read.

The great reformation that Henry brought about in religious matters awakened a spirit of research to find out things among his people. In Gwent at the dissolution of the monasteries, the wealth of the various prominent monasteries was distributed: that of Tintern – belonging to the Cistercian order - went to the Rhaglan family; Llanhonddu (Glan-nant-honddu) [i.e Llanthony] Priory that had belonged to the Augustinian Canons for hundreds of years went to Lord Oxford; and Llantarnam abbey belonging to the Cistercian order went to the Morgans of Llantarnam and Tredegar, but is now in the possession of R. J. Blewitt Esq. Goldcliffe the monastery in the marsh near the sea also belonging to the Cistercians, and now belongs to Eaton College; Grace Dieu also Cistercian was a monastery near the banks of the river Trothwy [Trothy] and near the mansion of the late R. Lewis Esq. of Llandeilo Groes Ynyr, and is now in possession of the Clarks of the Hill in Bassaleg, Gwent; There had be a Cell or religious house of the Benadictine order in Basaleg and in Abergavenny was a Benedictine Priory long established by Hamalin de Balun. In Caerleon there was a Cistercian monastery, and in the Marshland the *Aliwnaidd* Priory. In the parish of St. Cynnmark there had been an extensive monastery but it is not known to which order it was related. In Llanguyan (Llangwyn) there was an *Aliwnaidd* Priory, in Malpas a cell of the Cluniacs [a sect of the Benadictines], in the town of Monmouth a Benedictine priory and hospital, in Newport there was a monastery of the Austin Friars, in Chepstow an *Aliwnaidd* Priory, in Usk a Benedictine convent. These were the monasteries and main religious houses

of Gwent other than the churches [at the time of Henry 8th]. Also the castles were more numerous in the reign of Henry 8th and many of them came into possession of the Somerset family. Because of ignorance of their usefulness many of these ancient buildings had been razed, before the eyes of the present time were opened to their value.

Gwent has been a significant area as already noted since the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and to the end of the reign of Henry 8th where many famous men flourished, several from the Norman race as well as the Morgans' of Caerleon, the family of Iestyn ap Gwrgant, Seisyll ap Dyfnwald of Gwent Uwch Coed (his name survives to this day in the place named Llwyn Seisyllt) , John of Monmouth, Lord Cobham of Hen Gastell, Sir Dafydd Gam, the Herberts of Wernddu, Rhaglan and St.Julian, the Williams of Llangybi and Llanfoist, and the families of the lineage of Cadifor Fawr of Tredegar, Machen, Llantarnam, Malpas, Penllwyn, and many others too many to mention.

There has also been a series of notable bishops of Llandaff who shone out in the period between Llywelyn and Henry and many gifts of land were given to the bishopric and its different churches. Gwent has the honour of being the very earliest residence of these bishops at Matheyrn, [Mathern] and part of the mansion can be seen to this day being used as a smallholding, having been much devalued in recent times. Here at Matheyrn many bishops are buried resting at the house which was their home for a long time; for example: Miles Salley (who it is said built the greater part of the building); Anthony Kitchen the bishop of Llandaff who is buried in Matheyrn church together with Hugh Jones, William Bleddyn and others. In this place Tewdrig king or Prince of Glamorgan in about the sixth century and others of his family are buried, which is certain proof of the antiquity of this place within Gwent.

Although Henry 8th had put Wales under the same laws as England, there was not full acceptance of them because a hundred and forty Manors still kept themselves and their residents under the laws of Hywel Dda for a long period of time after (he had) ascended the throne. Despite many of them coming into the possession of the Crown and everything being in name under English government, there were still a lot of oppressive laws being maintained from the times when Gwent was subject to the wrath and hard measures of the English Kings. About 1535 the Welsh [of Gwent] made a general entreaty to King Henry appealing that they be wholly dealt with under the protection and Laws of England and its language, and they were so included which was really an excellent thing.

Soon after this the parliamentary laws were passed formally uniting England and Wales, with the same law in both, and all the old Welsh rules such as the Gafaelgod revoked. Twenty four of the Marcher manors in Gwent were joined together and the authority of the Marcher Lordships totally abolished, with the wealth of some of them going to the crown. In this context circumstances changed greatly in Gwent so that people were no longer under the rule and clutches of the Marcher Lords who would come out of their castles in warlike mode like eagles to commit their cruelties and create fear among the Gwent people.

When central government began to take root and win the day, with the inhabitants progressively coming to obey English authority, and with everything secured, Henry 8th extended the same rights to the Welsh as were possessed by the English by making the laws of the towns open to all inhabitants of the Principality. With Wales being 13

Shires including Monmouthshire, the right was given for each of them to send to members to Parliament, one to represent the shire and the other the towns within it. Because of the great evils committed along the Welsh Marches, and the biggest evil-doers often escaping the hands of the law and hence from being punished, the king had made Gwent one of the shires of England in order to fulfill the above plans, for the benefits and convenience of its inhabitants and the administration of English law. However, the Welsh considered then and up to the present day, that Gwent belonged to them.

Gwent continued thus through the reign of the Queens Mary and Elizabeth and into the following reign of King James without hardly any changes worth mentioning, save for the translation of the scriptures by several learned men of the Principality: Dr. Parry, Dr. Morgan, Dr. John Davies, Mallwyd, Gwilym Salisbury, the Archdeacon Prys and various other bishops and priests of Wales and England, too many to name. As a result reading the bible came to be a very general activity, and there were plenty of bibles available for those wishing to buy and read them. This was the biggest blessing that could have been transferred to Wales.

Gwent Castles and Families

The following are some notes on Gwent castles and families in respect those deserving of mention now because of shortness of time.

Rhaglan castle (the place where it stands is called Twyn y Ceiros) was highly praised during this period and its dignified, ingenious, and skillful family emanated from the most famous families in Wales, and it was said that it was here that you would hear first about useful knowledge – the steam engine for example, which has been of so much benefit to the commonwealth, especially at this time. This place progressed during the reigns we have considered, and became one of the most notable, extensive and strongest in its' excellence in the whole of Gwent with the arrival of the ostentatious days of Cromwell as we will note again.

The estate of the Morgan family which is spread out throughout Gwent has been praised in Gwent since the time of Henry up to the revolution [Civil Wars] and from thence to the present time. Some of it is in Llantarnam, other parts in Tredegar, Malpas, Machen, Langton Penycoed, Caerleon and then as far as Sant Cler [St. Clears] in Carmarthenshire. It is considered that all their great houses - plasdai – were established in the very earliest times. The Beaufort and Somerset families set themselves on the road to be respected by those elevated to the British throne, and the Pembroke family and that of Wernddu were famous from the time of the conquest to that of Henry, as Marcher Lords who were industrious in the wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster, and supported York.

The Earl of Pembroke went with his brother Sir Richard Herbert of Nant Oer near Abergavenny to fight in this war of the Roses, and it is there that he showed much courage and skill through taking his axe openly through the rows of his enemies twice without getting any mortal wound. But in the famous major battle of Danesmoor, these two heroes were taken prisoner and put to death. The Earl was buried in Tintern Abbey, and the remains of Sir Richard were put to rest alongside others of his relations in Abergavenny church.. The St. Mawr or Seymour family are old inhabitants of Gwent

from the beginning of the Normans and their Penhow Castle came to be the equal of Raglan with the marriage of Henry 8th to Jane the daughter of Sir John Seymour, who was the mother of Edward 6th. Penycoted Castle had previously been a place of great honour and the residence of the Montagues', whose wealth was shared among the families of the Herberts', Somersets', Seymours', and Morgans'. It was said that Thomas Morgan went to the Continent to learn to perfection the science of warfare in its methods of that time. The historian Camden alludes to the deaths of Sir Roger Williams of Penrhos in Gwent as a soldier of great bravery and skill and that of his friend Sir Thomas Morgan of Pencarn near the sea in Spain whilst in the army of Lord Essex. With them were other gentry from Gwent: Sir William Herbert, James Scudamore, John Morgan, and Harry Neville, who were made barons for their service.

Penhow castle had been built in Norman times to protect what they had stolen through violence from the Welsh in Gwent. Similarly castles at Llanfaches, Llanfair Dinam and. Cas Troggy. All of these stood within the hunting lands but now there is not so much as a piece of some of them to be seen to indicate where they stood. They are completely erased or just piles of stones. Towards the end of the reign of Harry the Herbert family had started to diminish but they revived with the demotion of the Seymour family. The Earl of Warwick was made Duke of Northumberland and Sir William Herbert was made Lord Cardiff and Overseer of the Marches and also given an old former honour of his family, the Earldom of Pembroke. Lord Worcester who achieved his aims against the Duke of Somerset and made William Cecil an instrument to take the head of the Duke to the place he was executed, was from one of the old families of Gwent and was made government Home Secretary. It was through him that the Exeter and Salisbury families came to be among the major families of Gwent. With the ascent of Mary [1553-1558] to the throne, Lord Pembroke was one of her very warmest supporters. Soon after the ascent of Elizabeth [1558-1603], the Windsor family came to possess huge holdings and influence in Gwent on the death of John Fiere the Earl of Oxford. His daughter from his first marriage married Lord Windsor.

By now Protestantism was greatly increasing in Gwent, but it was completely opposed to the wishes and authority of the most influential gentry in the county. About this time the Earl of Pembroke was sent to the Tower in London for showing for support to the plans of Mary of Scotland jointly made with the Duke of Norfolk, but he was released by Queen Elizabeth, and died soon afterwards in 1557. Because there is no great purpose in tracing the lineage of Gwent's different families , we come swiftly to the time of the revolution and will mention a little of what happened in Gwent at the time of Cromwell's war which caused a great loss of life among Gwent people. Gwent had continued to be governed under the prefectship of the Herberts' who at times had been given power over the whole of Wales and in their lineage by the Somersets' and up to the time of the Beauforts' they were notable in Gwent.

Gwent during the Reign of Charles 1st (1625 -1649)

When Charles 1st came to the throne, the family of the Earl of Pembroke was held in great respect, but within a short time we find the Seymours' and the Earl of Pembroke supporting different beliefs and in consequence became opposed to each other. A short time before the revolution broke out, the King visited several parts of Wales, and his officers were very successful in raising men to his cause, and especially in Gwent because of the diligence of the Earl of Worcester. Lord Herbert, the son of the

Earl, had been amazingly busy in creating a spirit for the King in the south of Wales, which could have been of the greatest importance against the Parliamentarians, were it not for the men of Gloucester. They had been preparing strongly and in large numbers on the side of Parliament. On the arrival of the parliamentary soldiers they were opposed by soldiers from Gwent, and in Cantref Coch [Forest of Dean] - by Lord Herbert together with an army from the King's side from Monmouth town. Sir William Waller brought an army to Gwent in April and visited Usk, but did nothing that deserves our attention.

In the fighting the whole of Gwent was on the side of the King under the leadership of the Earl of Worcester and his son Lord Herbert and some of the Seymour family - people who had come into much wealth in Wiltshire and Somerset and were defenders of the King and his officers. Lord Abergavenny did not have a residence in Gwent despite the great amount of land he had here, and though he supported the king he could do very little for his cause. The Pembroke family were divided in the revolution because the Earl of Pembroke himself gradually attached himself to the Parliamentarians whilst the Lord and Henry Herbert his brother remained faithful in their support of His Majesty. [In this context] there was an officer of the name of Massey, who was a very skilful person and leader of the parliamentarians in Gloucester, who maintained particular contacts in Gwent .

King Charles had commanded that a strong army be raised from the borders where the hot headedness and jealousies of the Marcher Lords were not yet buried and where the spirit of warfare was still alive and well up to this time. Massey and his soldiers had a great deal of trouble to prevent this army of Marshall Gerrard from heading towards Oxford, and he was obliged to call a force of cavalry who were camping and defending Monmouth and send them to Evesham. With the defeat of the King's army at Moreton-in-Marsh, Prince Rupert revised his plans about visiting the borders, and ordered Marshal Gerrard to make his way through Gloucestershire in order to secure the area between the Wye and Severn. But they were unsuccessful. The military governor Kirlie who was under the command of Holtby, Charles's administrator in Monmouth, was forced to come to terms with Massey and give up the territory he held. Some of his encamped soldiers fled; others taken prisoner, and a large number had been cut down by the sword. This was how the main town of Monmouth came to fall into the hands of the Parliamentarians. The King and his forces lost their hold of this strategic and flourishing place.

Losing Monmouth at that time was an event of the greatest importance to the cause of the King, as the town at that time was considered to be the 'Key to the South of Wales'. The Parliamentarians continued as far as Rhaglan Castle, waking-up the Earl of Worcester, who took Prince Rupert and some of his retinue to help him, and pursued them for a while but were not able to shift them from their encampment in Monmouth town. Gerrard brought together his forces to go towards Raglan intending to unite with others there of the same conviction as himself, but was stopped in this by Massey. Charge of the town came to one Throgmorton, who had made hardly any name for himself. Against him the Rhaglan family really persevered and their achievements will always be famous. By taking part in this great revolution, the situation in Gwent in these distressing times was as full of warring as it had been under the Marcher Lords

Swiftly after capturing Monmouth town (a major accomplishment in Cromwell's eyes) the parliamentarians strengthened their encampment and made changes to better secure themselves in their cause. The Earl of Worcester, Lord Herbert and Sir John Winter did everything to eradicate them and they got an army of knights from Prince Maurice to secure their base at Lydney, but they were prevented from coming through the Forest of Dean by Massey, and there was fierce fighting between them, and no side could claim victory over the other. The Marquis Hertford and Lord Seymour in support of the King and the Earl of Pembroke and Salisbury in support of the parliamentarians were the main delegates at the meeting at Uxbridge. From this point onwards the cause of the King was greatly weakened in Gwent, and after the battle of Naseby, his supporters could not withstand their parliamentary enemies, and returned to Rhaglan Castle, to restore his authority, soldiers, respect and wealth, but could not bring about any improvements in their situation.

When the King left Oxford secretly and put himself in the care of Scottish soldiers, and all the Royalist camps taken over by their enemies, the many Gwent castles all submitted to the Parliamentarians except Raglan. The name of Rhaglan will be famous in the history of Gwent through the ages yet to come when one considers the exceptional bravery and incomparable faithfulness shown by its owner the Marquis of Worcester to the king. His reasonable and respectful letters full of bravery are proof of his great abilities in his refusing to give up his castle when everyone else had been forced to submit to Cromwell and Parliament (and there will be eternal shame for evermore on the Parliamentarians for the way they treated this honorable gentleman). At the age of 84 he defended the place against all the forces of England for over six months before giving it up on good terms which did not bring him disrespect.

But, the first thing which was done to him after he gave up the castle was to send him as a prisoner to the Tower in London, and to deprive him of all his happiness and possessions, and there he died, and a huge loss to the whole of Gwent. So great was the fame and grandeur of Rhaglan castle that it was considered the most impregnable on the island of Britain, and said to house seven hundred residents among whom were: the Marquis of Worcester, Lord Charles the son of the Marquis, Lady Glamorgan, Sir Philip Jones of Llanarth and his Lady, Dr. Bailey, the Deputy Williams, four battlefield officers, twenty two marshals of the field, sixteen High Sheriffs, and six trumpeters. Also, fifty-two squires and gentry all of whom left the place at the same time. Soon after the castle was yielded it was cruelly defaced – woodlands in the three parks belonging to it were cut down and sold for one hundred thousand pounds, and as much land as came to twenty thousand pounds a year. All of this was the property of the Marquis and his family and they were dispossessed of all of it. The hunting grounds and the large forests of Gwent, Chepstow Castle and its park went directly to Oliver Cromwell and his family, and it appears that he also claimed the right to other inheritances in Monmouthshire belonging to the Marquis of Worcester. The following gentlemen to a greater or lesser extent had a hand in the contention: Sir Thomas Morgan of Penycoed, Sir Nicholas Cemys [Kemeys] of Cefnmabli, Sir Edward Morgan of Llantarnam, Sir Phillip Jones of Tre-Owen, and Sir Trevor Williams of Llangybi. The Earl of Pembroke and his friends were supporters of the Parliamentarians through which they achieved considerable benefits. .

Oliver Cromwell & Gwent together with the Reign of Charles 2nd (1660-1685)

With the death of Charles 1st Parliament created a State or Commonwealth Executive Council to have the ability to enact, and amongst its members were the Earl of Pembroke and other notables. However, when Cromwell seized the reins of government he disregarded his parliamentary supporters depending completely on the army for his safety. His parliament of uncaring barons did very little of note save attract the allegiance of the inhabitants back to their previous form of government, by putting Charles 2nd on the throne. It seems his arrival on the throne made but little change to the conditions and outlook of the people of Gwent and there is nothing particular to mention about Gwent more than the other parts of the Commonwealth, save that some Monmouthshire families suffered very severe treatment, and particularly those families who played a role in bringing his father to the place where they executed him.

The hunting woodland of Gwent now came into the hands of the Crown. This had been in the hands of the Welsh since before the arrival of the Romans and then in their clutches during the period they were in Britain. They were an outstanding area for hunting. Part of them had come into the hands of the Crown in the time of Henry 2nd. The practices and laws of these hunting grounds were set down by Henry 3rd in a woodland charter, and magistrates and officials installed to supervise them. This caused much disputation from time to time because the landowners all along its borders asserted their right to hunt the woodland according to the practice of their forefathers from ancient times. Consequently they took parts of it on leases in order to establish their authority, and through this over time it came into the complete possession of different people, so that the only district of the hunting grounds of this large forest remaining which had not been bought is currently called Gwent Wood, and which has come into the possession of the highly praised family of the Duke of Beaufort who still have it at the present time.

After the time of Cromwell, the castles were no longer places of permanent residence, so the grandeur of the Gwent castles came to an end, and they were greatly devalued from his time and up to the present. The supporters of Cromwell destroyed everything in them in their ability to do so at the time. One understands that the greater part of the wealth of the Gwent monasteries had been taken to the castles, and predominantly all their old manuscripts, which if they had been left alone and not destroyed would without a doubt have been of great service in our understanding many things about the historiography of Gwent. Lord Herbert of Rhaglan had a noted and valuable collection of old books and Welsh writings in the castle and the hall where he kept these was fifty two feet in length, and full of old books and various written volumes including essays on the different branches of learning of scholarship in earliest times which included Pharmacy, Agriculture, Astrology, and the history of the Welsh nation.

The above gentleman was a famous and excellent Welshman who composed several pieces and among them was *Trioedd y Pedair Cenedl*, which began with: "*the three notable features of a Welshman are awen (the muse), haelioni (generosity), and llawenydd (joviality)*". More's the pity that Cromwell and his soldiers put the whole of the contents of this magnificent hall to the fire, burning the whole valuable collection which had taken his Lordship much effort in bringing it together from visiting the

greater number of the libraries of Britain and the Continent in order to achieve such an excellent collection. Unfortunately all this was gone and a loss to the whole of Wales. Nothing of it has survived except a little by the poet and writer Llywelyn Siôn, who was in the habit of going there every Christmas when he given every access to the antiquarian library.

Although the big defects of Charles 2nd were disagreeable, to his friends as well as to his enemies, he nevertheless set down the foundations of many reforms in agriculture and commerce, and some of their effect reached Gwent and the borders . But in the time of James the second, the expected success of these was halted by the fear of Catholicism being restored, which was a spur to the minds of the men of Gwent – and other parts of the country – to support the great revolution. It was said that wheat was not being sown in Gwent at this time, and was seen as a wasteful luxury. If this is true, it could not have been more of a loss, it having been brought here by Call ap Callfrewi and sown in the fields of Gwent which with its bees, it became a general byword that *'the best wheat and honey is in Gwent'*. It seems that the reign of William 3rd hardly affected Gwent in terms of its agriculture or the life of the ordinary person in the population, and neither did the reign of Queen Ann either notwithstanding its splendour.

Gwent and the reign of George 1st

The whole of the reign of George 1st was all spent in opposing the Pretender and consequently agriculture and commerce was neglected at that time. The arrival of George on the throne of Britain was not satisfactory in the eyes of some gentry at the time, and especially to leaders in Gwent, for they would have been aware of the danger there was for revolution. One sees proof of this in the behaviour of Sir Charles Cemys who had been in Hanover and who was very accepted in the court there for many things and particularly his lectures on drinking and the smoking of tobacco. Because of his genius and notability he had come to have the friendship and respect of the Prince before he took the throne of Britain. At one of his first meetings in England, and full of an enquiring spirit , he said he felt the urge to see and have the company of Baron Sir Charles Cemys. [Kemeys] It was made known to him that this gentleman was not a supporter of the current throne. *"Poo, poo"*, said his majesty *"tell him to come here as I am dying to smoke a pipe in his company"*. This command was sent to the Baron who refused the offer of King George, and sent the following reply to his crowned monarch: *"I would have been very pleased to have had the honour of smoking a pipe with him as the Elector of Hanover, but could not think of doing it with him as the King of England"*. George lamented losing a kind friend and without doing anymore about it or harming the independent-minded Baron. A number of laws were passed in this reign which did not come into effect until the next one, and which hardly affected the inhabitants of Gwent at the time.

Gwent in the reigns of George 2nd (1727-1760) & George 3rd (1760 - 1820)

There is nothing worthy of mention concerning Gwent from the reign of George 2nd nor also from the time of George 3rd, other than the extension of commerce and the rewarding of industriousness. At the beginning of George 3rd's reign the doors of commerce really opened-up in Great Britain, and the mining of iron ore of great value was seen in Gwent. Its treasures were easy and convenient to get at so the building of large works began in Gwent which have been increasing in number since then, together

with much commerce in coal, the building of canals and railways and at the present time it is one of the liveliest places in the island of Britain. There are several thousand inhabitants more than there has been in the last fifty years. For many years Gwent has had as High Sheriffs the Beaufort family until the death of his High Honour who finished his career about a year ago when the office went to Capel Hanbury Leigh Esquire of Parc Pontypool.

Castles, Towns and Prominent Works.

Now we come to a short description of the castles, towns, the most prominent of the old mansions, and the industrial works in Gwent at the present time.

The Castles:

Rhaglan Castle: which once was absolutely splendid and was the last one to be given up in the whole island of Britain to Sir J. Fairfax, at the order of Parliament. It was later shattered but its remains are to be seen and are owned by the Duke of Beaufort.

Abergavenny Castle: there are still plenty of remains to be seen and there has been much fighting on this spot between the Welsh and the English over several eras.

Ysgenfraith [Skenfrith] and Grosmont Castles: these are in ruins and their remains are there to this day.

Castell Syr Gwyn ap Gaithfod - White Castle : which has a large part of its remains standing at the present time. It was a big place in the time of Leland, and what remains is proof of that.

Usk Castle – Brynbuga: still has parts standing including different rooms, and they are likely to stand for a good time yet if they are left alone.

Llangybi Castle: was notable in terms of its' antiquity, a many attacks were made on it in the many times of fighting in Gwent. The greater part of its' remains can be seen at present.[ie.1837]

Monmouth Castle: this is an old building which has seen many attacks on it. Its remains look old and rotting, but from its current appearance will remain in existence for ages yet, if it is not **deliberately harmed**.

Newport Castle: this has been a place of great remark, but only some remains now stand.

Caerleon Castle: this is now completely shattered but was an arched building according to Churchyard and other visitors. Its site was leveled, and covered with soil. It is considered that it was an unusually large castle because the land area on which it stood covers three acres.

Chepstow Castle: this has been a place of great note, and what remains are among the major surviving castles and worth the quest of the patient traveler.

Castell Gallycoed - Caldicot: this was a strong place the greater which has now fallen into a pile of stones, but there are still plenty of remains surviving.

Penhow Castle: this was once a splendid place and its remains are still to be seen. It did belong to the Seymours, but it is now in the hands of one Edward Llwyd. The main Roman road from Caerleon to Caerwent went past it.

Llanfair Castle: was a majestic building and much of it remains as testimony of its' strength in the old times.

Strigyll Castle or as it is sometimes called: Casthroggy Castle: This is thought to be of great antiquity, and the greater part of it is preserved at the present day.

Llanfaches Castle: this is almost destroyed and only part of its history is known at the present time

Dinham Castle: was a place of solidity and significance in the old times and only its name now marks the place where this splendid large building stood.

Penycoed Castle: this was once a famous place in Gwent for many years, and a small amount of old remains can be clearly be seen on the land where it stood. It was from this spot that the last six keepers have watched over the hunting grounds and the huge Gwent Forest

Castell Gwgan, Y Casbach [Castelton] : There was a notable castle here in the old days, but now there is hardly anything to be seen.

Y Gastell Glas: Its foundations are not completely eliminated and its highly praised name still continues.

Machen Castle: this still has the residue of it in place.

Castell Gwynllwg [Wentloog Castle]: this was huge in its glory in the old times but now in is in ruins on the land where it once stood.)

Llanhiddel Castle: or *Taliorum* which is now flat on the ground so only some remains and foundations can be seen. (It seems that Mr. Coxe obtained the traditional history of this castle from a Daniel Lewis of Blaenau Gwent)

Castell Ifor: nearly all destroyed and nothing of its history available at the present time.

Trelech Castle: It is assumed that there are remains of a one-time castle here but hardly anything to be seen.

Towns of Gwent: [These are listed using the names the author used in his text, and the contemporary English or anglicised form has been added in brackets]

There are in Gwent at the present time some splendid towns, as follows:-

Trefynwy [ie.Monmouth]: this is the main municipality in the Shire and is a lovely place though there is not a great deal of commerce. The half yearly courts are held here. There is also a splendid free school founded by the gracious William Jones who has donated sufficient to support it to the end of time. This is a famous town, and its inhabitants proud of the honour they have of it being the birthplace of Gryffydd ab Arthur the Welsh and Latin historian and of Henry Vth the king of England. It has a market on Saturdays.

Brynbuga [ie.Usk]: is small in size and there is no one thing more worthy of mentioning than the other, save for the holding of its quarterly courts.

Casnewydd ar Wysg [ie.Newport]: a substantial town at present and the main port of Gwent. Its population is continually increasing with its commercial growth.. Here is printed the newspaper for Monmouthshire, namely 'The Monmouthshire Merlin'

Abergavenny: a lovely town with many inhabitants, and of great antiquity, and increasing by the day. It has a Grammar School founded by Henry VIII and its' market day is Tuesday.

Grosmont: a small town said to be of the earliest establishment.

Caerllion ar Wysg [ie.Caerleon]: a small town at present now entirely divested of the glory of earlier times and has only a small amount of commerce taking place .

Pontypwl [ie.Pontypool]: this is a populous place containing several thousand inhabitants and a great deal of commerce and a market on a Saturday.

Casgwent [ie.Chepstow]: this is a town of considerable antiquity, with lovely buildings and many inhabitants, a port and considerable commerce.

Magwyr [ie, Magor]: a town of old establishment but small in size at the present time. Notwithstanding this, there is a weekly market fairs, as in the other towns of Gwent.

Tredegar: a town of recent foundation, but containing thousands of inhabitants, with much commerce taking place in respect of iron. There are annual fairs and one of the best markets within Glewysig is held every Saturday.

The Iron Trade:

About 60 years ago the iron trade began to get general custom in Great Britain, and from that time and up to the present Gwent became an extremely busy place for this industry with huge growth and amazing changes made to facilitate the transport of the different materials. Pontypool was an early site from about 300 years before the big iron works, and started by the forefathers of G. H. Leigh esquire the present owner. In 1788 the foundations of the Nantyglo and Blaenafon works were laid, and these were followed by others: Varteg, Cwm Ebwy, Sirhywy, [Sirhowy] Tredegar, and Rhymney. Later were built Abersychan, Penytwyn, Glyn Ebbwy fach, and Blaina and many others. Pontrhydyrynn, Ponthir, Caerleon, Newport and Monmouth are other works of old foundation. It is believed that the Tintern works were started by Germans.

Gwent and the Welsh Language:

Because of the many works in Gwent at the present time its population has increased in number, knowledge and skills. Also, although it is currently considered a part of England, in the half of it from the river Usk which is next to Glamorgan, namely the old Glywsig, the population speak Welsh and are zealous and unflinching for its success and its eternal preservation. The Eisteddfod for Gwent and Glamorgan, Ewias, Erging ac Ystrad Yw was recently held in Brecon with the support of the genial patriot Sir Charles Morgan, Baron of Tredegar and that of the 1834 Eisteddfod in Cardiff with the supported by the famous Marquis of Bute.

The Cantrefs of Gwent:

Present-day Gwent has six cantrefs: Ysgynfraith in two parts, lower and upper; Abergavenny, in two parts, lower and upper; Gwynllwg, in two parts, lower and upper; Usk – Brynbuga in two parts, lower and upper; Gallycoed in two parts, lower and upper; Rhaglan in two parts, lower and upper.

The Parishes and Churches:

The number of parishes is one hundred and twenty and there are more than one hundred and eighty churches and chapels belonging to the established church in Gwent. There are a whole variety of nonconformist chapels related to all denominations.

The Mansions:

It is said that there are more than eighty mansions [Plasdai] in Gwent, such as Tredegar from the lineage of Cadifor Fawr, Troy belonging to the Herbert line, Llangybi from the lineage of Caradoc Fraich Fras with its buildings by the artistic Inigo

Jones, as well as Llanarth, Nantoer, Wernddu, Henllys, Machen, Malpas, Llantarnam, St. Julian, Pontypool Park, Llanover New Court and plenty of others too many to name.

Mountains, Rivers & Smallholdings:

The mountains, rivers, mansions and smallholdings of Gwent have kept their indigenous Welsh names without change in common usage up to the present time. For example: the mountains: Y Foel, Yr Ysgyryd, Craig Sir Fyrddin, Y Blaureng, Moelfre, Carno; the rivers: yr Wy, y Fawnwy, y Droddwy, yr Olwy, yr Wysg, y Dorfaen, yr Ebbwy, yr Syrhywy, yr Rhymwy or Alarch as it is called for some miles before it sinks into the Severn.

We now see here many railways and canals for the transport of commercial products, and every sign of more to come which will open up new fields and make this an area of industriousness. Gwent sends three members to Parliament at present: Lord G. Somerset; Mr. A. Williams for the Shire, and Benjamin Hall of Llanover to represent the municipalities. One is able to say in finishing this essay that the mountains of Gwent are heavily loaded with treasures, the fields of its valleys prolific of fruit, and the whole appearance of the county is lovely, and continues to portray the image conveyed by the ancient name "Esyllaidd."

Now I close, yours faithfully until the day of my death, your sincere friend, One of the Gwenhwysion – people of Gwent. [ie. Thomas E Watkins (Eiddil Ifor)]

The translation of this manuscript (Cardiff MS 2.1033) into English so that its contents might be available to a wider readership was facilitated by the Head and Colleagues of the Local Studies Department of Cardiff Central Library. Amongst the extensive help received, permission to scan the manuscript was crucial as it hugely helped the process of reading the handwriting and in determining – through the magnification of page images – the exact words that had been written.

Anno. 2010.

THE TREDEGAR DIARIES OF JOHN DAVIES, (“BRYCHAN”) 1784-1864

INTRODUCTION:

In 1805, early days in the growth of Tredegar which, prior to the planned establishment of iron works and habitations, had been part of the land of Cwm Rhos and Pen Rhos farms in the challenging rural uplands of Bedwellty parish, a John Davies arrived in the town on 16th of November. He was twenty one years of age, and was to become prominent in Tredegar social life for some decades, particularly as a promoter of sobriety and thrift. He was a member of the famous Gwent group led by Lady Llanofer – *Cymreigyddion y Fenni* – which promoted the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau that drew to them the famous from Britain and Europe, and was himself a noted bard and Eisteddfod judge. His full bardic name was ‘Brychan Brycheiniog’, and in 1818 he had been ‘ordained’ a bard by no less a celebrity of the time than Iolo Morgannwg (Edward Williams), a now widely recognised absolute genius yet one with a penchant for some expert literary forging.

John Davies or ‘Brychan’ as he will be referred to from here-on, had been born on 24 October 1784 in Llanwrthwl parish, north Breconshire, into a poor family, his father scraping a living as a labourer. Little is known of his early life save that he received very little schooling and at some time he left his isolated rural area for Swansea. From Swansea he went to sea for several years, during which time he learned to read and write, self-educating himself in English, Welsh, a wide range of knowledge, and in book-keeping skills that were to give him plenty of employment later in Tredegar. His father had died during his time at sea and in the meantime, his mother and brothers had moved to Tredegar. He was an inveterate diary keeper and some of his diaries have survived. They are written almost wholly in Welsh, and can be read in the Cardiff Central Library. Unfortunately, the surviving diaries do not cover the first twenty five years of his life in the town. Nor are the four volumes which do exist continuous as there are gaps for some years, but they do span from 1831, by which time he was already into middle age, to the January prior to the June of 1864 when he died. Nevertheless, they amount to over two hundred pages of handwritten entries from a time when Tredegar was very much growing and prospering. By the beginning of the available diary period Brychan had married on 26 April 1826 a Margaret Morgan (died 24 June 1844), and was a bookseller and publisher in the town. He was also a promoter of friendly societies – the Oddfellows in particular - and an office holder in some of them, either as secretary or treasurer. The diaries reveal that he kept the books for savings clubs and several businesses in the town, and earned small amounts by various writing tasks for others. This was a time when the majority of the population were illiterate, yet would have relatives in other parts of Wales that they needed to keep in contact with, and in particular there were the significant number of the town’s sons and families who had emigrated to America having learned their industrial skills in Tredegar, and wanting letters from home.

The Welsh National Biography entry on ‘Brychan’ indicates that when he came to Tredegar first of all he was employed underground and worked his way to be a foreman. Clearly by the time of these extant diaries his self-education at sea had enabled him to work his way to established self-employment in the town and to a position among the

Welsh literati of Gwent and more widely. Mair Eilevet Thomas the author of the definitive work on the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau (*'Afiath Yng Ngwent, Hanes Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni 1833-1854'*, 1978, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru), states that he developed into '*one of the leading poets in Wales, and was sought after as an Eisteddfod judge*'. It is frustrating therefore that we have no real information in his surviving diaries about his education and the time at sea that was so clearly influential to his later achievements. In two different diary entries made towards the end of his life, he indicates that his period at sea was one of much adventure, trials, and tribulations for him, and that he would one day in the future write an account of it so that one of his sons in particular must read it (the surviving diary entries indicating, by the way, that he had two sons and a daughter; but there may have been others). Whatever it was that had held him back from writing about this key period in his life, he gives no indication of it, and in the diaries that survive he had not got around to it before he died.

The description 'diaries' has been used thus far, but for those who may consult them in future it should be noted that Volume 1 spanning the years 1831 to 1840, is more a combination of 'day book' matters as well as diary entries as such. There are many notes of account, invoices, publishers' orders (e.g. for a 'Manual for those emigrating to Upper Canada') and receipts, e.g. in respect of '1,000 pamphlets in Welsh to be sent over to America'. Also, records of loans by him and of repayments, transactions with his shop landlord etc. One also finds notes on how to clarify quills, to get rid of bugs, and avoid corns on the feet, as well as recipes for making ginger beer and other *diod dirwestol* i.e. non alcoholic soft drinks.

Inevitably all diaries record something of the minutiae of personal daily life: what time the diarist got up, whether he walked to the *ffynon*, i.e. the spring to wash or did it at home, the felt state of health, or what the weather was like: e.g.: 10th "January 1838: '*A freezing day with some snow. Spent time writing a piece to send to the Silurian about the damage done by the robbers I mentioned before.*'" Indeed for almost all years of the diaries there is frequent mention of heavy winter snows, a record then of far harder winters than 2009. Among other routine aspects of everyday life he notes how much rent was paid, on what date and always attaches to the record a remark about his landlord a Mr. Gronw, along the lines of '*the miserly old skinflint who cares for no one except himself.*'

The diaries reveal that 'Brychan' had a shop from which he sold books, Welsh language newspapers and the English local newspapers of the time, published booklets and pamphlets, and where he also took orders for printing and book binding. But this was basically something of a backstop because he had a range of other money earning activities which are well recorded in the diaries. These other activities illustrate that, in a place of rapid urban growth like Tredegar, someone whose education had given him writing and accounting skills, yet with roots firmly in *y werin* – the ordinary people, was in high demand from the illiterate majority of workers who needed to purchase such services that these skills supported. He did accounts for individuals, e.g. '*on 3rd June 1834] from six to ten o'clock at night I was doing the accounts of Ifan Rhisiart of Sirhowy Iron Works.*' He also did the accounts for a number of clubs and societies, for example:- '*checking through the accounts of the Samaritans and this was my work for most of the day [2nd July 1862]*'. He wrote letters for individuals, e.g.; '*in the morning I wrote a letter for Hopcyn Brâs for him to send to his brother in America [18 March 1834]*' and '*wrote a letter for David Jones to his sweetheart Mary Wiseman of*

Llanidloes' [2nd January, 1836]. He also composed inscriptions for people's grave stones, drew-up rules for Savings Clubs, and prepared documents such as apprenticeship agreements; for example: 24 February 1834: *'I have been drawing-up an apprenticeship agreement between Rhisiart Rhys the cobbler and Job Herbert whose son will be a bound apprentice to him'*.

The diaries also record him doing a great deal of translating documents into Welsh for local organisations, as that was the main language in Tredegar at the time. He did some teaching with individual students, viz: [Today May 27 1862] *'Tomas the son of Thomas Morgan the Golden Lion died aged 21 after a short illness. He had been a student with me when he was about 10 years old'* 'Brychan' also taught poetic composition in Saron Chapel. [11 July 1859] *'my work today has been judging the poetic compositions of the young men of Saron and this took sometime. In the evening, I went to the Literary meeting there and I was really heartened by the proceedings. I can only praise the efforts of the eager young men of Saron to cultivate themselves as well as learning to love the Lord God'*. In later years there are diary entries indicating that he had been *'in the School today'* but there is no indication of where it was or of what exactly he did there.

During 'Brychan's' life time no welfare state, whatsoever, existed – in fact he was still taking on some paid work within a few months of his death at 80. Hence, ordinary people in towns like Tredegar had to create their own welfare support arrangements by way of Savings Clubs, Widow's and Orphans' funds, Samaritan Clubs, and, above all the Friendly Societies, with their *cyfrifinfeydd* or Lodges governed by tight constitutions and membership entry involving a formal ceremony. Away from the shop 'Brychan's' main activity and source of income was connected with these friendly societies, mainly the Oddfellows. He not only did the periodic accounts for several but had a salaried position in at least one. A diary entry for 1845 shows that at *'a general meeting of the grand lodge of Wales of the Universal Order of the Independent Oddfellows, held at the Oddfellows Hall, Old Rolling Mill, Tredegar on 7 January 1845, John Davies, 'Brychan' was appointed to become Corresponding and Recording secretary at a salary of £26 pounds per annum'*. He was instrumental in inducting people into the rules of Oddfellows membership, e.g. [2nd April 1838] *'I visited the Social Britons Lodge to lecture on the nature and principles involved in membership of the society but to an undeserving audience'*. He records celebrations such as that of the Tredegar Iforiaid on 28 June 1838 - *'spent the whole day at the annual celebration and parade. We had a glorious procession with everybody smartly turned-out. Altogether there were 260 people in the procession including two sons of Samuel Homfray Esq. After dinner we met in the Court House where many short speeches were given on the nature and aims of the Oddfellows.'* The diaries also indicate that he had a role in the setting-up and opening of new lodges such as Inkerman Lodge at New Tredegar, the Prince of Wales Lodge at the new Victoria works in Ebbw Vale on 2nd November 1856, and at what I take to be Blackwood: *'I went with the brothers of the Social Britons Lodge and my dear brother Miles on a journey to Isca to open the Rose of the Valley Lodge in the house of Brother F. Cross'* [March 1834]. In the final years of his life he was himself a recipient of Friendly Society benefits, as he records on several occasions, one of which was 3rd July 1862: *'John Davies the Blacksmith presented me with 26 shillings from the Cadwallon Lodge in Rhymney ..the totally kind and generous brothers there have given me this as a present to assist me in my failing old age.'*

Among the range of social welfare organisations to which 'Brychan' provided services there was one real surprise (to me at least). His diary entries record the

existence of *Clwb Menywod* or Womens' Clubs! For example, 17 May 1838: '*I spent the greater part of the day looking over and balancing the accounts of the Women's Club in the King's Head.*' Elsewhere he mentions another such club at the Black Prince, and one would presume that these were woman only saving and social clubs, and a sort of public house based precursor to the chapel sisterhood. Despite 'Bryan's' commitment to thrift, he is not exactly complimentary about being in the presence of so many women. On June 11th 1838 his diary records: '*In the afternoon, I went to the Woman's Club where I suffered gossip and babble enough to stun the brain of an elephant. Shame on them I say, because between the beer and spirits there was no end to their babbling noise. Dark and cloudy weather today.*'

As already indicated above, and in addition to all his other activities, he was also a member of the committee promoting the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau at which he was also both a competitor and a judge: '*today [4th January 1834] I received a kind letter from my friend Eiddil Ifor, Blaenafon to say that I had been appointed a judge for the poetry competitions of the Abergavenny Eisteddfod this year. Wet, cold and uncomfortable weather today.*' His Abergavenny Eisteddfod involvement also brought him close to Lady and Lord Llanofor and his diaries record many gifts from them and much praise to them. Two examples are - '*Lady Llanofor sent me this afternoon a hare and other food treats. Without a doubt his Lordship was behind this. Blessed be his name for his paternal concern about me [28 October 1844]; Received two woollen shirts, two warm blankets, and a lovely bedspread from the generous Lady Llanofor [16 February 1858].*'

A constituent of almost all entries in his surviving diaries that span some thirty years is evidence of his strong religious attachment and certain faith in God. The daily entries often end with some thanks or invocation to God. The entries also record his support of services and events in a range of chapels. It seems clear, though nowhere is it explicitly stated, that he was a member in Saron chapel but he records attending events in others, such as Seilo and Elim. For example on 7th January 1838: '*In the evening I went to the Baptist chapel where I was absolutely delighted in listening to the Reverend Robert Edwards preach... Do let what he preached have an effect on my behaviour, My Saviour, Amen.*'

He was wholly proactive in all things *dirwest* – being temperate or totally abstinent in respect of alcohol, and many chapel meetings on the issue of temperance had a call on his time. The following is an interesting example. '*Went in the evening [2 October 1861] to listen to the talented Susanna Evans the daughter of Sam Pant-y-Waun discussing her writings on drunkenness and its injurious effects. I was hugely surprised to see and hear a girl just under 14 year of age in the pulpit lecturing to a huge assembly of enthralled listeners.*' Tredegar like the other new industrial towns in Wales of the time would often witness gross drunkenness in the streets, e.g. 20 May 1838: '*About 11 o'clock this morning I saw an astonishing consequences of the drinks trade. A totally drunk Irishman, the poor fellow having lost all self control was dragging himself along the street like a guilty dog.*' And it was not uncommon to witness breadwinners wasting their wages on drink at the expense of their families. Until the chapels multiplied and developed their premises to have facilities for social events of all kinds, the public houses with their meeting place facilities were the social centres in growing towns like Tredegar in the first half of the nineteenth century. They were the places where the Friendly Societies, Savings Clubs, Eisteddfodau, and even Literary Societies met. Indeed the building of a new *Gwesty* i.e. hotel/pub was an event

of note, e.g.: 6 July 1836: *'The foundation stone of the Tredegar Arms was laid today by Hawkins Bees of the Greyhound Hotel Tredegar, an event to which I was a witness'*. 'Brychan's' diaries record that he attended events in the following public houses: The King's Head, The Black Prince, The Red Lion, The Miners Arms, The Travellers Rest, The Cambrian, The Tredegar Arms, The Greyhound, The Golden Lion, and The Free Masons.

Regarding alcohol, they also record his own personal journey from *'being a sinner'* to the position of being an enemy of the drinks trade locally and totally abstinent in personal behaviour. It is worth quoting his diary on this matter in a little detail because the *'journey to abstinence'* was one that would be taken by many thousands in industrial south Wales, including, somewhat later, this writer's own Tredegar grandfather. What became a mass movement was of course to lead to the Sunday Closing Act for Wales, and when Monmouthshire was at first excluded from this, so strong was a commitment to total abstinence among the leadership of the Labour movement throughout industrial Monmouthshire that the position had to be changed by a further act of parliament.

Early diary entries record 'Brychan' drinking alcohol and his regret when having had too much to drink, e.g.: 28 February 1834: *'Mr. J. D. Harper of Abersychan was with me today and he took me to the Tredegar Arms with the result that I was not in a fit state for any work that day. I must confess at the end of this month that I have spent it in an ungodly manner. O God please forgive me for miss-spending so much of my valuable time, and please don't allow me to be guilty of that ever again.'* However, he was so, and just over a month later: 6 April 1834: *'I went with Brother William Miles and Thomas Davies to the house of Brother D. Jones in Dukestown where we drank a quart of spirits and returned home later exceedingly drunk. Lovely summer-like weather.'*

By the year 1838 though the diary entries show that 'Brychan' was getting a grip on himself regarding drinking and, by the September, he had completed his journey to total abstinence, e.g.: 7 January, 1838: *'I have been to the annual meeting of the British Crown Lodge in Cwm Myrddech and got home at 7pm without touching a drop of drink despite being derided by some foolish empty heads for sticking to the principle of abstinence.'* On April 1st, his diary records: *'Alcoholic drink will not make an April fool of me this year'*, and by the September of 1838, he writes in his diary a celebratory poem conveying that he really is 'off the pop for ever':

*"Ni Welir mwyach Brychan Bach,
O'i fodd yn afiach feddwyn
Er gwaethaf llwyth y trwythion
A'i pleidwyr ymhob cyrion!
Pe boddent fi mewn diod frag
Ymgadaf rhag ei swynion!"*

Freely translated this says that *'because of his commitment you will not see dear Brychan as an unhealthy drinker ever again despite the many sources of supply and the number of those promoting it everywhere. If they were to try and drown me in beer, I would not allow myself to fall for its seduction.'* From this time on, he rails against drinking at all social events, and was one of those promoting, in 1859, the establishment of a Temperance Hall in the town. His diary is scathing of those opposing the plan:

'Some 'ministers' ordained by Bacchus have got in league to try and prevent the idea of a Temperance hall going forward - poor fools to think they can withstand the will of the industrious people in Tredegar to promote abstinence and sobriety!' 'Brychan's' diary rejoiced when the Temperance Hall was opened in December 1861, though on that day he was already 77 years of age and not well enough to attend.

His diaries record what might be seen as significant events in the town, and among them funerals of note are frequently recorded. There is a remarkable entry about the death and burial of a Grâs Thomas at the age of 107! 'Brychan' says that *'he had been a Baptist minister for 80 years and had began his religious career in Pen y Garn, Pontypool He had spent the last 30 years of his life in Tredegar and Sirhowy looked after by an unmarried daughter. He was buried in Tredegar's Baptist cemetery.'* But in these early days of industrialisation it was the frequent works accidents ending in death which made some funerals a community rather than just family matters. For example, on 11th February 1838 he records that: *'three men lost their lives in a dreadful fire in Sirhowy works.'* For this same day by the way, he also records that *'there was a presentation in the town Court House to Samuel Homfray Esq of an exquisite silver tea service, worth they say two hundred pounds, and mainly paid for by public subscription.'* On 2nd March, 1838, he records the funeral of the three who died in Sirhowy, and it is worth quoting as an example of community closeness in this early period of industrialisation: *'the three friends were buried today at the same time, two of them, namely John Jones and John Williams, in Saron burial ground, and William Powell in the Methodists' grave yard. I estimate that several thousand attended these funerals!'* The numbers seem extraordinary but 'Brychan' is very exact in his recording and he uses here the Welsh word *mil* or thousand and not *cant* or hundred, so clearly such funerals were something of a civic event with the whole town turning out.

After this funeral 'Brychan' records that he went with friends to the Miners Arms hotel where many of the mourners *'were already sat down to make merry on intoxicating drink.'* His diary entry goes on to condemn *'the long established practice by Gwent and Glamorgan inhabitants'* of celebrating the life of the departed in a public house after a funeral. As in many other diary entries he seizes the opportunity to indulge in a small sermon – some might say a rant – against the excesses of drink, and congratulates himself *'trwy ras Duw'*, i.e. through the grace of God, in not contributing to the drunkenness that particular evening by leaving after *'having had but two small glasses of wine'* But this was, of course, before he became totally abstinent later that same year.

Other "special events" in Tredegar recorded by 'Brychan' convey a clear picture of how some of the people who had come to Tredegar from humble and impoverished backgrounds, became very wealthy in what was a rapidly growing town. On Thursday November 15th 1838, he records the death of Mr. Edwards aged 52, the landlord of The King's Head where the Oddfellows and other organisations met. He was buried on the following Monday in Bedwellty Cemetery *'the coffin being escorted to the grave by a large crowd of brother Oddfellows and other people, despite it being a very cold rough day.'* Regarding the character of Mr. Edwards, 'Brychan' notes that though he was a good friend and was well liked, he had no particular ability of note, save that *'he had obtained much wealth and possessions from keeping The King's Head for ten years, despite coming from a religious family from Pantcoch in Cardiganshire which had moved to Tredegar in 1804'.*

Earlier this same year his diary records and comments with much irony on the marriage of a Mr. R Jenkins to a Miss Marsden, *'the ostentatious splendour of which was amazing because the bride and groom were conveyed to the altar in separate horse drawn carriages. This pomp and ostentation stunned older inhabitants of Tredegar and especially those who remembered how the groom's father started off. The father was but a poor uneducated collier when he first came to south Wales, but having got his nose into the drinks trade, bit by bit, from being a black collier he came to be one of the gentry of Tredegar in wealth and possessions, which of course made him and his family amongst the most respected in the whole district!'*

Another type of event which would be noted by the wider community and which 'Brychan' often recorded was when someone emigrated from the town. For example, 24 April 1835: *'Friday morning Siôn Stradling of Tredegar set off for Philadelphia with his wife and five children, the eldest about fourteen. I sent with him a letter for my uncle Lewis in Utica, and a copy of the song 'The Land of My Birth'; 'on 12th April 1836: 'Dafydd Thomas of the Iforiaid Caredig Lodge set off for America, and I sent with him a letter to an old friend in Pittsburg'. Also, he records events of civic disorder in the town, some arising from ethnic tensions: 4th, January 1835: *'There has been a lot of drunkenness and disorder in Tredegar today.'* And on June 2nd 1857: *'Devilish fighting between the Irish, Welsh and English around the Red Lion which continued for the greater part of the night'*. But on the other hand there were of course many 'elevating' events that the diaries also record.*

'Today [15th April 1845] the Tredegar Welsh Literary Society was started in the Oddfellows Hall' and, on Monday 11th February 1856: *'In the evening I went to hear Mr. Price giving a lecture on the war with Russia. It was a great pleasure listening to his eloquence for over three hours'*. Also, there was the Eisteddfod, the competitive cultural event; unique perhaps to Wales. 'Brychan' records the meeting held on 24 June 1845 to announce and detail the competitions of an Eisteddfod that would be held in The Kings Head Hotel on 22 Sept 1845. It seems clear that the Eisteddfod was an event of some note in the town for some years because fifteen years later in 1860, his diary records that on May 7th he would be going to the Eisteddfod that day, though the entry also laments the quality of the works he was likely to see and hear. Elsewhere he also refers to a Blaenau Gwent Eisteddfod, held presumably in Ebbw Vale.

In conclusion, it is relevant to note that the diaries provide (perhaps as diaries always do) information reflecting on 'Brychan's' personality and his personal relationships. As will be obvious already, 'Brychan' was a person of firm opinions, not a man to mince his words, and in this regard, he was always consistent. He did not only lambast when reflecting on the drinks trade and abstinence, but also when some members of the Friendly Society Lodges were more concerned with socialising than discussing brotherhood issues and actions that the Society's rules called for, e.g.: [20 June 1838] *'Spent most of today writing a really long letter to the selfish serfs at the Travellers Rest regarding their behaviour as Oddfellows...only a small number of them fully understand anything yet about the true nature and principles of the Oddfellows.'* Even regarding views held by members of his own family he could be trenchant. In an entry on 5th June 1863, he lambasts Ynyr one of his sons who lived in Blaenau Gwent (there seem to have been two others, one in Arundel in the south of England and another in North Canada): *'received a letter from my son Ynyr which did not please me. I was hugely surprised to learn that he is on the side in the American Civil War of those falsely religious scab landowners, the Confederates who support slavery in the south of*

the United States. His mind had been deluded into believing that they are only standing-up for their independence. In fact they just want their commerce in the flesh and blood of unfortunate human brothers to continue.'

There are also some interesting entries regarding what today would be called his 'personal life' from the time after his wife had died. For example, in September 1844, we read *'I sent a love letter today to Mari Rees'*. It would seem that nothing came of it because later the same month there is mention more than once of a Beti: *'no news today of Beti returning. O God take care of me and teach me to be stay satisfied in the face of every disappointment.'* The following month a Citi Mathw comes into the picture: *'Citi has been with me today and we came to a decision to throw our lot in together for better or worse.'* As we all know matters of the heart do not run smoothly, and by the middle of November we read, *'Citi Mathw came over this evening and I escorted her back as far as Melin Ocran. Everything is really satisfactory though my mind is very disturbed in relation to the secret between us. O Lord spare me from getting involved with flesh and blood in this matter.'* There was no mention of Citi after this, but this aspect of his life alongside all the others recorded in his diaries shows what a multi-faceted and complete man he was.

On the basis of one swift reading of these surviving 'Brychan' diaries, I am left with great admiration for him. First because of the energy and application he applied to such a wide range of activities and right up to the end part of his life. For example, on 26 May 1862 when he was 78, he writes, *'got up at eight feeling pretty unwell; potched a bit in the garden and sowed half an ounce of onions; then wrote-up my records for the past four days. Chilly weather.'* I admire him also because of the consistency of his religious, cultural, and social values, and because he stays true to all that he believes in. All told then, one has to say from reading through what are likely to be the lesser number of all the diaries he completed, *Am Ddyn!* – What a Man!

In conclusion I want to raise two issues regarding these diaries. First, the account of them given above is based only on one quick study. To do them full justice and make evident their rich resource in terms of Tredegar's history, they deserve thorough detailed academic study. Could one hope that in the near future a student from one of the Welsh schools in Gwent might see in them on graduation a suitable topic for an MA dissertation?

Secondly, for a student of heritage matters and the devotee of Gwent history, these diaries raise the following questions: Where are the missing diaries? Where are any records of the Tredegar and Blaenau Gwent Eisteddodau, or of the Literary and other societies referred to? Where also, is any record books of the Friendly Societies and Savings Clubs associated with the Public houses he names in his diaries. Can all of these have been sent to 'the ash tip', or are some still in lofts and cupboards around Blaenau Gwent?

Colin Morgan, April 2009