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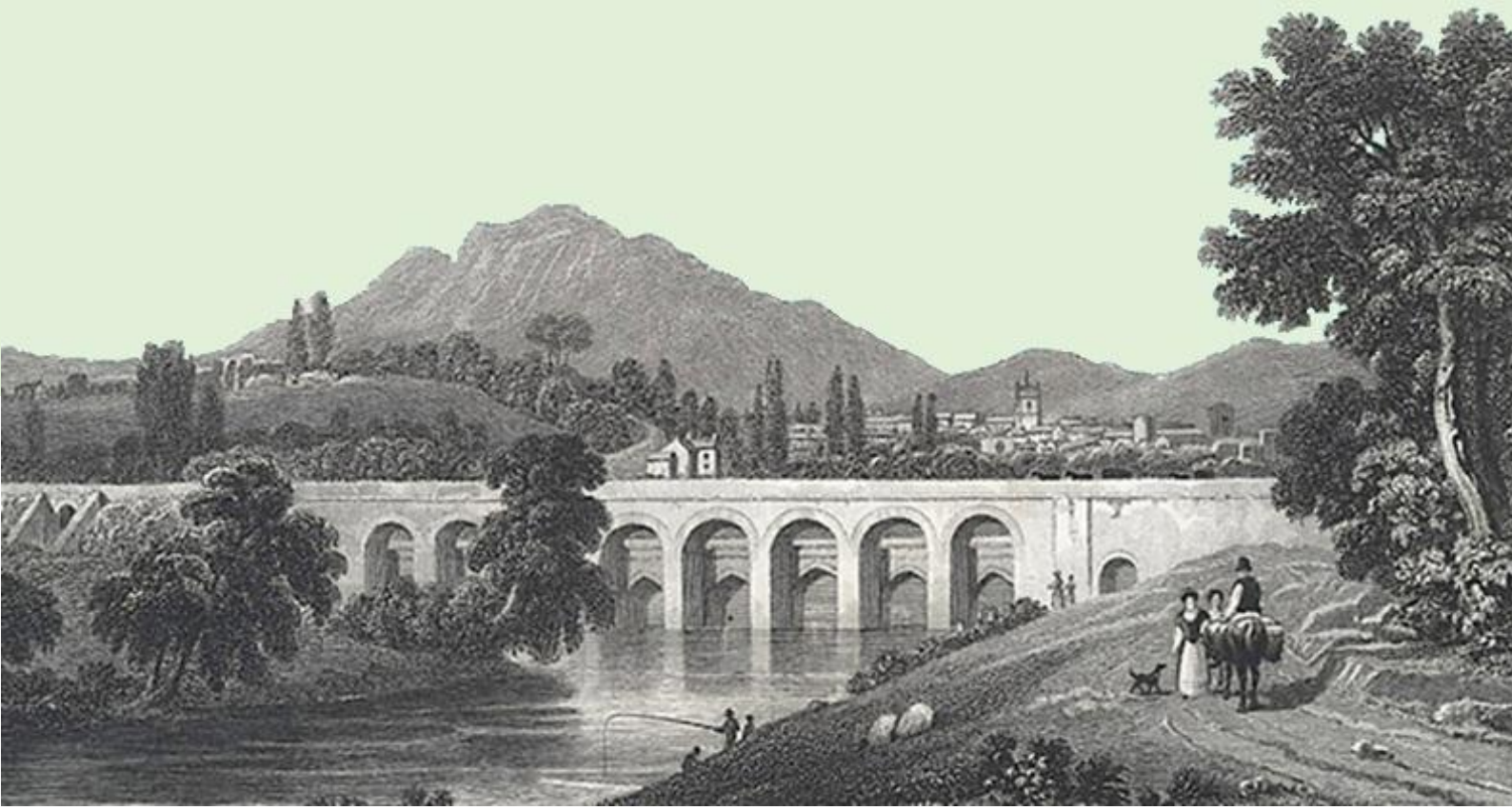
GOBANNIUM GAZETTE

The Journal of Abergavenny Local History Society



Introduction

Welcome to the third Edition of the Gobannium Gazette. It is good to know that there are so many people who are prepared, not only to spend their free time doing research into the history of the local area, but to submit themselves to the discipline of collating it and writing it up in a form that is understandable and interesting for others. It is so important that research doesn't just interest and benefit that one person, but that the knowledge gained is spread to others who are interested in the area. All too often, research is lost, or duplicated, because it is not recorded.

A local example has been the excavation at Twyn y Gaer in 1965 – 1980s, which was never fully recorded. Most of the people involved are deceased, have forgotten what they found and the records are patchy. Efforts are now being made to collate the records (and record the patchy memories).

Our plea to everyone is: if you have done some research, write it up. Members of the Research Group will help (if you need it) and review it. Sometimes, they may identify gaps in what you have written or suggest clearer ways of explaining what you have found. The important thing is for that information to be in the public domain.

Gill Wakley *(Editor)*

Contents & Authors

Cyfarthfa Castle

Cyfarthfa Castle today
(Wikipedia)

2025 is the bicentenary of the completion of Cyfarthfa castle. It is not actually a castle, but a grand castellated mansion with 15 towers and 72 rooms surrounded by a beautiful 158-acre park. With well stocked cellars, kitchens, dairies and bakeries, a beautiful stable block adjoined it -it was said that the stables were better than the accommodation provided for the workers.

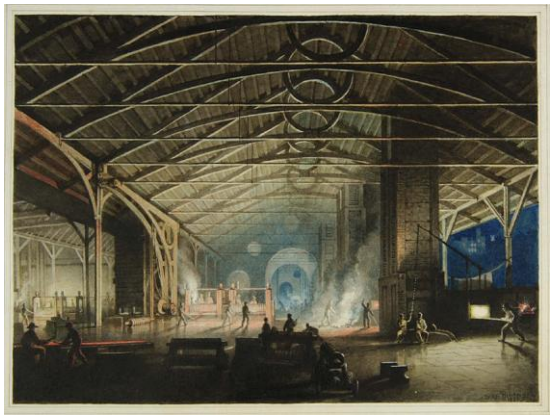
What is the relationship between a castle in Merthyr and Abergavenny? The names Crawshay & Bailey are the connection. It starts with Richard Crawshay who built Cyfarthfa Castle, a place befitting someone as wealthy as he was.

Richard Crawshay: 1739-1810: The owner of Cyfarthfa Castle

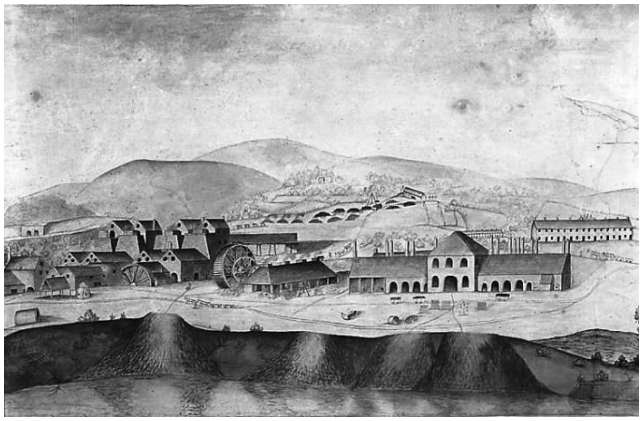
Richard Crawshay's father was a farmer with whom he fell out. At the age of 16, he left home and set out for London, taking 20 days to get there. He arrived penniless but sold his horse for £15 and got himself a job selling flat irons. Clearly, he was a hardworking and enterprising young man. He impressed his employer with his attitude and work ethic so much so that when his boss Mr Bickleworth retired in 1763 Richard Crawshay became the sole proprietor. He married Mary Bourne in 1763 and had now become a very wealthy man.

Richard Crawshay (1739-1810) who had Cyfarthfa Castle built. He was born near Leeds. *(National Museum Wales)*

Always looking for opportunities, he heard that the iron works in Wales were developing and they might be a good investment for his wealth, so he invested in Cyfarthfa Iron works and after various partnerships by 1794 he became the sole proprietor. As the iron trade was booming, he flourished. His prosperity was enhanced by meeting the demand for cannon balls used in the Napoleonic wars. He developed new techniques which improved the iron making process and by 1810 he had six blast furnaces. He promoted the construction of the Glamorgan Canal which connected Merthyr to Cardiff to ease the transport of the iron from the iron works to the docks.



Cyfarthfa iron works at night. The fires made the sky red and could be seen for miles around *(People's Collection Wales)*



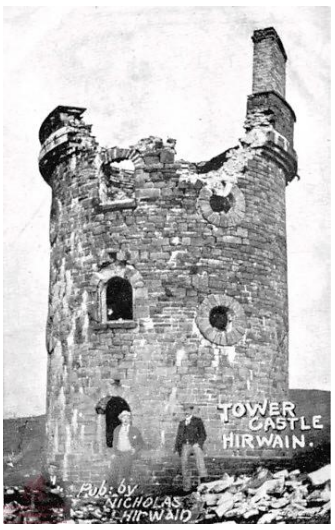
The Cyfarthfa Iron works in the late 1700's drawn by William Pamplin Richard Crawshay's gardener *(People's Collection Wales)*

Working with him were his sister Susannah's two sons, Joseph and Crawshay Bailey. They were hard working and did well. Joseph was the manager of Cyfarthfa iron works. By the time Richard Crawshay died in 1810, his fortune was £1.5 million. He left a quarter of his wealth to Joseph Bailey, hoping that he would continue in his position and that this would ensure the continuity of the ironworks. Three eighths went to his son and three eighths to his son in law Benjamin Hall.

The lives of these industrialists show courage, determination and ambition to succeed, their work ethic was impressive. Their dynasty started from very poor beginnings. It is fascinating how these wealthy families (wealth accrued through mining and the manufacture of iron) during this period were so influential and closely connected with each other and our locality.

Crawshay Bailey: 1789-1872

Crawshay Bailey *(Wikimedia Commons)*



It is thought that he built the towers at his Nantyglo home as protection in case of riots by the workers. Picture shows the ruins of one of the towers. *(Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council)*

Crawshay Bailey was the youngest son of John Bailey and Susannah Crawshay, the sister of Richard Crawshay. He started to work for his uncle when he was twelve years old. His uncle left him £1000 when he died. That money gave him the opportunity to buy into the Nantyglo ironworks with his brother Joseph. He didn't go to Nantyglo at that point though, he stayed on at Cyfarthfa until 1820. He had some of Richard

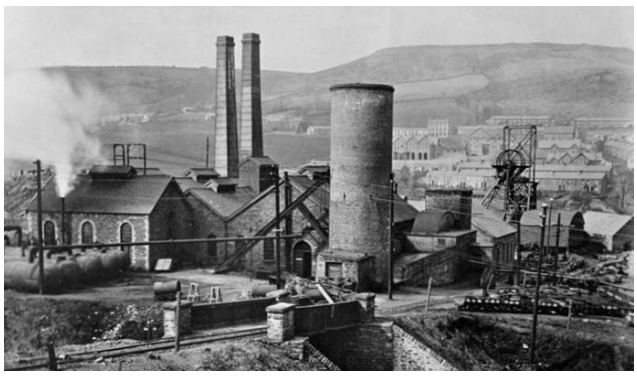
Crawshay's traits: a forceful personality and an extensive knowledge of iron making and mining. He and his brother were not popular with the people who worked for them. They were ruthless and single minded in achieving their goals. Crawshay particularly was said to be stern, tyrannical and a hard task master. It was said that he had to build towers at his Nantyglo home as protection in case of riots by the workers. Crawshay Bailey married Ann More in 1820, but they had no children. His only son was born to a maid, Anne Baker.

In 1832, the workers went on strike because wages had been cut and labour was stopped. Some workers had to break the strike because they needed their wages, but a secret group of men was formed called the Scotch Cattle to attack the strike breakers in some places and scare them. Eventually the brothers had to ask for assistance from the government. The 98th regiment was dispatched to Nantyglo with a magistrate. Those soldiers were stationed in Abergavenny. The next day the 11th regiment of foot also arrived from Cardiff, and they were more successful at patrolling the area. None of the local people would give any information about the Scotch Cattle's whereabouts or their names even though a large reward was offered for that information. Five men were captured and taken to the assizes at Brecon. They were treated leniently and were told that the iron masters didn't want to give them a severe punishment - this was just a warning that the law would not tolerate their behaviour.

The two brothers were exceptionally successful. They made Nantyglo Iron works one of the most prosperous and well-known iron works in the world. Joseph oversaw the iron works and Crawshay looked after the mining work. They bought the Beaufort iron works in 1833.

Then they decided that Beaufort should concentrate on producing pig iron which was sent to Nantyglo. It meant Nantyglo was able to increase production and became very successful. Joseph retired in 1830 and went to the Glanusk estate near Crickhowell.

When Crawshay Bailey retired from Nantyglo in 1845 he went on to develop the Aberamon Colliery and engine house (he was one of the few iron masters who recognised the value of the Welsh coalfields). In 1844, the Taff Vale Railway was started and at the end of that year he moved to Aberamon House.



Aberamon Pit *(National Museum Wales)*

Crawshay Bailey's achievements are numerous and impressive. He and his brother acquired great areas of land all over South Wales. Apart from his role in the Iron Works and the development of the collieries, he constructed a tramway from Beaufort and Nantyglo through the Clydach Gorge to Llanfoist where it joined the Abergavenny and Brecon Canal, and he was involved in the construction of a railway from the Forest of Dean via Coleford, Monmouth and Usk to Pontypool. These constructions are breathtaking in their audacity and ambition. He was appointed High Sheriff of Brecknock in 1837 and was the Conservative member of parliament from 1852 to 1868. Most of the work he did in parliament related to the railways.

In the late 1830's, with others, they opened their own bank: The Monmouthshire Agricultural and Commercial Bank. In the 1840's, also in partnership with others, he had an Iron Merchant business in Surrey. In 1853 he set up the Monmouthshire Wagon Company making coal wagons to transport coal to the docks. In 1854, they donated land for the Abertillery British School. They were the bankers for the Newport Steam Towing Company. Crawshay Bailey had a large stake in an American railway company. He exported rails to America from the docks at Liverpool. Unfortunately, he showed a callous disregard for any of the people working at the iron works or in the mines. He was contemptuous of any legislation to make working conditions safer and ignored legislation against employing women and children.

When he retired in 1850, he bought Llanfoist house. He donated money to build a clock tower for Abergavenny Market Hall which was designed by Wilson & Wilcox of Bath and built by Messrs S J Moreland and Sons of Gloucester. The painting of the northern clock face black was supposed to commemorate the death of Prince Albert. Unfortunately, Crawshay Bailey died before it was finished. He died in 1872 and was buried in Llanfoist church cemetery.

Llanfoist House
(by kind permission of Patricia Lester)

Clock tower and Town Hall Abergavenny

Grave in St Faiths graveyard Llanfoist

Crawshay Bailey Junior: 1841-1887

When his father died, Crawshay Bailey Jun inherited all his lands and properties. He wasn't interested in the iron works and collieries but concentrated instead on the acquisition of land. He was the only son of Crawshay Bailey senior and was in fact not the son of his wife Anne Moore but of a maid in the house, Sarah Baker. His illegitimate status didn't seem to hamper him in any way. Initially he lived at Maindiff but felt the house not impressive enough and in 1872 he built Maindiff Court.

Crawshay Bailey Junior *(Brynmawr Community Archive)*

In 1873 he married Elizabeth, Countess Bettina, daughter of the Count Metaxa and they had two daughters Augusta and Clara. He became quite popular as a benefactor in Abergavenny. He had a reputation for "Open House" at Maindiff Court and supported various charities in the area. There were huge celebrations around the town when his daughters married. The local people were invited to a garden party in the field near the house where they were also entertained with fireworks and music.

Maindiff Court
(Monlife Heritage)

He leased some land called the Priory Meadows in Abergavenny and created Bailey Park for the town people. He had railings and gates made. A lodge was planned on the left-hand side of the gates, which were to open onto the Hereford Road and be wide enough in the centre for a coach and four to be driven through, and a path all around the edge was for a cycle track. In the middle there was enough space for football and cricket to be played. There would be a Grandstand, a Bandstand, a Pavilion and an Ornamental Pond. To everyone's delight, he ordered there should be an area left for a swimming pool. There was a Park Keeper employed for the security of the park. When Crawshay Bailey died in 1887 the Commissioners decided to ask the family if they could take over the park. The family charged them £5,000 for the freehold (more than they had spent on the Park) but it was agreed. The park is now still owned by Abergavenny.

Crawshay Bailey was also a great supporter of local churches. He refurbished St Faiths Church in Llanfoist where his father is buried. He helped raise £11,000 for the restoration of St Mary's Priory Church and paid £2,000 for the rebuilding of Llandewi Skirrid Church where he and his mother are buried. He also built the village hall there and a lodge for the widow of the vicar. Quite a different character to his father. His family donated Maindiff court to the County as a Lunatic Asylum after his death.

Benjamin Hall: 1802-1867

Benjamin Hall's mother was Richard Crawshay's daughter. His father was Benjamin Hall a wealthy iron master and a Member of Parliament. The eldest of four children, he lived in Monmouthshire from his childhood. He was an engineer and later went into politics in 1831/32. He was very tolerant of other faiths and worked for improvement of social issues and the reform of local government and the church. He opposed slavery and supported the Abolition of Slavery Bill. He exposed the huge disparity between the stipends of members of the church where a bishop may receive around £40,000 a year some poor clergy only received £40 a year. He also brought up the fact that a lot of the churches wealth was used to enrich the hierarchy and not for Christian purposes. Although he didn't agree with the Chartists, he showed sympathy to the underlying causes of their discontent. He was totally opposed to all violence.

He was the Parliamentary Commissioner of Works 1855 to 1858 and oversaw the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament. It is said that the bell 'Big Ben' was named after him.

He inherited the Llanover estates in Monmouth through his wife Augusta Waddington. He was made a baronet by Queen Victoria in 1838 - Sir Benjamin Hall of Llanover Court, Monmouth. He always considered himself a Welshman and promoted the use of the Welsh Language.

Benjamin Hall 1822-67
(Wikimedia Commons)

Llanover Houe
(People's Collection Wales)

In 1854 he became the UK's first Minister of Health but unfortunately there was a cholera outbreak in 1854. He went to the areas which had the worst outbreaks and was convinced that the lack of hygienic sewers was the cause of the spread of disease. He was able to introduce bills to centralise sanitary matters He was also a member of the Queen's Privy council.

Lady Llanover: 1802 - 1896

Born near Abergavenny, in 1823 Augusta Waddington married Benjamin Hall. Their marriage united the Llanover and Abercarn estates. She was keen on all things Welsh. She did learn the language herself but wasn't fluent. She took the bardic name of "Gweninen Gwent (the Bee of Gwent) She gave her staff Welsh costumes to wear on special occasions and gave them Welsh titles. Her home was a centre for the promotion of Welsh culture where she entertained Welsh artists, poets and musicians. Her husband also promoted the use of the Welsh language in church services.

Lady Llanover in Welsh Costume *(Wikipedia)*

She had a Woollen Mill constructed on the estate which produced woollen flannels in the styles that she assumed were Welsh. Welsh was the language of tuition in the two schools on the estate. She played the harp and encouraged the use of the triple harp. She presented harps and money to winners of competitions held in harp playing and awarded many scholarships for harp playing. She painted a set of water colours with suggestions for the Welsh costumes for women and girls. The dances held at Llanover helped to maintain the Welsh folk dances. She wrote an essay entitled *"The advantages resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh language"*. This won a special prize given by the Eisteddfod in Cardiff in 1834. A lot of her enthusiasm was for the Eisteddfod tradition which she encouraged. She also gave several prizes for categories at the Eisteddfod. She was a great supporter of the Temperance movement and shut all the Public Houses on her estate, She thought people should live healthy lives.

One of a series of water colour paintings of Welsh costume done by Lady Llanover (Wikimedia Commons)

Conclusion

Cyfarthfa castle is of interest to us as it is part of the story of the origins of the famous Ironmakers of South Wales. Richard Crawshay, who built the castle, was the founder and wealth maker. In fact, without his amazing success, the people in this story may well never have been as well-known as they are. His nephews Joseph and Crawshay were also great iron makers as they went their different ways. Joseph developed the great Iron Works of Nantyglo and Beaufort and retired to found the Glanusk estate. Crawshay Bailey Senior was involved in the Nantyglo Iron works as well as instrumental in the creation of the Abergavenny and Brecon Canal, the Clydach Tramway and a network of railroads in the area. He retired to Llanfoist where he bought Llanfoist house and was buried at St Faith's church.

Crawshay Bailey Junior, considered a benefactor to the town of Abergavenny, has left many reminders of himself: Bailey Park, Maindiff Court, improvements to St Mary's Priory church, St Faith's church Llanfoist, Llandewi Skirrid Church, Llandewi Village Hall, and the clock on the town hall tower.

Richard Crawshay's grandson Benjamin Hall and his wife Lady Llanover worked hard to promote the Welsh language and customs. He was influential in setting higher standards of hygiene in towns. He is also famous for the refurbishment of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. You can see here the connection between Abergavenny and Cyfarthfa Castle.

Irene Hofayz

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Behind the Façade: A look at two families and the Angel Inn from early 1700 to 1805

Since I became involved with the Street Survey, I've become increasingly fascinated by the history that lies behind the façade of the buildings which line Abergavenny's main streets. The Angel Hotel in Cross Street, within the Town conservation area, is a prime example of this.

Formerly known as the Angel Inn, during the early half of the 18th century, the Angel Hotel now mainly presents a 19th century facade with the south-east end probably being late 18th century. It was Grade II listed in May 1952 because of its "special interest" and its retention of "good classical character" as well as being "a long established and historic coaching inn."[1] Although the original building was built before 1736 "none of the present building dates from then."[2]

The earliest mention that I've found of the Angel Inn is in 1706 when there was a two day riot in Abergavenny. Under the Recruitment Act the Army were able to go to Towns and 'recruit' soldiers to fight in the Spanish War of Succession. The problem started when Captain Colt 'recruited' a man called Powle, on a busy market day. Bearing in mind that many of the inhabitants of Abergavenny were either Catholic supporters or Dissenters it's unsurprising that a proportion of the population openly opposed the recruitment to fight against the Catholic Spanish. Also, the same year in Newbury, townspeople became involved in freeing pressed men from recruiters.

Powle escaped several times from the recruiters. Firstly, he escaped after 'recruitment' and was captured in the Cow Inn. The Captain then took him to the Angel Inn. Although it was the practice to billet soldiers in local inns at this time, it is unclear why the Captain took Powle to the Angel Inn and not to the lock up in Abergavenny or directly to the gaol in Monmouth. A large number of townspeople, consisting of both men and women, arrived to free him. Feelings ran high. I can only imagine that the people staying at the Angel Inn would have been frightened and anxious. Powle was then taken from the Angel Inn to the Mayor's house where, in the early hours of the morning, townspeople gathered. The Army fired shots and dispersed the mob. However, in the morning when they were leaving, they were met by a mob of 2-300 people at a Town Gate. After the dogs had been set on the soldiers and they'd been pelted with sticks and stones Powle finally escaped. No mention was made of who the landlord of the Angel Inn at this time, but it was probably owned by the Duke of Beaufort, who was a staunch Catholic supporter.

The next mention of the Angel Inn is in 1727 when William Dinwoodie has bought the Angel Inn (possibly leasehold), Abergavenny as well as TuyDuy*, in Lantillio

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***Ty Du in Llantilio Pertholey** has different spellings in different documents. Tuy Duu, Ty Du, Twy Dee, Tdweedwl, TwyDel, TwyDee. Also, the adjoining farm has different spellings. On the 1841 Tithe map the house is Ty Du and the farm as Tredilion. The OS map of 1880 shows Ty Du as Tredilion Park, the same name as the Farm.

NOTES:

[1] Cadw, *The Angel Hotel 15 Cross Street,* Ref no: 2402 https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/listedbuilding/FullReport?lang=en&id=2402 [accessed 20/12/2025]

[2] Cadw, *The Angel Hotel 15 Cross Street,* Ref no: 2402 https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/listedbuilding/FullReport?lang=en&id=2402 [accessed 20/12/2025]

Pertholey, from the Duke of Beaufort. There were two problems resulting from the sale. One was 'alienation of sale.' Alienation allowed a tenant to sublet or share the lease or property and, in 1731, tenant's death duties which were due to the Lord of the Manor of Maindiffe, the Duke of Beaufort. These matters must have been resolved as in 1734 the Angel Inn is to be let, and William Dinwoodie is listed as a contact for information. The landlord at this time was William Humphris.

> "The Angel Inn, situate in Cross Street
> in Abergavenny, in the County of Monmouth, being an old
> accustomed House, lately rebuilt, and very commodious;
> with good Stabling, a Malt-House, and all other Convenien-
> ces; the House being in the best Repute and Business of any
> in the Town: The present Tenant will dispose of the Stock,
> and most of the Furniture, if required, at a reasonable Rate."[3]

From this advert we discover that the Inn has recently been rebuilt and, as with most Inns of the time, it brewed its own beer. Good stabling was very important as horses, carts and carriages were the main form of transport. At this time, the Inn probably had an entrance from Cross Street to the stables behind the Angel Inn. The same entrance that now forms the main doorway and the reception area. It is interesting to discover that the Angel's good reputation was as important in 1734 as it is now, 291 years later.

Between the early 1700's and 1805 the Angel Inn was closely associated with two families. The family and descendants of William Dinwoodie/Dinwoody, who were probably leasehold owners of the Inn and the family and Samuel Saunders and his son, who were the Innkeepers.

What do we know of William Dinwoodie and his descendants?

During the Civil war in the 1600's the area of Monmouthshire between Monmouth and Abergavenny had been the centre of Catholic supporters. The ensuing distrust of Catholics and dissenters explains the reason why Catholics were not allowed to worship openly and both they and anyone not attending the Protestant Church and receiving Communion were banned from holding public offices, including within the armed forces. Oaths of allegiance had to be made by anyone working in a public service, whether that be labouring in the dockyard or being an MP. These are known as Oath Rolls. Anyone not conforming to worshiping in a Protestant Church of England was known as a Dissenter.

The 'Toleration Act of 1689' allowed people to worship publicly, have their own ministers and build meeting houses if they took "a simplified version of the oath of allegiance".[4] However, this religious choice of not conforming to the Protestant religion meant that people were at a disadvantage both publicly and socially. The Test and Corporation Act of 1673 barred both Protestant Dissenters and Catholics from certain public positions. In addition, they couldn't attend University, become an MP or take a commission in the army or navy.

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[3] Angel Inn: *To be Lett The Angel Inn,* Gloucester Journal 1734 November 12th

[4] ANNAL, David & COLLINS, Audrey, *Birth, Marriage & Death records, A guide for family Historians,* P76 Pen & Sword 2012

William Dinwoodie was a Dissenter, a Nonconformist. We know this because in 1712 he and his wife appear in the Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel non-conformist register. He was amongst the first members of the recently built Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel, recorded along with the Chapel constitution of April 1712. William's address is shown as Cross Street. His will shows that his only property there is the Angel Inn, so he and his family were probably living there. The Chapel was licensed for worship and was allowed to carry out baptisms. All marriages had to take place in a Protestant Church, although they were recorded in some Chapel registers. This situation continued up until 1837. The Chapel had no burial ground, so burials took place at St Mary's. Two of William's children were baptised at the Chapel. His daughter Jane on the 3rd June 1713 and his second son John on the 27th June 1715. His eldest son, Robert, isn't recorded in the Chapel register, so it is likely that he was born before April 1712 or wasn't born in Abergavenny.

William is recorded as attending St Mary's Parish vestry meetings between July 1717 and May 1725. Some of the Parish responsibilities were the care of the poor, which included setting, levying and administering a poor rate, maintaining and improving roads and appointing church wardens, constables and oversees. The Vestry meetings were open to both Protestants and dissenters regardless of social status. However, it was usually the more prominent members of the Town who would attend. This would suggest that William Dinwoodie was a respected member of the community. In January 1732, William is recorded in the Chapel register as in "Full Communion"[5]. It seems possible that William complied with the need to take Holy Communion in the Church of England, which then enabled him, should he wish, to hold a public position.

After acquiring both Ty Du and the adjoining farm, Tredilion, in Llantillio Pertholey as well as the Angel Inn, William wrote his will in March 1736. He bequeathed his properties to his wife Jane, for her lifetime, after which his son Robert and his offspring inherited the above properties, and his son John inherited Upper Court at Llangattock juxta Usk. Whether William knew he was dying or it was just serendipitous that he wrote his will when he did, he died and was buried on the 8th November that same year. This event is recorded both in St Mary's parish register and in the Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel register. He had lived long enough to see his daughter Jane married to John Watkins, a Grocer in Crickhowell that same year. A Jane Dinwoodie is recorded in the Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel register as dying 9 Feb 1740. This is probably William's wife. At this point William and Jane's son, Robert, inherited Ty Du, the farm and the Angel Inn, whilst their second son, John, inherited Upper Court at Llangattock juxta Usk.

Robert Dinwoodie/Dinwoody married Catherine and their first son William was born on the 15th September 1740 at Ty Du, LLantillio Pertholey. Like his father, Robert was a member of the Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel with both his first son, William, and his second son, John, baptised there. Robert doesn't appear to play a large part in the life of Abergavenny, but he does retain the Angel Inn, with Samuel Saunders as Inn Keeper. Robert's name doesn't appear in the Vestry book or in any newspaper article relating to the Angel Inn. By June 1770, Ty Du and the adjoining farm is to be let. On the death of Robert Dinwoodie his eldest son, William, automatically inherited Ty Du, the adjoining farm and the Angel Inn, as per his grandfather's will of 1736. William was like his grandfather in that he became involved in town and county affairs.

[5] Dinwoodie, William, 1732, *Register of Abergavenny Castle Street Chapel*, Ref: RG 4/1241

William Dinwoody is recorded as having leased properties in Camden, Middlesex between 1782 – 1792. It is the Land Tax record for 1783 which confirms that the marriage announced in the Gloucester Journal, of William Dinwoody Esq. of Queens Square and Mary Cobb of Chelsea, is a match to him. William was a bachelor and Mary was a widow. In 1784 William and his wife, along with Miss Cobb, were mentioned in the newspaper as arriving in Abergavenny. At this time, it was a popular health resort "noted for the beneficial effects of its goat's whey."[6]

In 1790 William was appointed High Sheriff of Monmouthshire. The word sheriff derives from 'shire reeve' and dates back to Anglo Saxon times. The 1543 Act of Union meant that Monmouthshire had different administrative and judicial arrangements to the other Welsh shires. It came under "the jurisdiction of Westminster courts of Kings Bench and Common Pleas and Justices of the Assize."[7] The High Sheriff's role would be the same as that of a Sheriff in England. Some of their duties included hearing minor civil lawsuits, being responsible for the County Gaol, supervising executions and conducting elections to parliament. They were the Crown's representative and agent, and it was a powerful position to hold. It was an unpaid role with tenure for a year. William was appointed by the monarch George III. To hold this position, he would have to hold land in the county, and it would have to "be sufficient to answer the King and his people."[8] An insurance document of 1790 confirms that he had the properties of 'Tuy Duy' and the Angel Inn in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire.

In 1794, William Dinwoody became one of the first Town Improvement Commissioners. Their first meeting records thanks to him and others "for their very friendly assistance in attaining the 'Act for paving and otherwise Improving the Town of Abergavenny and the limits thereof, in the County of Monmouth, 1794[9]'. As well as attending and chairing some of the Town Improvement Commissioner meetings, he donated £200 "to the fund for the improvement of this Town."[10] It was a condition that a Commissioner must be a Freeholder. The Land Tax Redemption records of 1798 record William's freehold and leasehold properties and their value. He had properties in Cross Street and Monk Street and was a tenant in Butchers Row. The Land Tax Returns also show him leasing/renting property in the Holborn area of London.

Before William's death in 1805, he was recorded in at least two publications. The Cambrian Travel Guide says: "Among other delightful situations in the neighbourhood of Abergavenny is Ty du, the seat of William Dinwoody, Esq."[11] In 1800 Archdeacon Coxe, in his book 'An historical tour in Monmouth,' mentioned William's help with his work. He is credited with providing information about the old Market House in Abergavenny. Coxe describes William's house and grounds, 'Twy Dee,' as having one of the most delightful situations, a mile from the town (Abergavenny). "In this agreeable retreat, I had the pleasure of passing several days."[12] William also accompanied the Archdeacon around the area and pointed out places of interest.

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[6] Dinwoody, William: Dinwoody, *Mr & Mrs Abergavenny,* Gloucester Journal 9th August 1784
[7] Gray, M. & Morgan P. (Eds), *The Gwent County History Vol 3,* University of Wales Press on behalf of the Gwent Local History Association 2009 p3.
[8] *Expenses of Sheriffs Act 1662,* 14 Cha2, c. 21 Section VI Qualification of Sheriff
[9] Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners, *Minute Book 1794-1812*, 2 July 1794 ALHS Transcription [original in Gwent Archives Ref D874/1]
[10] Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners, *Minute Book 1794-1812*, 26 Aug 1795 ALHS Transcription [original in Gwent Archives Ref D874/1]
[11] NICHOLSON, George, *Cambrian travel guide*, 1st edition 1808

[12] Coxe, William, *An historical tour in Monmouthshire*, 1801 L Hansard

By the time of his death, in May 1805, William's will had three codicils. He died childless and in the final codicil the main beneficiary was Anne Dinwoody, daughter of William Dinwoody of Walsall. The will states that William of Walsall was the late cousin of William Dinwoody (of Abergavenny and Bloomsbury).
A few months after William's death, the Angel Inn was advertised for sale with information to be obtained from William's executor, Robert Barnewell Esq. Later, in 1806 the remaining Freehold estate "Tdweedel or TwyDel …… late seat of Wm Dinwoody Esq. deceased"[13] and Tredilion Farm were sold by auction.

At the time of William Dinwoody's death the Angel Inn had been in the family for 78 years. The sale information said that it was the "only post house in the said town, and in the occupation of Charles Hanbury Saunders."[14] By 1805 the Saunders family had been Inn Keepers of the Angel Inn for 71 years.

What of Samuel Saunders and his family?
Samuel Saunders became the Angel Inn Keeper in December 1734. He was the "late servant to the Hon, Sir William Morgan of Tredegar."[15] This implied that Samuel was a man to be respected and trusted. He took over the recently rebuilt Angel Inn which offered 'modern' conveniences that the traveller required. It was a well-respected business with a good reputation as well as a place where "all travellers and others will meet with good entertainment and civil usage".[16]

Samuel was a Protestant and his family attended St Mary's church. Some of their births, marriages and burials are recorded in the parish register. He married his wife Anne before 1736 and it's possible that she wasn't originally from Abergavenny as their marriage doesn't appear in the parish register. Their first daughter, Anne, is baptised at St Mary's in 1736. The following year he was appointed church warden at St Mary's.

Samuel would have been either nominated by either the vicar, the Vestry, the existing church wardens or a rotation of proprietors and householders in the parish. Being a church warden wasn't a paid role but from the Vestry meeting of 4th July 1737 we know that his expenses were paid. He would have had to have sufficient funds to cover any cash flow problems relating to his role and been fit and healthy. The reason for becoming a church warden varied from person to person. All were proud of their parish with some wanting to be involved in promoting and governing it. It was definitely a position that denoted they had achieved a certain status in society.
As church warden, Samuel Saunders' role included maintaining the church and churchyard, being responsible for the church furniture, which included the altar, font, pews bells, clocks, organ. He would have also provided everything for the communion service and allocated pews to the parishioners. He would have paid church bills, and levied rates. On appointment the vestry agreed that a "Rate of sixpence in the pound should be given to the present church wardens for the repairs of the Church and other Expenses Incident to their office."[17] If in office for the visitation of the Bishop or Archdeacon (every 3-5 years) he would have reported to them about the moral

[13] Ty Du: *Tdweedel or TwyDel for sale by auction*, Bristol Times and Mirror 19th April 1806
[14] Angel Inn: *Angel Inn Monmouthshire, to be sold by Auction*, Bristol Times and Mirror 7th December 1805
[15] Angel Inn: *To be Lett, The Angel Inn*, Gloucester Journal 12th November 1734
[16] Samuel Saunders: *Notice is hereby given*, Gloucester Journal 17th December 1734
[17] St Marys Abergavenny *Vestry Book 1704-1804,* 4th July 1787 [ALHS Transcription]

standing of the parishioners, the state of the church building and presented the church warden accounts. The role was usually for one year.

Samuel and Anne's son, Charles Hanbury, was born in 1745. He was the third son to be baptised at St Mary's. By Anne's death in 1748 Samuel was 50 years old and had nine children. Sadly, his daughter Sarah died 6 years after his wife, aged 7. During Samuel Saunders time as Inn Keeper the Angel Inn served a variety of purposes. This included property auctions, meetings of local groups, a performance by a fire eater in 1753. This might have been controversial. There would have been those who felt exposure to circus style acts was morally corrupting. Though I would imagine that the majority of locals found it greatly entertaining! In contrast to this were the "Militia, Officer recruitment, meetings" in 1759 and 1764. In 1765 Samuel introduced "Post chaises which he will run for Nine pence a mile on any Turnpike Road."[18] Post Chaises were coaches for private hire, which changed horses at coaching Inns approximately every ten miles. This meant that they could travel quickly and further than coaches which did not change horses or drivers. The Turnpike roads charged tolls, which varied from place to place, so offering a standard rate meant that a traveller could work out how much their journey would cost them.

In 1768, the newspaper reported the "picking of the pocket of a post chaise boy belonging to Mr Samuel Sanders".[19] Then in 1766 the carriage of John Vaughan Esq. was broken into whilst outside the Angel Inn and "plate, jewels, lace, linen, &c. to a considerable amount carried off."[20] The robbery was allegedly committed by William Cadogan, a blacksmith in Abergavenny. Most of the stolen property was found in the possession of relatives of William Cadogan in town. A week later he was captured in Swansea and sent to Cardiff gaol to await trial. There appear to be very few of these types of events reported in the newspapers related to the Angel Inn.

When Samuel died on the 3rd October 1788, aged 80, the Gloucester Journal announcement read, "On Sunday sennight died, much regretted, at Abergavenny, in Monmouthshire, Mr Samuel Saunders, many years landlord of the Angel Inn in that town." Samuel was buried inside St Mary's church. His grave is marked with a flat ledger stone set into the floor. It was usually the wealthy and those holding prestigious positions that were buried here. It was probably his service as church warden that enabled him and his family to be buried here.
The inscription reads:

> *Here lyeth the body of Ann the wife of Mr Samuel Saunders of this Town who departed this life Nov^ber^ 11^th^ 1748 aged 39*
> *Here also lyeth Sarah y daughter of Samuel Saunders who died April the 1 1754 aged 7*
> *Here lyeth the body of Samuel Saunders who departed this life Oct^br^ 3^rd^ 1778 Aged 80*
> *Also Hanbury the son of Charles Hanbury Saunders Aged 2 years*

Once Samuel was buried no additional burials were added to the grave.
In Samuel's will there is no mention of his sons John and William. This suggests that they were either dead or estranged at this time. It was his third son, Charles Hanbury,

[18] Samuel Saunders: *the Angel and George Inns,* Gloucester Journal 26th August 1765
[19] Samuel Saunders: *Post chaise boy*, Gloucester Journal 29thAugust 1768
[20] Robbery: *John Vaughan Esq.,* Gloucester Journal 2nd September 1776

who was named as executor and who inherited the residue of the estate. The money shared between Samuel's two daughters, nephews and nieces totalled £240, equivalent to £33,364.06 today.[21] Charles Hanbury Saunders appears to have inherited the lease for the Angel Inn as he takes over as Inn keeper. The Angel Inn continued being used for property auctions, acted as a point of contact for notifying the sighting of any stray or stolen animals and was a place where visiting dentists stayed. For example, in 1779 Mr Moor, surgeon, offered "all the various operations of the gums teeth viz scaling, cleaning, filling up the decayed and fastening loose teeth, transplanting real and setting artificial teeth."[22] A reminder that dentists were for the wealthy.

Like his father, Charles Hanbury attended St Mary's church and in 1779 he was appointed as one of four overseers of the poor for the parish. It was a position denoting social standing within the community. He would have been nominated by the parish and appointed by the Justice of the Peace. It was an unpaid position. As an overseer his responsibility was for the poor in the parish. Most of his duties were administering poor relief, acquiring or funding buildings for the poor, allocating them work, contracting apprenticeships for pauper children and removal from the parish of unsettled people claiming poor relief. Most of his work was governed by the Poor Relief Act of 1601 and the Poor Relief Act of 1662, which related to Settlement and Removal of the poor. The care of the poor was parish based at this time and relief was based on keeping people in their own homes wherever possible.

One of the roles of the Vestry, in 1787, was in response to His Majesty's proclamation for supressing of vice and immorality in all classes of his Majesty's subjects. They certified that the publicans, within the town and parish of Abergavenny be of "good fame, sober life and conversation and whom (we think) are qualified in every respect to keep a publick house."[23] Listed as approved was Mr Saunders, Angel Inn. In 1792 Charles Hanbury Saunders followed in his father's footsteps and was appointed church warden.

In 1796, Charles Hanbury Saunders was married, by licence, to Sarah Oram, at St Mary's Church. Two years later the Land Tax redemption record show him as a proprietor of property in Cross Street, of which he is also the occupier. This was recorded directly below the entry of William Dinwoodie, proprietor with Charles Hanbury Saunders, occupier. This suggests that Charles' property was either adjoining or in proximity to the Angel Inn. In November 1798 the Land Tax Commissioners announced, in the newspaper, that they were available at the Angel Inn "for the receiving of certificates and entering into contracts"[24] in connection with the payment of land tax assessments.

It is unclear if Charles Hanbury Saunders' notice to creditors, in December 1798, was related to the payment of land tax or other reasons for his debt. A deed of trust was set up for all the parties involved in the debt. The Creditors were invited to "come in and execute the Deed of Trust."[25] The Trustees prepared for his first payment to the

[21] Bank of England *Inflation Calculator* https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator [accessed 16/12/2025]
[22] Dentist: *Mr Moor Surgeon* Gloucester Journal 4th October 1779
[23] St Marys Abergavenny *Vestry Book 1704-1804* 11th June 1787 [ALHS Transcription]
[24] Land Tax: *Redemption and sale* Gloucester Journal 19th November 1798
[25] Charles Hanbury Saunders *Notice to Creditors* Gloucester Journal 17th December 1798

creditors and all creditors had to provide their authenticated accounts. The deed of trust allowed Charles to make regular payments to his creditors and not have to be declared bankrupt. Charles continued as Inn keeper of the Angel Inn, but March 1800 saw the auction of "All those truly commodious Freehold messuages adjoining to and occupied by Mr Charles Hanbury Saunders as part of the said Angel Inn with the yard, garden, stabling for 24 horses, haylofts and other conveniences thereto adjoining and belonging".[26] This may be Charles' property listed in the 1798 land tax return. There was "Also, an unexpired term of nine years of and in the said Angel Inn with stabling for 18 horses, haylofts and other conveniences". Details were available from the Abergavenny Bank. Charles was then 60 years old, and this was the last time that he appeared in the newspaper. It is unclear what happened to him after this. We do know from a report of the death of Thomas Jones, a waiter at the Angel Inn, that a Mrs Lewis had been running the Angel Inn since 1811.[27]

The Angel Hotel has been a presence on Cross Street for over 290 years. The building façade has changed since it was built, and the interior has adapted to the challenges of 'modern' life. Meanwhile, behind that façade were a myriad of lives. Visitors, proprietors, inn keepers, and managers, all with their own stories with the Dinwoody and Saunders families spanning a quarter of that time.

Sandra Marks

[26] Charles Hanbury Saunders *To be sold by auction* Gloucester Journal 17th March 1800
[27] Angel Inn: *Death: Sept 23 suddenly ill Thomas Jones, waiter at the Angel Inn Abergavenny: he had been in the employ of Mrs Lewis for eighteen years*. Bristol Mercury 6th October 1829

The Mari Lwyd in Monmouthshire

The Mari Lwyd is an ancient Welsh Christmas and New Year custom. The Mari Lwyd was a horse's skull covered with a white sheet and decorated with coloured ribbons. Carried on a pole by a man who crouched beneath the sheet and operated the jaw, it was led from house to house during the hours of darkness in the Christmas season.

The 2026 Mari Lwyd
(Marie Carter)

As the party (which included characters known as Sergeant, Merryman, Punch and Judy) approached the door, verses were sung in which the bearers asked for admittance. The people inside the house would reply in verse, pretending to refuse entry. There followed a contest in impromptu verse between the two sides until the callers, who were always better prepared, were allowed into the house. Once inside, the *Mari* chased the young women of the family and then, the horseplay over, the revellers would be given food and drink.

The Mari Lwyd was once very popular throughout Gwent, especially the western districts where the Welsh language survived the longest. In 1838, it was very popular at Pontypool, Govilon and Abergavenny, as a letter from the Monmouthshire Merlin of December 29th of that year shows:

The Mari Lwyd, Llanofer
(Fred Hando)

"With regard to the pastime of the horse's head mentioned in your last paper, I am happy to say it continues to delight young and old every winter, in the parts of Gwent about Pontypool, Govilon, Abergavenny and the mountainous district generally. The parties going about with the horse's head are denominated Merry Lhwyd, who sing Welsh songs and dance, the great amusement consisting in the spectre horse's antics, he being well skilled in frightening the maidens, who, peeping through the half opened door are put to flight by his gambols these most interesting relics of past ages, are so little prized that they are scarcely known to exist by the higher classes of Wales."

But as the language retreated, so did the Mari Lwyd. By the middle of the 19th century, the custom had almost completely died out in Tredegar, though it still flourished in Briery Hill in Ebbw Vale and in Beaufort, Gilwern and Govilon until the 1870s. Its last local appearance was in the Rassau, Ebbw Vale, in the 1880s.

We are very fortunate that William Williams, Myfyr Wyn, (1849-1899) has left us a detailed description of the local version of the tradition as she was seen in Sirhowy and Tredegar in the 1850s and 1860s:

“Or, as the old timers used to call her, the *Fari Lwyd*. It used to be very popular years ago at Christmas Time, but you don't hear a lot about it nowadays . . . The ones I saw were pieces of wood carved into the shape of the head of a horse or mare (if there's any difference between them) and dressed in ribbons of different colours, and its mouth made in such a way that the man that was working it could move it up and down from a cord as if it were alive. The fellow that was performing inside was hidden under a big white sheet that covered him entirely with another lad leading him by a bridle with a red or blue ribbon, like leading a horse.

“A company went with the "Meri" round about through the town or village, and before they'd begin acting, one part of the company would go into the house and shut the door against the other part. Then the part that was outside would begin a "pwnc" (a “chant”) through the keyhole, with those inside "chanting” against them. One or two were very funny at this, and if there was somebody clever inside, he would keep the "Mari" out until the boys were almost frozen stiff. The "pwnco" went something like this:

Agorwch y drysa,	Open the doors,
Gadewch i ni wara,	Let us play,
Mae'n or yn yr eira	It's cold in the snow
Y Gwilia.	At Christmas.
Cer odd na'r hen fwnci,	Get away you old monkey,
Ma d'anadl di'n drewi,	Your breath stinks,
A phaid a baldorddi	Stop hooting and hollering
Y Gwilia.	At Christmas.
Ma'r gaseg o'r perta,	The mare's of the prettiest,
Gadewch i ni wara,	Let us play,
Mae 'phen yn llawn cnota	Her head is full of knots
Y Gwilia.	At Christmas.
Yn lle bo chi'n sythu,	Instead of you freezing,
Wel, ledwch y "Feri"	Well, lead the "Meri"
I fiwn i'n difyru'r	Inside to entertain us
Nos heno.	Tonight.

“Then they would march in singing some old nonsense like this:

Ti dy lodl lidl,
Tym tidl odl idl,
Tym, tym, tym.

“If there was a young girl there somewhere, the "Meri" would bolt in a wink, with her mouth open and the girl screaming as only girls can scream - louder than the Dowlais hooter. After performing like that for a while, they'd put a cap or hat in the Meri’s mouth to go round and collect for the cause, and they often made a pretty penny before the end of "Y Gwilia" - the Twelve Days of Christmas.

There I've given you a fairly close account of how the Meri Lwyd used to carry on; but education and enlightenment have driven her from the land by now and she is very little

mentioned, and that's no great loss, for all I know. Still, we like to recall the old customs and ways, and that's the reason for my saying so much about this old custom."[1]

Mari Lwyd Glamorgan c.1900
(People's Collection Wales)

We also have descriptions of the local Mari Lwyd by Rev. William Roberts, Nefydd (1813-1872). Originally from Denbighshire, Nefydd served as a Baptist minister in Salem Chapel, Blaina, from 1845 to 1872. Among other subjects, Nefydd took great interest in folklore and in 84, he won first prize at the Eisteddfod of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society for an essay on the history of the Mari Lwyd. The essay was later published in his book *Crefydd yr Oesoedd Tywyll neu Henafiaethau* ("The Religion of the Dark Ages or Antiquities") in 1852. He recorded important information about other aspects of the tradition:"The stronghold of the "Mari Lwyd" is Gwent and Glamorgan . . . it is only in this region that the name is used . . . Before the Christmas holidays (as that part of the year is called), the young men will search for the skull of a stallion or mare, donkey or female donkey . . . Having succeeded in making the Mari Lwyd to look as much like a horse as possible . . . they will then prepare the other characters, namely (sometimes) four singers apart from *Punch* and *Joan*; At other times, *Punch* and *Joan* will make up the numbers themselves. Two of the singers are called *Sergeant* and *Corporal*; however, these are not always the same – sometimes one of them will play the crwth and act as *Merryman* . . . When *Punch* and *Joan* take part, they wear ragged clothes mired in dirt, soot and general untidiness and take the name of husband and wife. The garments of all the others will be clean and elegant (if at all possible) and covered with ribbons and, in general, they wear a beautiful, wide sash around their waists."

The "pwnco" (or exchange of verses) follows exactly the same pattern outlined by Myfyr Wyn, but then:
"After that the Mari Lwyd goes in, first to the women – she will blow and snuffle and bite and neigh and terrify etc. Together with every other sort of horsey gestures, apart from speech. The *Merryman* brings his *crwth* with as many japes as he can, then *Joan* comes forward, with brush in hand to sweep the fireplace; at that, here comes *Punch* and throws her to the ground – followed by a fierce struggle; *Punch* again then kisses all the women, with *Joan* chasing him with her brush. Then, after enough singing, dancing and playing, they all sit down to food and drink and, having gone through all this drama, they sing:

[1] Williams, William, 1908. *Cân, Llên a Gwerin: sef Cynhyrchion y Diweddar Myfyr Wyn* (Aberdâr: Swyddfa'r "Darian"), 151-53.

Dymunwn i'ch llawenydd,
I gynnal blwyddyn newydd,
Tra paro'r gwr i dincian cloch,
Well, well y bo'ch chwi beunydd

We wish you joy
To keep a New Year
As long as the man tinkles his bell,
May you be better and better every day."[2]

As we have seen, the Mari Lwyd was also popular in the Abergavenny area. It was held regularly in Gilwern and Govilon until the 1870s and there is a famous painting of the Mari in Llanofer above the door of the old *Llythyrdy* or Post Office.

Frank Olding

[2] Roberts, William (Nefydd), 1852. *Crefydd yr Oesoedd Tywyll, neu Henafiaethau*

(Caerfyrddin: Swyddfa "Seren Gomer"), tt. 1-18

Dafydd Gam

Introduction

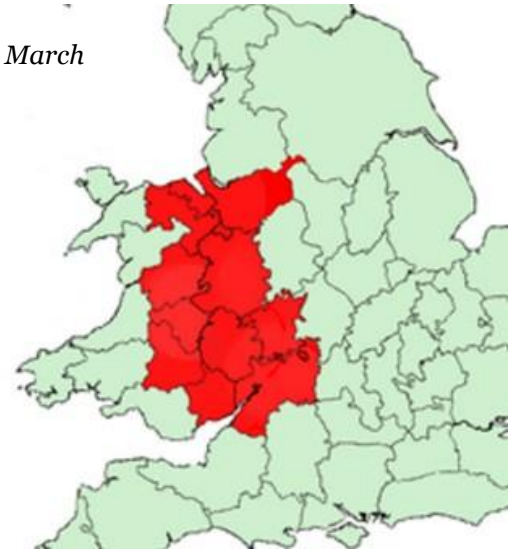
King: Where is the number of our English dead?
[*Herald presents another paper*]
Edward the Duke of York, The Earl of Suffolk,
Sir Richard Kikely, Davy Gam Esquire;
None else of name…

William Shakespeare, King Henry the Fifth, Act Four

A passing mention of "Davy Gam" in Shakespeare's play is almost all many people today may know of Dafydd Gam - a man who was one of the most significant historic figures in our part of Wales. In his day he was a major landowner - whose descendants are important to this day - a prominent soldier, an opponent of Owain Glyndŵr, whose forces he helped defeat in a significant local battle, and, as Shakespeare reminds us, a casualty of the Battle of Agincourt. This short article will attempt to redress the balance a little by presenting some of the details (both true and questionable) of Dafydd Gam's life and times.

Wales in the Later Middle Ages

Late mediaeval Wales was a complex country. After the withdrawal of the Romans, the Celtic church and a vibrant literary tradition based on the Welsh language helped to underline a degree of national identity, but the region divided itself into a number of small "kingdoms", frequently at war with each other and with their neighbours across the English border.



The March

The coming of the Normans had brought about massive changes in Wales, largely enabled by a lack of national coherence and the rivalries between regional rulers. Semi-autonomous regions were set up encompassing the border regions of England and the conquered parts of Wales. These territories became known as the *March* and were controlled by *Marcher Lords*. Welsh rulers still controlled the less accessible mountainous heartland and the western coast of the country but were always under threat from the Marcher lords and the forces of the English crown. The most important of the principalities were Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth (south-west Wales), but quite apart from internecine warfare, these were inherently unstable. For example, frequent fierce rivalry between brothers and other close relatives was in part a consequence of the practice of *cyfran*: equally dividing inheritances between *all* male heirs. Illegitimate sons could inherit, but women could not own land at all! Cyfran risked constantly reducing the size and income of estates. At the level of the princedoms, this could be disastrous, and the South Western kingdom of Deheubarth, was effectively broken up after the death of Rhys ap Gruffydd in 1197 by infighting between his eight legitimate and seven illegitimate sons.

This instability aided the Plantagenets and later English Kings in gradually subduing and controlling the North and centre of Wales, and a period of relative stability, punctuated by Welsh rebellions, followed. After the execution of Dafydd ap Gruffydd at Shrewsbury in 1283, King Edward 1 of England effectively had complete control of Wales. The Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284 established the counties of Anglesey, Merioneth and Caernarvon out of the previously dominant kingdom of Gwynedd. The Statute introduced the English common law system, abolishing the law of Hywel Dda for criminal cases, though it remained in use for civil cases. Most cases were now conducted in Latin, with witnesses interrogated in English, thus disadvantaging monoglot Welsh speakers (the great majority). The Statute allowed the King of England to appoint royal officials such as sheriffs, coroners, and bailiffs to collect taxes and administer justice. In addition, the offices of justice and chamberlain were created to assist the sheriff. However, the Marcher Lords retained most of their independence, as they had prior to the conquest. At the same time, the Marches saw a gradual exchange of loyalties by the upper classes of Welsh landowners, the *uchelwyr*, from the former princedoms to their new liege-lords, the Marcher Lords.

So, who *was* Dafydd Gam?

Dafydd ap Llywelyn ap Hywel Fychan ap Hywel ap Einion Sais was a member of one of the most prominent Welsh families in Brycheiniog (a region which included what is now Breconshire), with a family lineage claimed to descend from the early kings of Brycheiniog. The family had gained considerable regional power as loyal supporters of the de Bohuns, who were earls of Hereford and Marcher Lords of Brecknock (an anglicised corruption of Brycheiniog). Dafydd's forefather Einion Sais held a castle at Pen Bont on the River Usk, a short way west of Brecon, and had fought under the de Bohuns at the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. Dafydd's grandfather held the manor of Parc Llettis, near Llanofer, whilst his father, Llewelyn ap Hywel, held the manor of Penderyn (Hirwaun), south of Brecon. Under Llywelyn ap Hywel, and following the failure of the de Bohun male line, the family's traditional loyalty was transferred to the new Lord of Brecknock, Henry Bolinbroke, who had married Mary de Bohun.

Dafydd was born in 1351, possibly at or near Penderyn, though there are no reliable records, and some claim that he was born in Brecon. In any case, little is known of his early years, or how he came to be known as "Dafydd Gam". There is considerable speculation concerning the exact meaning of "Gam", a mutated form of the Welsh "cam", which has a host of meanings, from "twisted", "crooked", "faulty" or "bent". Numerous writers translate it to indicate a squint or other eye problem - most often the loss of an eye - but the true origin of the byname is far from clear.

It is very likely that Dafydd had the early education and training typical of the uchelwyr upper classes in the late Middle Ages. He would have learned to read and write at one or other of the monasteries in the region of Brycheiniog. This was likely to have been either in Brecon or, given his grandfather's landholding at Parc Llettis, quite possibly in Abergavenny. At the same time, he would have been trained in the use of the weapons appropriate to his class, including sword, spear and bow.

In his twenties, Dafydd moved to Herefordshire to join the court of John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, father of Henry Bolinbroke. Many writers attribute this move to the result of a duel in Brecon High Street, in which he had killed a kinsman, Risiart Fawr o Slwch. However, evidence for this is scanty, and similar stories abound in other biographies. In fact, Dafydd was a member of a very large family, and it might simply

have been the case that his prospects were better in the service of the Marcher lord to whom his father had pledged allegiance.

Under John of Gaunt, Dafydd seems to have established himself as a brave and competent soldier. It is claimed that he first served as part of an armed escort for the religious reformer John Wycliffe, who was being provided protection by the duke in 1377. He was possibly with John of Gaunt on the Scottish borders during the Peasants Revolt in 1381 and may have been among the retainers who accompanied John seeking the protection of King Robert II of Scotland, but there is no record of this.
Dafydd was among those chosen to go to Spain in 1386 on John of Gaunt's unsuccessful three-year campaign attempting to claim the Castilian throne. Having proved himself in battle, Dafydd was appointed an adviser to Henry Bolingbroke, the duke's eldest son and heir. He joined Henry on his "crusade", aimed at infidels in Eastern Europe. This involved forays into Lithuania in 1390 and Prussia in 1392. "English" archers were strategically important in some of the key battles, and it is possible that Dafydd had charge of some of this force. Wounded during the fighting, Dafydd returned to Wales to convalesce after Bolingbroke's return to England.

Dafydd seems to have risen in Henry Bolingbroke's retinue, and by 1399 was receiving an annuity of 40 marks from the duke's estate. A mark was an accounting unit, worth about 160 pence, so Dafydd was receiving about £27 per year. This might be the equivalent in modern terms of around £450,000[1], though opinions (and methodologies) differ, and there is no valid direct comparison. This annuity would be in addition to his income from various estates and holdings in Brycheiniog and the March.

In 1400, Dafydd and his brothers were described as King's Esquires, and would therefore have been prominent as regional representatives and supporters of Bolingbroke and were likely to have played significant parts in the preparation of any Welsh contribution to the overthrow of Richard II in 1399. Among Dafydd's duties was the security and supervision of Bolingbroke's son, Henry (known in later histories, but not at the time, as Henry of Monmouth). This was particularly important when Bolingbroke was banished to Ireland by Richard II. Dafydd seems to have developed a good lifelong relationship with the youth. This was to prove critical in the coming years.

Owain Glyndŵr's Rebellion
Despite the apparent military stability in Wales following the Statute of Rhuddlan, there was growing dissatisfaction among the ordinary people, particularly in the North and West of the country beyond the Marches. Gradual anglicisation of the laws and government, together with a heavy burden of taxation had created a widespread disaffected peasantry. In addition, the Black Death in 1349 and subsequent recurrent plague epidemics had reduced the population by about 40% and had led to a severe depression in agriculture and trade, causing great and lasting hardship.

Set against this, the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr, a landowner based in Sycharth, Powys, appeared at first to have more in common with the internecine rivalries of an earlier era. The beginning of Owain's rising in 1400 appears to have been an armed attack on Ruthin, the base of a regional rival, one Reynold de Grey. De Grey had used

[1] According to castellology.com

his influence with the new king, Henry IV, to induce the rejection of an appeal by Glyndŵr regarding a land dispute. To make matters worse, de Grey had withheld a summons to Owain to join the king on his Scottish campaign, thereby setting Owain at risk of incurring royal displeasure and large fines for his non-participation.

Whatever the immediate cause, the rising spread, gaining widespread support from peasants and gentry in North and West Wales. But, contrary to some modern accounts, it was not universal and was opposed by many uchelwyr. Dafydd Gam was a major focus of resistance within Brycheiniog and The March, and Owain retaliated by burning and destroying several of his and his family's properties. In fact, at one point, escaping from their devastated home and lands, Dafydd's daughter Gwladys, her grandfather and two of her brothers, sought refuge at King Henry IV's court. The standing of the family is demonstrated by the fact that Gwladys became a Maid of Honour to Mary de Bohun, wife of Henry IV.

Dafydd served as an advisor to Prince Henry and was active in the defeat of Harry Hotspur at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. There is a widespread story that Dafydd was captured by Owain's forces in 1404 whilst planning to assassinate Owain at his historic parliament in Machynlleth, but this seems to date from the mid seventeenth century writing of Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt, and does not fit with Dafydd's known movements, particularly in view of what was to follow in the subsequent year.

The Battle of Pwll Melyn

During Glyndŵr's rebellion, two key events in Monmouthshire served to underline a crucial tactical weakness of Owain's forces. The first was the battle of Grosmont in March 1405, where, despite burning the town, a substantial force of Glyndŵr's men failed to capture the castle and were attacked with heavy losses by Prince Henry's forces. It is quite likely that Dafydd Gam was directly involved in this battle. Prince Henry referred in his report to the king that his force included a small body of his household, and this might well have included Dafydd, but there is no clear evidence.

Reputed site of the battle
(Photo: Roger Davies)

Shortly afterwards, in May 1405, forces led by Owain's son Gruffudd ab Owain Glyndŵr attacked Usk Castle in an attempt to gain control of the region. The town of Usk had been attacked and burned in a previous attack in 1403, but this time the town was prepared. Dafydd, who held land at Hen Gwrt in nearby Llandeilio Gresynni (Llantilio Croesenny), is credited by Scottish chronicler Walter Bower with playing a major role in alerting Henry's forces and strengthening the defences of Usk Castle.

In the event, Gruffudd's force was beaten off and pursued into the forest of Monkswood on Mynydd Pwll Melyn. Glyndŵr's men suffered heavy losses. Numbers are always suspect in records of such battles, but it is reported that 1500 were killed, with many driven into the River Usk and up to 300 beheaded before Usk Castle. Gruffudd was taken prisoner and Owain's brother Tudur was killed. John ap Hywel, Cistercian Abbot of Llantarnam and a powerful supporter of Owain was also killed.

A Prisoner of Owain Glyndŵr

Despite important civic achievements, including forging the beginnings of a true national identity with the establishment of a Parliament in Machynlleth and his claim of the title "Prince of Wales", the battle of Pwll Melyn saw the high-water mark of Owain's effective power, and the king's forces gradually regained control of Wales. More and more Welshmen were recruited to forces opposed to Owain, and Dafydd's family were rewarded with grants of lands seized from rebels in Cardiganshire and elsewhere. Dafydd had married Gwenllian ferch Gwilym ap Hywel Crach, daughter of the Bailiff of Pencelli, a fellow Brycheiniog uchelwr, and they settled in Brecon with his young and growing family.

The details are unclear, but in June 1412, towards the very end of Owain's rebellion, Dafydd was captured and made prisoner by some of Owain's followers. Surprisingly, he was not immediately executed, but was instead ransomed, though Dafydd had previously been effectively condemned by Owain. The Seneschal and Receiver of Brycheiniog were empowered to treat with Owain for a payment variously quoted as 200 to 700 marks, to be raised by special taxation from the royal estates in Wales. Given Dafydd's survival and the huge size of his ransom, it seems possible that his capture was closer to the kind of kidnap that was fairly common at this time, rather than an act of war! It is often stated that a condition of the release was that Dafydd should swear an oath not to take up arms against Owain, but even if this is true, Dafydd clearly did not regard the oath as binding and was able to direct royal forces to the location of his erstwhile captors.

The Battle of Agincourt

After a period spent working to restore his estates, Dafydd accompanied the young king Henry V to war in France in 1415. He took part in the long drawn-out siege of Harfleur and in Henry's strategic withdrawal towards Calais, which culminated in a battle in the Somme Valley at Azincourt (Agincourt).

Henry V at Agincourt
(Harry Payne, 1858-1927)

The history of the battle, though described in contemporary documents is confused in many modern accounts, with significant discrepancies regarding the actual numbers engaged. The English accounts make little or no reference to Welsh involvement, even though it is clear from extant muster roles that at least 300-400 bowmen were employed. The part that Dafydd himself played in the battle is unclear. It is known that he was indentured to serve with "three foot-archers", but given his standing with King Henry as a loyal supporter and mentor, this is likely simply to have been his personal retinue, rather than reflecting the unimportance of his command. To underline this point, one of these men was reported to have been his son-in-law Roger Fychan (Vaughan) of Bredwardine, Herefordshire, the husband of his daughter Gwladys.

It does appear that Dafydd had command of a significant contingent of Welsh bowmen, but his exact role is obscured by later accounts which often seem more hagiography than history. For example, he is often described as having been knighted on the field, either before or after the battle, though no reliable record survives. He is frequently credited with heroically saving Henry V by killing the French Duc d'Alençon

at the cost of his own life and that of Roger Fychan. But whereas both died in the battle, the exact circumstances are not recorded.

The monuments to Gwladys and William in Abergavenny Priory Church

Dafydd's family seem to have enjoyed considerable royal favour subsequently and became very influential throughout Brycheiniog. The family adopted the surname "Games" and were one of the most powerful in the county until Stuart times, when the male line died out. Dafydd's daughter Gwladys had been widowed when Roger died at Agincourt, and subsequently married Sir William ap Thomas of Raglan Castle who had also served in the battle. They share an impressive monument in Abergavenny Priory Church.

Their son William Herbert – Dafydd's grandson - was later created Earl of Pembroke and was the first full-blooded Welshman to enter the English peerage.

Postscript

The last word goes, of course, to William Shakespeare. Some aspects of the character of Fluellen in Henry the Fifth might conceivably be related to Dafydd Gam. Shakespeare uses a stereotypic Welshman extensively in his play, and although essentially comedic and used to mock the Welsh, the basic character is represented as a brave and competent soldier, and the storyline effectively proceeds from parody to frank admiration.

Fluellen forces Pistol to eat a leek: Henry the Fifth: Act V Scene 1 (*H. C. Selous)*

Fluellen may have been created as a hybrid from several characters known to contemporary audiences, including Dafydd Gam and also the Elizabethan soldier Roger Williams. To some extent, Shakespeare is having his cake and eating it, since his Fluellen has more than 280 lines in the play, whilst the death of "Davy Gam", a known historic fact, is also acknowledged.

Perhaps, in the end, it is a fine epitaph for Dafydd Gam that he should have inspired a major role in one of the greatest plays in the English language.

David Smith

The Malt Kiln, Mill Street, Abergavenny

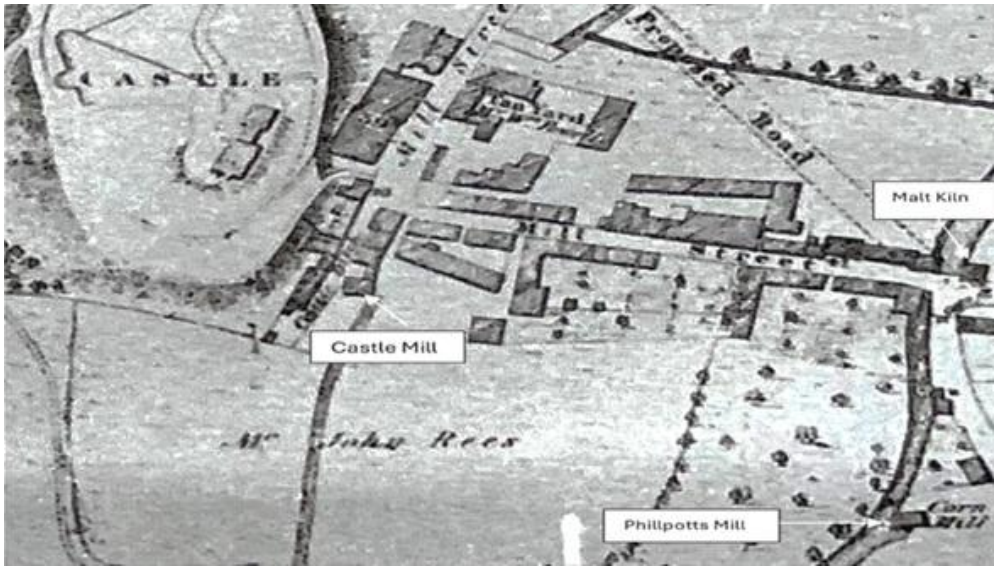
Recently whilst reviewing a set of old documents and photographs linked to research that I was completing for a book on the corn mills along the River Gavenny, I came across a striking image in a local history Facebook page titled *Forgotten Abergavenny*[1] which is unfortunately no longer available.

This photograph of Mill Street immediately caught my attention not for the street itself, but for an unusual conical shaped building standing near the river bridge at the far end of the street, indicated by the white arrow.

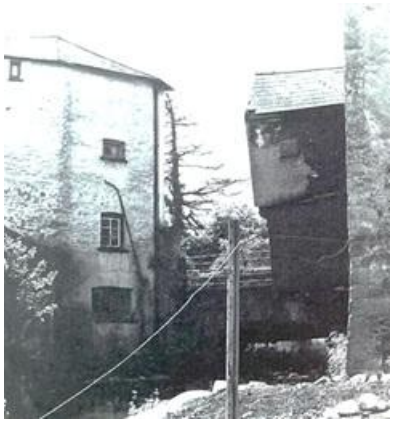
Curiously, despite its distinctive shape, I could find no mention of this structure in old maps or local history publications, and enquiries with eminent local historians also drew a blank. This absence of information only deepened the mystery. Further investigation eventually led me to a document in the Gwent Archives: the 1836 will of one John Rees, dated 2 September 1836. Described as a *maltster to Richard Fothergill of Tredegar Ironworks*, Rees owned several properties in and around Mill Street, including a malthouse, malt kiln, house, garden, stable, and meadow land.[2]

This information strongly suggests that the conical structure shown in the photograph was almost certainly the malt kiln mentioned in Rees's will offering a rare glimpse into Abergavenny's forgotten links to both its brewing and corn milling past. Today a dwelling house known as *'October House'* stands directly opposite what would have been the site of the Malt Kiln which today forms part of the lower car park attached to the Abergavenny Hotel.

It's a possibility that October House was originally the building referred to in the will of John Rees as the house garden and stable, likely to be the Maltsters living accommodation, although further confirmation is needed before we can be sure of this.



In 1834, John Woods produced a detailed street plan of the market town of Abergavenny.[3] The section shown here focuses on the area around Mill Street and clearly marks land owned by John Rees, including a building situated exactly where the Malt Kiln once stood. Also shown are two nearby corn mills Castle Mill and what later became known as Philpotts Mill, both located within the Mill Street area and quite possibly reliant on the Malt Kiln for drying their grain before milling.



This photograph from the same Facebook page[4] provides a closer view of the curious conical structure believed to have been the Malt Kiln. The image was originally included to illustrate the rear of 42 Mill Street, an old Elizabethan building that once stood near the river. During its demolition in the 1960s, workers discovered heavy iron chains fastened to the cellar walls, evidence that the property may once have served as a temporary prison. Even more remarkably, local accounts claimed that the very same chains had earlier been used in the early 19th century to tether performing bears belonging to travelling Prussian entertainers who passed through the town. For me, however, the most intriguing feature of the photograph was not the description of Number 42, but the white, conical tower visible just over the River Gavenny, opposite 42 Mill Street. Though not mentioned in the Facebook page, this distinctive structure appears to be a closer view of the malt kiln referred to in the 1836 will of John Rees.

How a Malt Kiln worked

The kiln's main function would have been to convert barley into malt for use in brewing. This process, known as *malting*, involved soaking the barley in water to encourage germination, before drying it in the kiln to halt further growth and preserve its natural sugars. The proximity of a slow-moving, flat-bottomed stretch of the River Gavenny opposite the site would have made it ideal for the soaking stage, suggesting that both soaking and drying took place side by side at this very same Mill Street location.[5]

Whilst the name suggests the building would have primarily been used in making beer to quench the thirst of the multitude of workers residing in the industrial communities of 19th century Monmouthshire, given its location sandwiched between two corn mills off Mill Street itself, it is likely that the kiln would have also been periodically used to dry the grain used in the milling of flour at both Philpott Mill and Castle Mill. The 1861 census for Cross Street, Abergavenny provides some interesting information detailing how a maltster and a miller were part of the same family living under the same roof, the house they lived in was called *'Parrot' or Parrot Inn,* better known today as the *Gunter Mansion*, the head of this family was Edward Probert 34yrs whose occupation is shown as a maltster, also residing within the same house was his father in law Samuel Griffiths aged 60yrs whose occupation was a miller.[6]

Wales damp climate quite often required corn and other grain to be dried before it was suitable for grinding at the mill, this would sometimes be carried out in a separate building called a drying kiln, where the grain would be spread on the floor of the first storey, the floor was made from thick perforated terracotta tiles or perforated thick steel sheets. On the ground floor a fire would provide the heat to dry the grain. In nineteenth-century Wales, corn-drying kilns were used mainly for drying cleaned oats and barley to facilitate de-husking prior to milling, and only rarely for wheat which developed a 'very strong' flavour when kiln-dried.[7]

It's likely that any ventilation cowl that would have existed on top of the Kiln in Mill Street would have been capped after it stopped being used as a kiln. The remains of a similar more recent malt kiln building can still be seen today towards the rear of Lion Street near the rear entrance to Abergavenny market.

In their heyday, as well as being used for drying grain, Kiln houses were also popular places for the young people of a community to meet on cold winter nights, where quite often they would recite poetry and sing songs in a welcoming cosy atmosphere. We can perhaps surmise that the visiting Prussian entertainers used the warmth of the kiln at Mill Street to practice their songs while their bears were tethered up in the cellars next door.

The following interesting description of how oats were dried in South Wales kiln houses was written in a copy of Cymru Fu dated 1888, ("Cymru Fu" was a collection of Welsh, folklore, and traditions written by Isaac Foulkes published in three parts between 1862 and 1864), although the article refers to Glamorganshire it is likely the same terminology would have been used in the Malt houses of their neighbours in Monmouthshire, the process described would have been the same for the drying corn and barley.[8] The article includes a number of long-lost Welsh terms listed below describing parts of the process, I have tried to offer the English equivalent for some of them, which are open to being scrutinised. The processes described and possibly the Welsh terms mentioned, are likely to have been familiar with the labourers working at the Abergavenny malt kiln. It's worth pointing out that the Welsh language would have been in regular use at the Abergavenny market when this article was written, indeed one of the last speakers of the ancient Gwenhwyseg Welsh dialect spoken in this area of South Wales was 'John Williams Y Felin' an old corn miller himself, who lived in the mountains above Abergavenny and Crickhowell at Grwyne Fechan mill, in 1939 he was recorded speaking about his life through the medium of Welsh. The recording is available to listen to via the Welsh language ballad 'Can John Williams by Tom Morys and his band Delyn a'r Ebillion. [9]

Description of a Welsh Kiln House 1888

> *"Glamorganshire farmers have nearly forgotten the term, "Crasu yr Endid" which was years ago in general use, particularly in the hill parts of the county. In winter every farmer of note sent a load of oats to the country mill, or, rather, the kiln-house belonging to the mill. The miller would then take charge of the oats, when the whole would be deposited in the lower kiln, called in Welsh, "Piben yr Odyn". The upper kiln consisted of perforated iron plates, which were heated by fire from a range placed beneath in the lower kiln. When the iron plates became heated the oats were poured out of the sacks and spread over them. The miller then attended to the fire and the oats, and it would be his business to look after the place and secure the proper temperature. For two or three days he would carefully turn over the oats and move them about with an instrument called" Corlag yr Odyn". The oats in the kiln, consisting of twenty, thirty, or forty bushels, as the case might be, were called "Endid," and this process of drying the corn was called "Crasu yr Endid."*
>
> *When the corn was dry enough the farmers would send his men to help the miller to re-fill the sacks, which was done by night, and the process was called "Cwnu yr Endid."*
>
> *"Diwrnod Cwyro." This was the day following that on which the process of "Cwnu yr Endid" had taken place. The dry corn was to be passed through the mill, first of all, to be shelled. After that it was winnowed and carried back to the grinding mill, and after passing through that last process the "endid of oats" would be taken home in sackfulls of oatmeal, a quantity sufficient to supply the farmer's table with oatmeal-bread for that year". [10]*

Welsh terms in the article
"Crasu yr Endid" – "Baking Entity" – (The definition of 'entity' means something that is separate and can be identified as its own thing, regardless of its connection to other things. In this context it perhaps describes the change in the grain when heated).
"Piben yr Odyn" – "Kiln pipes" – reference to the heating system within the kiln.
"Corlag yr Odyn" – An instrument used by the miller to turn and dry the oats.
"Diwrnod Cwyro" – "Waxing Day" – Possibly describing the day put aside to carry out the cooking or heating process that turns the corn into a sticky texture.

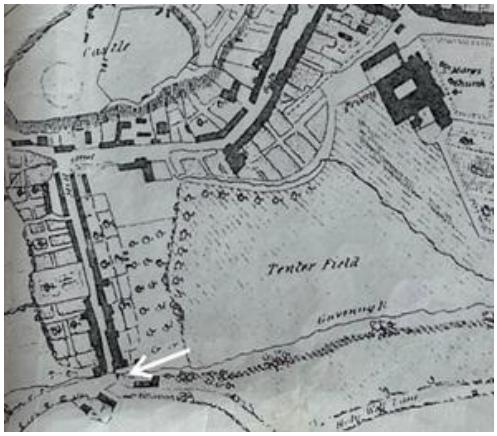
'Trouble at Mill'
Although sometimes utilised by millers during damp weather, using the malt kiln was usually a last resort due to the unpredictable nature of the process affecting the flavour of the wheat. A local newspaper item from 1909 details some of the disadvantages millers faced at the corn mill during damp weather, and their anxieties about having to use a malt kiln to dry the crops prior to milling the grain as opposed to allowing them to dry out naturally: -

> *"The chief anxiety is fine weather, so as to get the corn dry enough, for failing that there follows heavy loss. The miller puts his hand in the sample; "Cold" he exclaims. Then he nibbles at the grain like any mouse. "Thone" {Damp} he declares…. Precious little is that damp wheat good for……. it won't keep but will go mouldy. You have forgotten the Malt kiln which can dry the grain as you will? No I haven't forgotten. I have been dreading that, which if employed,*

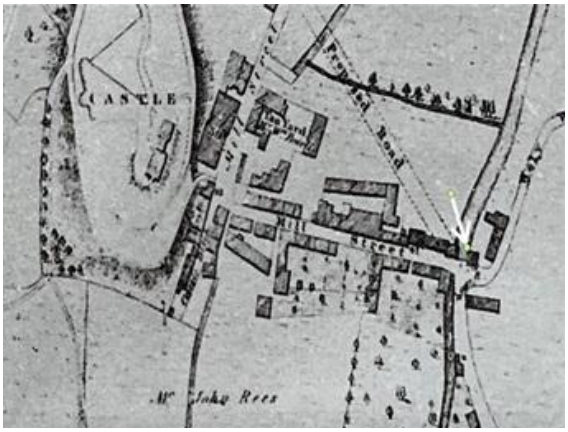
dries out a third of the weight if not carefully used, and leads to no end of cost, loss and bother"....May judgement save every Husbandman from having to employ such a plan of drying his "Thone", out of conditioned wheat, or any other grain for that matter, save barely for malting" [11]

When was the Mill Street Malt kiln built?

A comparison between two of the earliest plans of Abergavenny shown below, appears to indicate the malt kiln tower depicted in the photograph was built sometime during the first three decades of the 19th century. The building appears to be absent from Archdeacon Coxe's Map of 1800,[12] however thirty four years later John Woods plan of the town shows a building on the exact spot as the malt kiln opposite the Gavenny bridge in Mill Street. The earlier map from 1800 clearly shows the large open area close to Mill Street was being used as part of the woollen trade, a tenter field sometimes referred to in Welsh as 'Cae Dynter' was where woollen cloth were hung out to dry on wooden frames after being thickened at a fulling mill.



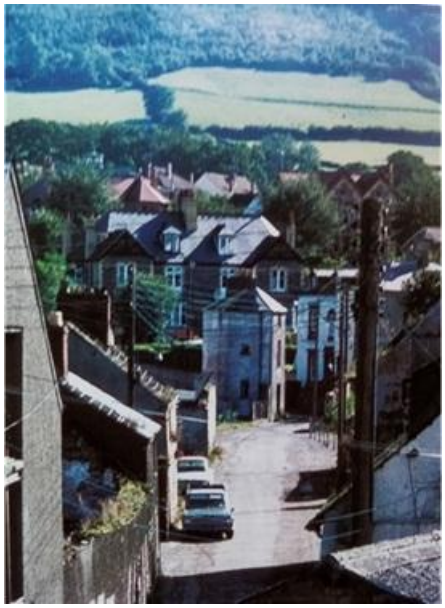
Archdeacon Coxe's Map of 1800



John Woods Plan of Abergavenny 1834

I hope this article has helped shed some light on one of Abergavenny's lesser-known forgotten buildings from the past which would have been a familiar landmark to anyone entering or leaving the town via Mill Street during the 19th century. Until 1847, this was the main route into Abergavenny from the east and south. As early as the 16th century, visitors approaching the town along Mill Street would have encountered a hive of industry: woollen workers stretching their freshly spun cloth on tenter frames, or tanners nearby transforming raw hides into leather. By the 19th century, the fluttering lines of white cloth would have given way to the glow and clatter of an iron foundry.

Amid these sights and sounds, anyone living, working, or simply passing along Mill Street could hardly escape the strong odours that accompanied many of these trades. The Tan Yard, situated on the western edge of the street, would have been especially pungent, its air thick with the unmistakable stench of hides being turned into leather. Yet, amidst these less pleasant smells, the Abergavenny Malt Kiln is likely to have offered an occasional respite. On certain days, the air drifting over the River Gavenny would have carried the warm, musky scent of barley being dried and prepared for brewing a fleeting reminder of the town's industrious spirit and the rhythms of everyday life in old Abergavenny.



Since completing this article, I was made aware of this colour photograph of the Malt Kiln in Mill Street that featured recently in a book about Lost Buildings in Abergavenny compiled by Tim Butters who referred to the building as the 'Pepper pot building' Tim has kindly allowed me to include this photograph in this article.

Tim Rees

Acknowledgements

My thanks the Monlife Heritage for allowing me to use the black & white photographs of Mill Street in this article.

Also Tim Butters Abergavenny Chronicle for the colour photo of Mill Street.

Notes

1. Photograph & description taken from - *Forgotten Abergavenny,* undertaken by Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences as part of the project *Performing Abergavenny: creating a connected community beyond divisions of class, locality and history*, 2013-14.
2. Details of the will are to be found in the Gwent Archives ref D2958/7.
3. John Woods Plan of Abergavenny 1834.
4. Photograph & description taken from A History Project- Forgotten Abergavenny.
5. Wikipedia entry - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malt
6. 1861 Census for Abergavenny.
7. Malt Kilns and Malthouses Historic England.
8. Cymru Fu, (Jan. 21, 1888), p. 62 - "Cymru Fu" was a collection of Welsh folklore, and traditions written by Isaac Foulkes. It was published in three parts between 1862 and 1864.
9. The last Welsh Speakers of the Black Mountains by Richard Gwyn.
10. Cymru Fu, (Jan. 21, 1888), p. 62 - "Cymru Fu".
11. The Pembroke County Guardian and Cardigan Reporter 3rd September 1909 Page 3.
12. Archdeacon Coxe's Map of 1800 & John Woods Plan of Abergavenny 1834.

The Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum in Abergavenny: the first ten years

Introduction

This article explores the development of the Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum in Abergavenny over a ten-year period from its opening in 1851 using evidence from the Annual Reports and Rules of the Asylum produced in that period.

Background

The Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum opened at Pen-y-Fal on 1st December 1851 in Abergavenny. This came about following the Lunacy Act of 1845[1] and the County Asylums Act also of 1845.[2] Prior to this legislation the poor who were suffering from a mental illness were likely to have been housed in the workhouse, house of correction or prison or hidden at home by families. Families with the means sometimes arranged for their mentally ill family member to be housed in one of the 'private mad houses' which were licenced by the justice of the peace. A previous County Asylums Act in 1808[3] had proposed that justices of the peace build county lunatic asylum for the poor but take up had been slow. There were no local asylums in South Wales at this time although there were several private small asylums such as the one at Hereford which housed twenty patients.

An agreement was reached on 13th September 1847 to build an asylum to serve the Counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon and Radnor and the city of Hereford. Initial estimates were that the asylum would need to house 160 patients so plans were drawn up for an asylum to be built which could house 200 with a possible enlargement to 300 in future. A 36-acre farm called Lower Farm in Abergavenny was purchased along with a small meadow and an extra 3½ acres next to the turnpike road. After some land was sold to the railway the cost of the site was £4,545. 9s.4d and the total cost of building the asylum was £37,082.18s.1d. which was shared proportionally between the four counties and city. [4]

The Lunacy Act 1845 established the Lunacy Commission with paid and honorary members whose duty it was to carry out the provisions of the Act. The Act also established local Commissioners in Lunacy who were responsible for inspecting plans for the asylum and carrying out visits to the asylum. The asylum had to be registered with the Commission and had to employ a resident physician. The Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum at Pen-y-Fal had a Committee of Visitors made up of forty members being drawn proportionately from the contributing counties and city of Hereford. As might be expected at this time they were all men.

Moral Treatment

The reference in the duties of the Medical Superintendent (below) to 'the medical or moral treatment' gives us an indication of the prevailing ideas about treatment at the time. The concept of Moral treatment was introduced in England by William Tuke

[1] An Act for the Regulation of the Care and Treatment of Lunatics (1845)
[2] The County Asylums Act (1845) amended 1846.
[3] County Asylums Act (1808).
[4] First annual report of the joint lunatic asylum for the counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon, Radnor and the city of Hereford. United Counties' Lunatic Asylum (Abergavenny, Wales) 1855. Wellcome Collection.

(1732 -1822).[5] At the same time there were similar development in France and America. Prior to this people who had a mental illness were often treated in inhumane ways, beaten and restrained with chains. Tuke, a Quaker, had observed the way patients were treated at the asylum in York and set out to develop an alternative philosophy at a private mental hospital which he established in York with George Jepson in the first half of the 19th century. His ideas centred around treating all patients with kindness and respect and creating a safe rural space such as a farm where they could be occupied in work but also have the benefit of good nutrition and exercise. Restraint of any kind was to be avoided if at all possible. The example set by Tuke went on to influence the work of medical superintendents in the first public asylums. Both the first medical superintendent at the asylum in Abergavenny, John Stewart Allen, who had previously been employed at the Lunatic Infirmary in St. Marleybone, London and the second, David Moore McCullough from Edinburgh, were probably influenced by this movement. The farm setting in Abergavenny provided the perfect environment for this treatment. Throughout all the annual reports examined the medical superintendents and visitors take pride in never using restraint and also try to limit their use of seclusion. The asylum also had provision for airing courts that could be used for outdoor exercise by those not employed on the farm as shown in the plans below.

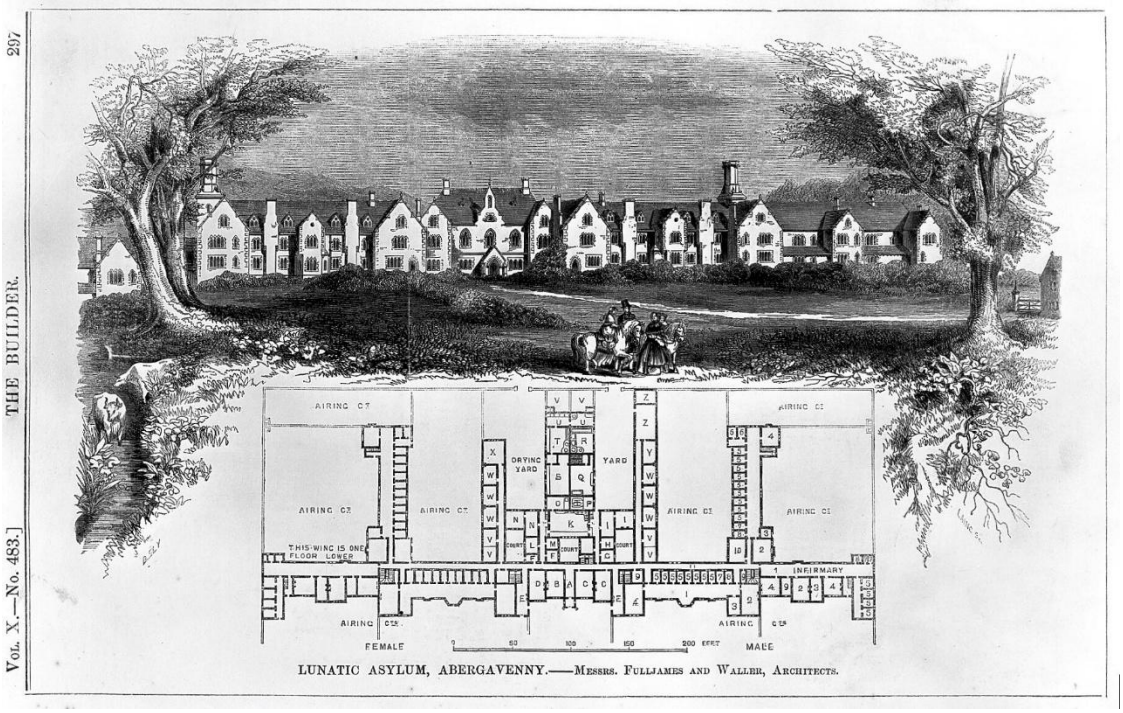


Fig 1, Lunatic Asylum, Abergavenny- Messrs. Fulljames and Walker architects.
(B 51 y. Laing sc. Wellcome Collection 15364i.)

Rules for the Government of the Lunatic Asylum at Abergavenny 1857

One of the surviving copies of Rules[6] give us some insight into how the Asylum was run. The document of rules was approved by Sir. George Grey who was the Home Secretary in Whitehall at the time. It states that the Committee of Visitors is required to nominate twelve visitors to be a House Committee each year. At least one of the visitors was to visit the Asylum weekly and at least three once a month. They were

[5] Online archive 1. William Tuke (1732- 1822) .www.rcpsyh.sc.uk
[6] Rules for the government of the lunatic asylum at Abergavenny. United Counties and City of Hereford Lunatic Asylum (Abergavenny, Wales) 1857 . Wellcome Collection

required to 'inspect the food and see that the contracts are performed; also to see all patients, and all the wards and premises appropriated to their use: and to inquire and examine into the convalescence and improvement of particular patients, and as to the treatment, health and conditions of all.'

We also learn along with the annual reports the importance of financial accountability for the asylum. The visitors were permitted to advance sums up to £10 to the Steward for current expenditure but also had to examine accounts regularly.

The Committee were also responsible for the formal hiring and firing of attendants and servants taking into consideration the recommendations of the Medical Officer.

The Medical Officer

The Medical Officer or Superintendent also had quite a responsibility. He was required at least once each day to see every patient. If one imagines that he devoted 10 hours out of a 12-hour day to this, with 200 patients he would have had only three minutes per patient. He was also required to examine every patient on admission and classify them, order their diet and treatment, whether medical or moral. If a patient died or there was a dangerous accident he had to immediately communicate this in writing to the members of the House Committee for the month. He was also required to keep a journal detailing the hiring and firing of any attendants and the names of any patients who had died and their cause of death, details of any who had escaped and any who could be discharged 'either as cured, or as being in a harmless, chronic state.'
He was also not allowed to leave the asylum overnight without the permission of the Committee of Visitors and providing a competent person as his replacement.

The first Medical Officer was John Stewart Allen who was employed in September 1851 prior to the opening of the asylum. He had qualified as an apothecary prior to his medical qualification.[7] In his first report he noted that in the great majority of patients insanity had been present for between 5 and 20 years and commented that permanent recovery could be hoped for in only a few cases. He regretted that patients were not brought earlier in their illness. He added that it was an established fact that insanity whether dependent on hereditary or congenital causes is comparatively incurable even when treated. Examining his reports for evidence of treatments other than moral treatment there is little mention of the use of any drugs apart from in his first report. Here he refers to the use of cotyledon umbilicus (navelwort or pennywort) and sambul (sic.) (probably sumbul, muskroot). These medications had been highly spoken of, but which were tried without any marked good effect. He had found mineral acids (particularly sulphuric) in combination with sulphate of magnesia to be useful in diminishing the frequency and lessening the violence of epileptic seizures. Interestingly, today magnesium sulphate is recognised as an anti-convulsant and is the first line treatment for pre-eclampsia. Dr. Allen also does not appear to spend significant amounts on medication. In the 1852 report, £26.1s.2d had been spent on drugs, arrowroot and wine compared to £36.17s.6d on tobacco and snuff and £10.4s.on candles. The following year spending on drugs and wine were detailed separately and £23.13s.5d was spent on drugs. By 1856[8] the amount spent on drugs had reduced to £16 8s. compared with £82.5s spent on tobacco and snuff. However,

[7] John Stewart Allen find my past.co.uk accessed 5th January 2026
[8] Fourth annual report of the Committee of Visitors of the joint lunatic asylum for the counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon, Radnor and the city of Hereford, for the year 1856. United Counties' Lunatic Asylum (Abergavenny, Wales) 1857. Wellcome Collection

it must be acknowledged that a considerable amount of laudanum could have been purchased at this time for this price. It may be that the use of laudanum was so common at this time that no reference to it was considered necessary in the annual reports.

Dr. Allen died at the asylum on January 8th, 1858, at the age of 46. He was buried at St. Mary's church. His successor was Dr. David Moore McCullough from Edinburgh. The Visitors Committee announced that he had been selected from many candidates and appointed in March 1858. That year the amount spent on drugs and instruments increased to £52.2s compared with £106 3s 8d spent on tobacco and snuff. [9] Further research would be needed to identify if there was a significant one-off purchase of surgical instruments. By 1859 the Visiting Commissioners in Lunacy were commenting that the management of the asylum had been improved under Dr. McCullough. By 1862,[10] £73 2s 4d was being spent on drugs, £41.19s 0d on wine and only £5 11s on surgical instruments. However, by this time there were more than twice as many patients as when the asylum opened. Patients were allowed a ration of beer or cider and tea. Only the male patients were permitted to drink coffee. Presumably the wine was consumed by the medical staff and visiting dignitaries. The reports did not contain any information suggesting that other treatments such as the use of hot and cold baths. However, an entry from the Commissioners visit for 1858 stated that they noted that three or four patients were now bathed in the same water instead of the larger number noticed previously. This suggests a solitary bath for one person is not something which would have been suggested often for a patient. The records do refer to the use of seclusion where a patient was kept in their bedroom or a padded room for periods of time varying from 15 minutes to many hours. This had to be carefully recorded. In March 1859, the Commissioners approved that seclusion had only been used four times since the previous visit in November.[11] However, by 1862 seclusion had been used for 28 patients over 64 episodes. The majority of times it was for between fifteen minutes and four hours but on four occasions it had been for the whole day. The increased crowding of the asylum may have been a factor in the need for this treatment being resorted to. Study of individual patient notes may add clarity to individual treatment regimes in addition to Moral treatment.
The salary of the Medical Superintendent rose from £350 in 1851 to £430 in 1862.

Assistant Medical Officer
The first assistant medical officer was appointed in 1861 to support the work of the Medical Superintendent and by 1862 was impressing the visiting Commissioners by having reared and domesticated upwards of 50 birds of various kinds which were now distributed in cages through the wards where the patients took care of them. The cages were made in-house. Dr. Thom was clearly ahead of his time in recognising the value of keeping birds as therapy. Hammond, R, Tognin, S, Burgess, L,et. al. (2022) [12] demonstrated the positive effects on mental health of hearing bird song for both

[9] The sixth annual report of the Committee of Visitors of the joint lunatic asylum for the counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon, Radnor, and the city of Hereford, for the year 1858, United Counties' Lunatic Asylum (Abergavenny, Wales) 1859. Wellcome Collection
[10] The tenth annual report of the Committee of Visitors of the joint lunatic asylum, at Abergavenny, for the counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon, Radnor, and the city of Hereford, for the year 1862, United Counties' Lunatic Asylum (Abergavenny, Wales) 1863. Wellcome Collection
[11] The seventh annual report of the Committee of Visitors of the joint lunatic asylum for the counties of Monmouth, Hereford, Brecon, Radnor, and the city of Hereford for the year 1859.
[12] Hammond, R, Tognin, S, Burgess, L, et.al. (2022) Smartphone-based ecological momentary assessment reveals mental health benefits of birdlife, Sci Rep.12, 17589.

healthy people and those suffering with depression. The introduction of Monday evenings' music and dancing and the development of a small band was probably helped by his presence and enthusiasm.

The Chaplain
Another key person in the day to day running of the asylum was the Chaplain. The Chaplain was required to read prayers daily and to perform divine service with a sermon every Sunday and on Christmas Day and Good Friday and to attend any patients the Medical Superintendent considered would benefit. Interestingly, he was required to have a competent knowledge of Welsh but was not required to preach in Welsh.

Reverend W.G. Davies was the chaplain throughout this ten-year period. During this time his duties changed significantly, and his salary was increased to recognise the full-time nature of his work from an initial £100 to £180 per year. He went from initially leading one service on a Sunday to two to accommodate as many patients as possible. His new duties included visiting the wards in the evenings to give talks on various topics and involve the patients in reading and writing classes.

The Matron
The Matron was under the direction of the Committee of Visitors and the Medical Superintendent. She was responsible for the condition of all the female wards and, alongside the medical superintendent, was responsible for all the attendants and servants employed on the female wards. She was expected to see all female patients and their wards at least twice a day and report any illness or injury to the Medical Superintendent. In addition, she oversaw all the bedding and clothing of patients and the making of their clothes and the servants in the kitchen and laundry. She was also 'to use her best endeavours to induce the female patients to occupy themselves in needle and household work, and other fit employment.' For this the matron was paid £40 per year and had board and lodgings.

The reports from Charlotte Simon tend to concentrate on the amount of needlework produced by the female patients of which there was a considerable amount. For example, the output in 1853 included 194 caps, 164 dresses and 117 chemises in addition to many other items including bedding and all the repairs of both the male and female clothing. When the Matron resigned in 1860 her duties were divided into posts for a Housekeeper and a Head Female attendant. The Housekeeper took on the mantle of maintaining the self-sufficiency of the asylum for clothing and bedding.

The Nurses and Attendants
The rules state that a sufficient number should be employed of whom two of each sex must be conversant in Welsh. Female attendants were provided with a uniform and supervised by Matron, whereas male attendants were given funding for their uniform and supervised by the Medical Superintendent. All the attendants 'shall be instructed to treat the patients kindly, and never to strike or speak harshly to them.' They were held responsible for the safety and cleanliness of their patients and for the ventilation and order of their wards.

When the asylum opened there were seven male attendants earning between £18 and £32 per year and seven female attendants earning between £10 and £18 per year. They also had board, lodgings and washing. By 1862 the numbers had increased to 14 male

attendants earning an average of £27 and eighteen female attendants earning an average of £13 per year.

Interestingly by 1860 advertisements for new attendants were hopeful that they would be multi-talented e.g. have the skills of a glazer, or shoemaker in addition to being an attendant. [13] This fitted in with the desire for the asylum to be self-sufficient.

Steward, Treasurer and Auditor
The rules also set out the responsibilities of the Steward, Treasurer, and Auditor. The Steward was responsible for the running of the asylum and the 'quantity, quality, and safe keeping of all articles received, either from tradesmen or from the lands of the Asylum.' He was responsible for keeping all the accounts and making out the bills that were sent to the separate Counties who had patients in the Asylum. He also served as Clerk to the Committee of Visitors.

The Treasurer dealt with all the large expenses and payments of the asylum and was required to submit accounts twice a year. The auditor had to audit the accounts twice yearly and present them to the Committee of Visitors.

Visitors to Patients
Rules on visiting are also included. Near relatives and friends were permitted to visit on weekdays between one and four with the approval of the Medical Superintendent. This seems unlikely to have been convenient if the visitors were in employment, or if the patients were working on the farm. In 'special cases', with the approval of the Medical Superintendent, visiting could occur on a Sunday after the chapel service. Parish Officers were encouraged to visit the patients from their parish at least every three months and to inquire about their treatment and fitness for discharge. Care was taken of the female patients in that they were not allowed a male visitor without the presence of a female attendant.

General Management
The rules also include instruction on the separate care of the male and female patients by attendants of the same sex and separate wards. The distance between beds in the male wards is stipulated to be at least 2 feet and 6 inches and all the male patients are to sleep in single beds. Interestingly, there is no reference to the female beds. Were some of them required to share a bed at times?

The rules also emphasise that no patient can leave the asylum until they are discharged unless the Medical Superintendent has authorised a temporary absence.
The rules detail the procedure on the death of a patient. The clerk was to notify the parish officers and the nearest relatives, when an address was known for them, by post, and the body was to be delivered to them if necessary. However, if the body had not been removed by the fourth day it was to be buried under the direction of the Medical Superintendent. If earlier burial was necessary, a special report had to be prepared for the Board. This may account for some of the burials in the Pen-y-fal cemetery.

The Annual Reports
We can learn something of the running of the Joint Counties Asylum from the Annual Reports produced by the Committee of Visitors, Lunacy Commissioners, Medical

[13] Monmouthshire Beacon 10 March 1860 Page 4 findmypast.co.uk accessed 5th January 2026.

Superintendent and Chaplain. Table 1 details the number of patients in the asylum in each of the ten years examined.

Table 1 : Number of patients in the asylum in December each year 1852 – 1862,
Data Extracted from the Annual Reports of the Medical Superintendents

Year	Males	Females	Total
1852	88	119	207
1853	101	133	234
1854	110	150	260
1855	114	143	257
1856	120	158	278
1857	138	176	314
1858	151	193	344
1859	153	208	361
1860	165	235	400
1861	181	242	423
1862	197	245	442

We can see from this table that the numbers of patients were exceeding that originally planned for by the second complete year of opening. It is also noteworthy that the number of female patients consistently exceeds the number of male patients. Dr. McCullough remarks about this in his 1858 report and explains that this is not due to insanity being more prevalent among women but, as is the case today, the women generally live longer. Dr. McCullough also comments that the increase over the years might also be attributable to changes in the criteria used for insanity to include milder cases of congenital deficiency, epilepsy and dementia of old age and the admission of patients who previously might have remained at home. Over the years the Committee of Visitors made a number of efforts to increase the capacity of the asylum. By the second report in 1854 they had authorised the fitting of a new dormitory on the female side and the erection of a new drying room and conversion of an old drying room into a dormitory creating accommodation for an extra 39 patients.

The following year they were proposing making a male dormitory in the attic floor as had previously been done for the females to accommodate a further 25 patients. These rooms were cold, but patients were given extra blankets in the winter. The Commissioners were also recommending the renting or purchasing of additional land. By 1856, the Committee were recognising the need to extend both the day and sleeping rooms for the female patients. They had had an offer of 13 acres of land for £1,600 which they aimed to bring into cultivation and hence make savings on the purchase of provisions such as potatoes. The asylum was moving towards self-sufficiency. By 1858, the conversion of the attics was complete accommodating up to 370 patients but it was recognised that this sometimes made the day rooms crowded. Architects were employed to prepare plans for an enlargement to contain 125 additional patients. In 1860, the completion of the building was nearly complete but had been delayed due to the bankruptcy of the builder. By 1862, there was accommodation for 257 females and 198 males. There were plans to convert some farm buildings for eight more patients and a separate house had been built for Dr. McCullough to free up his rooms in the asylum for use by patients. The Committee recognised that the current building was at its limits and that no more beds could be placed there.

The Patients

This article would not be complete without some consideration of the patients being cared for in the asylum. Rather than consider the diagnoses given to the patients over the ten-year period, focus is given to just one year to give the reader an insight into the severity of the illness of the patients being cared for.

Table 2, details the Diagnoses of the Patients admitted in 1862 by Dr. McCullough and Table 3, details his ideas on likely causes. Unfortunately, at this level it is not possible to relate potential cause to diagnosis for individuals.

Table: 2 Admissions in 1862

Form of Disorder	Male	Female	Total
Mania :- Recent and acute	20	36	56
Mania - Chronic	5	6	11
Mania - Epileptic	2	3	5
Mania -Puerperal	-	2	2
Mania -Recurrent	1	-	1
Melancholia	12	13	25
Monomania	2	1	3
General Paralysis	7	-	7
Dementia	-	3	3
Imbecility (Congenital)	5	2	7
Idiocy	2		2
Convalescent	2	2	4
Total	58	68	126

It can be observed that a significant number of patients are categorised as suffering from mania. It is likely that this category includes patients who would now be diagnosed with schizophrenia (Eugen Bleuler did not use the terminology until 1908) or bipolar disorder (first described by Carl Jung in 1903). The term ‘ dementia’ at this time was literally interpreted as ‘out of mind’ and hence may have included patients with schizophrenia in addition to those with a senile dementia (Alois Alzheimer did not identify the disease called after him until 1906 and then in a pre-senile case). General Paralysis refers to General Paralysis of the Insane (GPI) and is the terminal stage following infection with syphilis. In this period there was no effective treatment for this disease.

Monomania might today be categorised as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder or fanaticism. The terms ‘idiocy’ and ‘imbecility’ were used in this period to describe patients with a learning difficulty with those labelled ‘ idiots’ considered to have the more severe disability. Despite the severity of the illnesses identified, Dr. McCullough considered that in two thirds of admissions there was a prospect of recovery, while in one third there was no hope of recovery. When the Commissioners visited the asylum in 1862, they found that 130 men and 173 women were employed on the farm, workshops, laundry or office out of a total of 433 patients.

Table3: Identification of Causes of Insanity in Admissions in 1862

Causes	Male	Female	Total
Congenital weakness of mind	7	3	10
Disease of Brain	8	1	9
Injury of Head	3	---	3
Epilepsy	1	3	4
Ill Health	1	5	6
Intemperance	3	---	3
Profligacy	---	1	1
Childbirth	---	4	4
Prolonged Lactation	---	3	3
Disorder of Menstruation	---	1	1
Neuralgia	---	1	1
Hysteria	---	1	1
Climacteric Period	---	1	1
Old Age	---	2	2
Imprisonment	1	---	1
Fright	---	2	2
Disappointed Affection	---	1	1
Reverse of Fortune	---	4	4
Unknown	34	35	69
Total	58	68	126

Climacteric period refers to the perimenopause, menopause and post menopause periods. It is interesting to consider how Dr. McCullough arrived at these suggestions for causes and highlights the beginnings of an understanding of some of the organic causes of mental illness but also the remains of older interpretations such as 'hysteria' and 'profligacy'. It is probably to his credit that he admitted not being able to identify a cause in half of the admissions.

Conclusion

This article has examined some of the information available from the Annual Reports of the Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum in relation to the expansion of the asylum, the roles of key staff and treatment of patients using 'moral therapy'. The article has only examined the initial ten-year period. There are records for at least the following fifteen years readily available online in addition to those held at Gwent Archives which include individual patient records. In addition, no attempt has been made to study the records relating to the operation of the farm, other employees of the asylum or material contained in the censuses of the time. There remains a wealth of material that could be explored further.

Christina Maciejewski

The Metamorphosis of Abergavenny's Drill Hall into the Baker Street Cinema

Drill Halls date back to the 19th century. On 12 May 1859 the Volunteer Rifle Corps and Artillery Corps (in coastal towns) was created from the Militia and Yeomanry (prosperous farmers who were volunteer soldiers on horseback). These volunteer men then received similar military training to the regular army, but they needed somewhere suitable to train. Drill Halls, of differing sizes and architecture, were built in local areas and provided large indoor open halls, space for storage, an armoury, and some had target ranges. In 1908 the Voluntary Rifles became the Territorial Force (TF), then renamed the Territorial Army (TA) in 1920, the Territorial and Army Volunteer Reserve in 1967, reverting back to the TA in 1979[1] and finally in 2012 the name changed again to the Army Reserve.[2] Apart from military training, Drill Halls were used for other various social functions within the community.[3]

Abergavenny's Drill Hall

The Drill Hall in Abergavenny was designed by the architect E. A. Johnson and built by J. G. Thomas and Sons for the 4th Voluntary Battalion South Wales Borderers (SWB) H and I Companies. A Battalion is a unit of 500 – 1000 soldiers[4] and a Company, usually named alphabetically, is part of a Battalion and consists of between 100 and 150 soldiers.[5] The Drill Hall is built out of Old Red Sandstone red bricks[6] with contrasting stone blocks surrounding the windows, which vary in size and shape from round, arched and square. The front of the building measures almost 29 metres/95 feet and it is 14.6 metres/48 feet deep.

Photographs from the front and side views of the Drill Hall/Brecon Road Cinema in Abergavenny.
(*Photographs taken by the author on 29 May 2025*)

[1] Carmichael, K. (2015) English Heritage Research Report Series no. 6-2015 *Drill Halls A National Overview* Available at: https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/6277/DrillHallsANationalOverview. Accessed: 5 May 2025.
[2] Army Reserve *Your Reserve Questions Answered* Available at: https://jobs.army.mod.uk/army-reserve/faqs Accessed: 18 September 2025.
[3] Carmichael, K. (2015) English Heritage Research Report Series no. 6-2015 *Drill Halls A National Overview* Available at: https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/6277/DrillHallsANationalOverview Accessed: 5 May 2025.
[4] National Army Museum *British Army Organisation Battalion* Available at: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/army-organisation Accessed: 12 March 2025.
[5]National Army Museum *British Army Organisation Company* Available at: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/army-organisation Accessed: 12 March 2025.
[6] Abergavenny and District Civic Society *A Design Statement for the Abergavenny Urban Area* Version 4-September 2018 Available at: https://abercivsoc/acsdesignstatement 081018.pdf. Accessed: 13 April 2025.

As regards funding, it is unclear whether the building was financed solely by Colonel Burton, the Commanding Officer of the 4th Volunteer Battalion South Wales Borderers, or by donation or contributions from other sources or a combination of the two. What is certain is that the Government made no financial contributions to the Drill Hall.[7] The building was completed in 1896.
The terracotta foundation or memorial stone was supplied by the monumental sculptor Mr Evans and laid in 1895 by Mrs W. D. Steel, the wife of Major W. D. Steel. Colonel Burton, Colonel Mansell, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, and the Officers of the H and I Companies were also present. The architect placed a large bottle containing a copy of the *Abergavenny Chronicle* and a few new coins in a cavity behind the foundation stone.[8]

The Foundation or Memorial Stone of the Abergavenny Detachment of the 4th. V.B.S.W.B.
Photograph taken by the author on 24 May 2025.

The inscription reads:

DRILL HALL
OF THE
ABERGAVENNY DETACHMENT OF THE 4th. V.B.S.W.B
THIS MEMORIAL STONE
WAS LAID BY
Mrs. W. D. STEEL
27 DEC. 1895.

Some reports state that the Drill Hall had a target range underneath the main hall, but there is some debate surrounding its existence. During a conversation with Viv on 14 November 2025, he spoke about his training at the Drill Hall during his time as a Regular soldier in the Royal Artillery during his National Service in 1952 and in the TA in 1954. He could not recall a target range during his time there, but that is not to say there wasn't one there previously. He did remember marching through Abergavenny though. Most of his training with guns took place on the Bannau Brycheiniog or on Salisbury Plain.

[7] Abergavenny and Monmouthshire Advertiser *The Volunteers' Drill Hall* January 3 1896 p.3 Available at: Abergavenny Library Microfilm Number 20. Accessed: 26 September 2025.
[8] Abergavenny and Monmouthshire Advertiser *The Volunteers' Drill Hall* January 3 1896 p.3 Available at: Abergavenny Library Microfilm Number 20. Accessed: 26 September 2025.

Who were the South Wales Borderers?

The South Wales Borderers or the SWB have a long and complicated history, mainly because Army Regiments are disbanded, divided or combined with others for active or economic reasons. A Regiment or Corps may vary from one to several Battalions and is a permanent unit in the Army. Each Regiment has its own history, traditions and insignia[9]. A brief history of the South Wales Borderers is outlined below.

In 1689 Sir Edward Dering formed an Infantry Unit, which in 1747 was ranked as 24th in the British Army. In 1751, the Unit was given the infantry order of 24 and renamed the 24th (The 2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot. The Regiment moved from Warwickshire to Brecon in South Wales in 1873 and under Army reforms in 1881, it became The South Wales Borderers.[10] In July 1885 the 3rd Corps (or Regiment) of The Monmouth Rifle Volunteers joined the 4th Voluntary Battalion South Wales Borderers and were based in Abergavenny, and fought in the Boer War. Then in 1908, under further Army reforms the 4th Battalion of the South Wales Borders became the 3rd Battalion The Monmouthshire Regiment, known as the 3rd Mons. The Battalion became well known in Abergavenny during both World Wars. In WWI (1914 – 1918) the 3rd Mons Battalion fought gallantly in France and Belgium. During the Second World War (1939 – 1945) the 3rd Monmouthshire Regiment served in the UK until 13 of June 1944 when they were deployed to France to fight in northwest Europe.[11] The War Memorial in Frogmore Street[12] and the marble Memorial plaque on the right-hand wall as you enter the Market Hall are dedicated to the men of the 3rd Mons who died in WWI[13]. Those who gave their lives in WWII are remembered in an inscription on the back of the War Memorial in Frogmore Street and a plaque on the left-hand wall as you enter the Market Hall[14].

In 1947 the 3rd Mons became the 637 (3rd Mons) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment Royal Artillery (TA). The Regiment was granted the freedom of the Borough of Abergavenny in 1953 and with the reorganisation of the Territorial Army in 1967, the 3rd Mons Regiment ceased to exist, but its traditions still live on in Abergavenny.[15] However, in 1969 the SWB amalgamated with the Welch Regiment to become The Royal Regiment of Wales (24th/41st Foot), then on 1 March 2006 merged with the Royal Welch Fusiliers to become The Royal Welsh.[16] The Drill Hall ceased to be used for military training in 1969.

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[9] National Army Museum *British Army Organisation The Regimental System* Available at: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/regimental-system Accessed: 24 July 2025.
[10] South Wales Borderers *South Wales* Available at: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/south-wales-borderers Accessed: 18 September 2025.
[11] Cwm & Waunlwyd Community Archive *History of the 3rd. Battalion The Monmouthshire Regiment* Available at: https://Cwm-Waulwyd.gwentheritage.org.uk/content/catalogue-item/history-of-the-3rd-batt-the-monmouthshire-regt. Accessed: 26 February 2025.
[12] Wakley, G. ***Monmouthshire Regiment memorial, Abergavenny*** Available at: https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=monmouthshire-regiment-memorial-abergavenny Accessed: 17 March 2025.
[13] Wakley, G. and Senior, M and Gwent FHS *Abergavenny First World War Memorial* Available at: https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=abergavenny-war-memorial-fww Accessed: 17 March 2025.
[14] Yendall, D. et al and Mellor, C. *Abergavenny Second World War Memorial* Available at: https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=abergavenny-war-memorial-sww Accessed: 17 March 2025.
[15] Cwm & Waunlwyd *History of the 3rd. Battalion The Monmouthshire Regiment* Available at: https://Cwm-Waulwyd.gwentheritage.org.uk/content/catalogue-item/history-of-the-3rd-batt-the-monmouthshire-regt. Accessed: 26 February 2025.
[16] The British Army *The Royal Welsh* Available at: https://www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/about-the-army/corps-regiments-and-units/infantry/royal-welsh/ Accessed: 25 February 2025.

What was the Drill Hall in Abergavenny used for?
The Drill Hall was used for drill practice in which the volunteers practiced marching and were trained in the use of weapons. Drilling taught teamwork, discipline and self-control.[17] During WWI the 3rd Mons also used Bailey Park and the cattle market for marching practice two evenings a week.[18] Soldiers certainly used the Drill Hall in the 1940s, for four of the soldiers scratched their names into the bricks where the advertising boards are now placed to the left of the cinema entrance, as seen below.

Names of the four soldiers scratched into the bricks. (*Photographs taken by the author on 24 May 2025)*

In the past the Drill Hall has also been used for several community events such as gymnastics by the Abergavenny Gymnastics Club,[19] PE and exercise by prisoners aged between 16 and 21 years old,[20] amateur dramatics,[21] roller-skating sessions which were held every Thursday and Saturday evenings between 7.30pm and 9.30pm,[22] boxing matches organised by the Abergavenny Sports Committee,[23] Fairs and Fêtes. In 1939 the 3rd Mons Regiment displayed weapons, such as machine guns, anti-tank rifles,

[17] Britannica *Drill Military* Available at: http://britannica.com/topic/drill-military Accessed: 10 May 2025.
[18] Abergavenny and Monmouthshire Advertiser *Abergavenny Town Council Civilian Volunteer Corps* April 16 1915, p. 8. Available at: https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4121236/4121244/110/?from= search. Accessed: 19 February 2025.
[19] Abergavenny Chronicle *Abergavenny Gymnastics Club* 4 March 1898 Available at: Abergavenny Library Microfilm Number 21. Accessed: 25 September 2025.
[20] Abergavenny Chronicle *Youthful Prisoners* 16 April 1909 p. 2 Available at: https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119823/4119825/39/drill Accessed: 25 February 2025.
[21] Abergavenny Chronicle *Amateur Theatricals at the Drill Hall* 19 February 1909 p.8 Available at: https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119751/4119759/ Accessed 16 November 2024.
[22] Abergavenny Chronicle *Advertising* 29 January 1909 p.5 Available at: https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119724/4119729/66/drill Accessed: 25 February 2025
[23] Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser *Boxing at Abergavenny* January 8 1937 Available at: Abergavenny Library Microfilm Number 60. Accessed: 25 September 2025.

trench mortars and armoured vehicles in the Drill Hall.[24] The Drill Hall has also been used as a dance hall and various retail outlets such as a Do-it-yourself (DIY) store [25], a carpet shop and a bed and furniture store.

How did the Drill Hall become Baker Street Cinema?

After a ten-year ambition to open an independent cinema in a market town Peter and Irene Davies bought the Drill Hall in March 2009, completing the conversion into a cinema in just over a year.[26] On 7 May 2010 the cinema opened to the public, with the official opening by the mayoress Norma Watkins on 17 May 2010. The mayoress, along with other town councillors, residents and the Davies' family and friends enjoyed an outdoor buffet and a 'behind the scenes' tour before watching the screening of a Sherlock Holmes film, a reference to Baker Street in London[27]. It has two screens, 280 seats and Dolby technology. There was great excitement in the town when the then Prince Charles attended a red-carpet premiere of the film *Resistance* at the cinema on 21 November 2011. The film is an adaptation of Owen Sheers' debut novel and stars Michael Sheen[28]. Apart from this cinema there have been three other cinemas in Abergavenny in the past.

The first was the Picture Palace which opened in 1912 in Park Hall, a corrugated iron hall in Park Road, behind Tesco today. It closed in 1918.[29] In November 1913 The Coliseum in Lion Street opened as Abergavenny's second cinema. It was built by the Abergavenny Coliseum Company and had 600 seats. By the 1930s it had 780 seats and a sound system was installed to show the '"Talking Pictures". In the mid-1950s an 8.5 metre (28 foot) wide screen and CinemaScope (a process of projecting widescreen films with special lenses) were installed.[30] By 1987 a smaller cinema was created upstairs, whilst the stalls were converted into shops. The last film was shown in 1992, when the bingo hall moved here from the Pavilion Cinema. The cinema became a Wetherspoon Public House on 14 March 2001.[31] Cinema number 3 was built at 21 Monk Street and called The Pavilion. It opened in late 1928 or early 1929 and closed in 1930. After re-decoration, new seating and a sound system, it opened again as a cinema on 24 April 1935. In the mid-1950s CinemaScope and a 6.4 metres (21 foot) wide screen were fitted. From 9 January 1967 the cinema was a bingo hall, which closed in 1992 and moved to The Coliseum above. In 1999 the building was bought and restored. Since 2001 the building has been used by The Gateway Christian Centre.[32]

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[24] Constable J. (2019) Abergavenny Local History Society Newsletter No. 35 August 2019 *80 Years Since The Town Trod The Road To War* p.5 Available at: https://abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk/gallery/2019.pdf Accessed: 19 April 2025.

[25] South Wales Argus *Baker Street Cinema in Abergavenny goes up for sale* Available at: www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25069658.baker-street-cinema-abergavenny-goes-sale/. Accessed 29 September 2025.

[26] South East News *Cinema returns to Abergavenny* Available at: news.bbc.co.uk/local/southeastwales/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_8673000/867356. Accessed: 18 September 2025.

[27] Abergavenny Chronicle *Baker Street Cinema Opens 17 May 2010* May 20 2010 p. 9. Accessed: 9 April 2025.

[28] South Wales Argus *Charles in Abergavenny for film premier* Available at: www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/9376956.charles-in-abergavenny-for-film-premier. Accessed: 9 April 2025.

[29] Wakley, G. and Woolley, G. *The Abergavenny Coliseum* Available at: https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=the-abergavenny-coliseum Accessed: 11 March 2025.

[30] Cinema Treasures *Coliseum Cinema* Available at: https://cinematreasures.org/theaters/44561 Accessed: 11 March 2025.

[31] Wakley, G. and Woolley, G. *The Abergavenny Coliseum* Available at: https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=the-abergavenny-coliseum Accessed: 11 March 2025.

[32] Cinema Treasures *Pavilion Cinema* Available at: https://cinematreasures.org/therаters/44562 Accessed: 11 March 2025.

Now we are back to Abergavenny's fourth cinema in Baker Street. Sadly, the cinema was put up for sale in May 2025 but almost immediately the stirrings of the community purchasing the cinema surfaced, with an online survey to gauge community interest.[33] In July 2025 *The Abergavenny Focus* reported that a post on *Abergavenny Voice* asking if residents were interested in buying the cinema had an overwhelming positive response, resulting in two public meetings and the setting up of a Steering Group. The Steering Group applied to become a Community Benefits Society (CBS)[34]. A CBS is a not-for-profit company which is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. This will enable local people to buy the cinema by raising money through shares, fundraising and a social interest loan.[35] The application was approved and the formulation of a business plan and share offer was set in motion.[36] Regrettably in September 2025 it was decided by the Committee of the Abergavenny Community Cinema Campaign to scrap the plans for a community purchase due to the financial constraints on running the cinema[37].

But in December 2025 hope was reignited again for the Cinema when Dance Blast announced an interest in purchasing the Cinema in order to expand its existing circus classes at the Melville Centre. As well as creating more circus space, other community activities such as 'a community cinema and/or an exhibition space for visual arts' are envisaged. A survey entitled the Dance Blast Aerial Circus Project is now underway to seek the views of the community.[38]

Conclusion

Abergavenny's Drill Hall has had a long and illustrious association with the South Wales Borderers and the 3rd Monmouthshire Regiment dating back to 1895, when the foundation or memorial stone was laid. It has been used for military as well as community purposes. Volunteer soldiers were trained here during both World Wars, but particularly for the Boer War and World War I. It has also been very much part of the town's community through its use for community events and as a retail outlet, but particularly as an independent cinema for the last fifteen years. Hopefully the Drill Hall/Baker Street Cinema will remain a vital part of the community in the future. Although the Abergavenny Community Cinema Campaign has withdrawn, hope rises again with the prospects of Dance Blast purchasing the site, although that is far from certain at this present time.

Marilyn Diosi

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Viv who spent time talking to me about his training experiences at the Drill Hall during his time in the Royal Artillery, both as a Regular and TA soldier. It is much appreciated.

[33] Abergavenny Chronicle (2025) *News* June 4 Volume 155 Issue No. 23 p. 5.
[34] Weller, E. (2025) *Join the Community effort to Save Baker Street Cinema* The Abergavenny Focus July Issue 216 p. 7.
[35] Webb J. (2025) *Abergavenny Community Cinema Campaign Update* August Issue The Abergavenny Focus 217 p. 5.
[36] Abergavenny Chronicle (2025) *News* June 4, Volume 155. Issue Number 23. p. 5.
[37] Oakley, T. (2005) *Community Cinema purchase plans shelved over business plan* 29 September. Available at: https://www.abergavennychronicle.com/news/community-cinema-purchase-plans-shelved-over-business-plan-836441 Accessed: 2 October 2025.
[38] The Abergavenny Focus *A New Circus Space in Abergavenny?* December 2005 Issue 221 p. 23.

From Serf to Freeman –
Social Change in Fourteenth Century Abergavenny

Strip farming at Chatsworth Park
in the Peak District (*Derbyshire Heritage*
https://derbyshireheritage.co.uk)

Great Haseley Tower Mill
Oxfordshire (*Wikipedia*)

The view from the Blorenge: Oblong fields enclosed
by hedges, rough grazing above (*Gill Wakley*)

Laxton near Nottingham, still farmed in
the traditional way in strips (*Wikipedia*)

Looking at Landscapes

Wherever I have lived previously (as in the pictures above), there have been the remains of strip farming – the long narrow strips left by the open field system. In medieval times the large manorial fields were divided into long, narrow strips cultivated in rotation with fallow periods, and managed communally with shared plough teams and grazing rights on common lands. Enclosure from the 1750s onwards changed this pattern but some areas escaped and, in others, the patterns imposed by the strip farming persist in the landscape.

As a child, I would walk up to Great Haseley windmill (before its restoration) and over the baulks – the raised areas of ground where the plough turned around – that separated the strips. In Nottinghamshire, the existing strip farming areas at Laxton could still be visited. In the Peak District, I walked for miles looking down on the remains of the strip farming. But when I moved to Abergavenny there were only rectangular or square fields stretching between the hills of the Blorenge and the Sugar Loaf. Why was the land management so different?

The Great Famine

The most extensive famine of the Middle Ages was the "Great Famine" which lasted between 1315 to 1317[1]. Poor weather persisted until 1322, but not in such a severe form. It affected large numbers of people in Northern Europe, and it is thought between 5-10 percent of people died. The famine came near the end of a long period where the population had increased and marginal land brought into cultivation, but this trend was reversed with poor crops and the death of animals. The Great Famine started with bad weather in spring 1315. Crop failures lasted through 1316 until the summer harvest in 1317, and Europe did not fully recover until 1322. Crop failures were not the only problem. Cattle disease caused sheep and cattle numbers to fall as much as 80 per cent, although figures are hard to establish. Salt, required for the preservation of food, increased greatly in price, as most was then produced by evaporation, impossible without long periods of sunshine, rather than excavation.

The cause was mainly due to a change in the weather. The winters were colder, and rain persisted throughout the spring, summer and autumn. Yields of crops fell and animals died in large numbers. The Black Death of 1347–1352 was more lethal[2], but the Great Famine was the worst natural catastrophe of the later Middle Ages. The cause of the change in weather is not recorded but this type of weather pattern typically follows volcanic events, sometimes on the opposite side of the world, which obscure the sun. It may perhaps have been Mount Tarawera in New Zealand which is known to have erupted around 1314.[3]

The famine undermined traditional and unthinking belief in the Roman Catholic Church, as no amount of prayer changed the weather. Crime increased with desperation. It was thought that the immorality and poor decisions by Edward II contributed to his downfall in 1327[4].

The Black Death

In 1348 the arrival of the 'Black Death' must have seemed terrifying to people who were already impoverished and poorly fed. People died rapidly, sometimes within hours of becoming ill (septicaemic infection), or within a few days with the dramatic black swellings in their armpits and groins (Bubonic Plague) which gave more time for the infection to spread. With the pneumonic form (not recognised at the time), they might cough their bacteria into the air, confirming the miasmic theory of the spread of disease prevalent at the time (that it spread through poor air quality).

The Black Death, the plague caused by *Yersinia pestis* bacteria, spread from Crimea across the whole of Europe[5]. The pneumonic form, spread by coughing from infected lungs probably contributed more to its spread than the dramatic bubonic form with its black coloured swollen enlarged lymph nodes marking out the victims. This bubonic form was greatly feared, as was the septicaemic infection which killed so rapidly that no signs appeared, just a fever, an 'ague', and rapid death a few hours later. The belief then was that infection was spread through the air as a 'miasma'. Not a helpful concept in its control when the infection was mainly spread by its host – fleas carried by people

[1] https://britishfoodhistory.com/2020/09/09/the-great-famine-1315-1317/ October 2025
[2] Rees, W. (1920) "*The Black Death in Wales*," Trans. Royal Hist. Soc. 4, 3, 115-35
[3] https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/The-Great-Flood-Great-Famine-of-1314/ (October 2025)
[4] Ackroyd, Peter. *The History of England Volume I: Foundation'* (2012)
[5] https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death/Effects-and-significance (October 2025)

and animals - but that mode of transmission was not established until 1898. The infection was probably brought to Britain by ship, and Bristol was likely to have been the local port of entry to south-eastern Wales with its frequent passages between Bristol and Chepstow and then taking goods on through the hinterland.

Death Rates

It is difficult to establish accurate statistics about mortality at that time[6]. According to official records about the English royal family, an example of the well off in society and for whom the best records were kept, the average life expectancy at birth in 1276 was 35.28 years[7]. Between 1301 and 1325, during the Great Famine, it dropped to 29.84 years, but between 1348 and 1375 during the years of the Plague, it was only 17.33 years. The average life expectancy figures are skewed by child mortality rates, which were naturally high even during non-famine years. However, this demonstrates the steep population drop between 1348 and 1375 of about 42%.[8] Historians of medieval England have looked to a limited range of estate documentation, including records of tenant deaths in manorial court rolls, to estimate total mortality and chart year on year changes. Given differences in landholding, land management and the general lack of comparable record types, this cannot be done with any accuracy for Wales and the Welsh March. It is clear, however, that mortality was considerable.

Another cause of excess mortality may have been the war with France. Many Welsh soldiers went to fight, as foot soldiers or skilled archers, and did not return[9] . During much of this period St Mary's Priory, and its profits, reverted to the King[10] because the links with France were severed.

By March 1349 the death rates in the Lordship of Abergavenny were recorded as particularly high[11]. The rents from the hamlets there only produced about one-third of their former rents. It is recorded that many of the villeins, those tied to the land by agreements with Lord, fled, spreading the infection more widely.

Social change during and after the loss of population

It was not just the poor and ill-fed who died from the plague – but their deaths had a profound effect on the inhabitants of Abergavenny castle. The tomb of Lawrence de Hastings, Lord of Abergavenny and son of John Hastings the Younger, can be found in St Mary Priory Church. He died in 1348 during the Black Death epidemic.

[6] Aberth, John. *The Black Death: A New History of the Great Mortality in Europe, 1347-1500*. OUP 2022.
[7] https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/why-did-people-die-danger-medieval-period-life-expectancy/ November 2025
[8] Dattani, Saloni. *"Measuring the Black Death." Asimov Press*. https://www.asimov.press/p/black-death (November 2025)

[9] Chapman Adam, *Welsh Soldiers in the Later Middle Ages 1282-1422,* Boydell Press 2015.
[10] https://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk/gallery/St%20Mary's%20Research%20Documents.pdf
[11] file:///C:/Users/athry/Desktop/rees-1923-the-black-death-in-england-and-wales-as-exhibited-in-manorial-documents.pdf

Lawrence De Hastings tomb in St Mary's Priory Church, Abergavenny

The window recess to the south of this tomb contains another tomb thought to be that of William de Hastings, his brother, who also died of the plague. There are records of grants to the Hastings from the King providing for reinforcement and extension of the town defences of ditch and bank in 1241-6 and1259-64 as a response to the aggression from Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in neighbouring Brycheiniog[12]. They could fight off the Welsh, but not the Plague.

As a result of the decimation of the population many families died out, and power became concentrated in a smaller number of ruling families. William Beauchamp inherited Abergavenny Castle after the Hastings and King Henry IV (reigned 1367-1413) gave instructions to strengthen and reinforce Abergavenny castle and increase the size of the garrison. William Beauchamp was ordered to stay at the castle and defend it and the town until 1409. The walls were built in stone, the original gatehouse was replaced, and the remains can be seen today. The garrison then included some 80 mounted soldiers and around 400 archers. In 1402, a riot broke out in Abergavenny after the constable attempted to hang three townsmen outside this castle gate. Their supporters stormed the castle, freed the prisoners by a daring assault, and imprisoned Lady Joan Beauchamp in the keep. The authority of the Castle was much less feared. Shortly afterwards, in 1404, the town was sacked during the great Welsh rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr, but the castle itself withstood the siege and was not captured, relieved by the arrival of the army of Richard York and the Sheriff of Hereford.

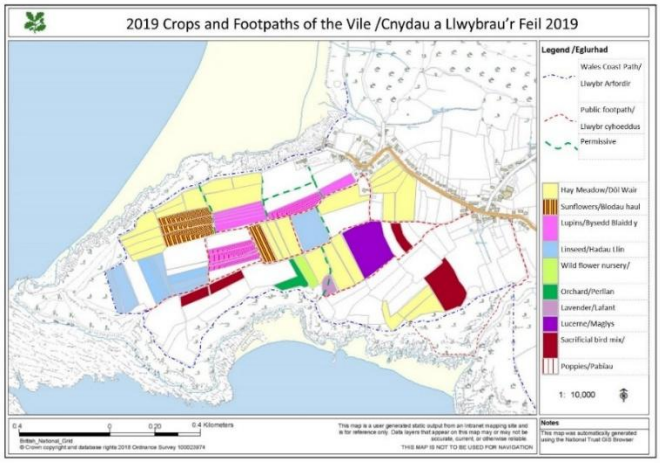
Land management

The Anglo-Norman Lords of the Marches had established manors in the same way as in England and there were eight around Abergavenny which provided cereal crops [6]. The Lord of Abergavenny castle received income from the sale of crops from their own lands overseen by the reeve, an official employed by the castle who organised the rotation and type of crops grown. Yields were very low compared with today. Large numbers of people were involved in producing food both for local consumption and for sale. Many of the workers were those who had had been invited by their Anglo-Norman overlords – retainers from other Lordship holdings and those lured by the promise of land and more status in the border lands, acquired in the years since the Norman Conquest. Most were villeins, partially free tenants who worked their land as well as owing several days a week working for the Lord. Ploughmen, carters, dairy workers and cowherds were needed for the fields, but in upland areas most of the land

[12] Ralph A. Griffiths, Tony Hopkins, and Ray Howell (Eds)*The Gwent County History Vol 2*. Univ. of Wales Press for Gwent County History Association.

around Abergavenny was unsuitable for crops. In the land used for pasture, swineherds for the pigs, shepherds for the sheep, and cowmen for the cattle, amongst others, looked after the animals.

The arable open field system had been adopted throughout the Marches, wherever there was suitable lowland land to support it, as, for example, on the sloping fields running down to the flood meadows surrounding the rivers. This involved two or three large fields surrounding a settlement. These fields were divided into long narrow strips which were allotted to the villagers by the reeve as shown by the plan from the Gower. These strips alternated between arable farming (crops) and fallow (land that is fertilised with dung and left uncultivated for a season to allow it to regain its nutrients). However, this system was adversely affected by the loss of population in the 14th century to manage the system in such a labour-intensive way. The open field system was largely abandoned and replaced by enclosed pastoral farming[13]. This new system involved regular-shaped fields that were marked by boundaries, either woodland, ditches or hedges, which can still be traced today, and the pattern is clear on the Tithe maps[14] and looking down from the hills around.



An example of strip farming in the Gower - a common pattern in lowland fields

It is estimated that the mortality rate in 1348-9 was 30 – 50%. It was less than 10% in the next wave of 1361-2 when it appears many of those affected were the young not exposed previously[15] - that is, if you had survived the first wave, you were protected to a large degree from being infected again. Further waves of infection continued intermittently but none as severe as the first. The landowners and their retainers were trained to be fighting men, owing military service to their Lord and their King, and their officials were also ignorant of agricultural skills. Who, then, would do this agricultural work?

Efforts to regulate employment

Villeins were peasants who were legally tied to land owned by a local lord. If they wanted to move, or even get married, they needed the permission of the lord first. In return for being allowed to farm the land they lived on, villeins had to give some of the food they grew each year to the lord. Villeins worked on the strips of land, spread out in different fields across the village. Life could be hard; if crops failed to produce

[13] Roberts. K. ed., *Lost farmsteads. Deserted rural settlements in Wales,* Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 148, 2006
[14] https://places.library.wales/ Search for Tithe Maps around Abergavenny
[15] https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/society-economy-and-law-fourteenth-century-england (October 2025)

enough food, they starved. Some peasants were freemen who were able to move round from one village to another and did not have the same restrictions on them as villeins did. Most had been tied until their labour became more important because there were so few of them.

In England and Wales, Edward III (1327 to 1377) and his lords first created the Ordinance (1349) and then the Statute (1351) of Labourers, which froze wages at pre-plague levels. The Statute of Labourers forced workers not otherwise engaged in fixed, long-term employment into year-long contracts with the first employer who demanded it and established penalties to ensure compliance. The ruling classes put their efforts behind the control of waged labour rather than the retrenchment of serfdom. Rural landowners sought a resolution to the impasse and thought they could use the existing market for labour but control the terms of exchange. Many peasants, however, refused to play their assigned deferential role or carry out their previous customary service. Every Court Record[16] from 1352 onwards gives examples of workers (villeins) who refused to continue their deference to their overlords across England and Wales. They left their tied employment to work for better wages elsewhere or demanded higher wages to continue their services. The arcane restrictive land tenures changed to contractual leaseholds, rental income for the lord fell substantially and many escaped from serfdom with the confidence imparted by survival from the Black Death. Being paid in cash, rather than in kind (in the granting of privileges such as the right to collect firewood), meant that peasants had more money to spend in towns. They also had the freedom to move and find another employer.

One trade which did prosper in the Marches during the Middle Ages was wool[17]. The Border lands had large areas of open moorland with fertile pastures ideal for the rearing of sheep. There was also a plentiful water supply for the treatment of wool. However, this trade was not enough to sustain the whole of the county. The salmon fisheries on the River Usk also continued as a source of income and food, but again, fewer people were available to work in this profitable business.

Revolution to the East in England

The Peasants Revolt in 1381[18] mainly affected the eastern counties of England. The change of king to a teenage Richard II emboldened the peasants into thinking that they could influence a young King and change their status. By June 1381, people had had three poll tax assessments in less than four years (1377, 1379 and 1381.) There seemed no end in sight for these assessments, and each was higher than the last[19]. Rebels from Kent joined Wat Tyler on his march to London. Jack Straw's "Men of Essex" began a march of their own and they too arrived in London.

Given the importance of religion at this time, it inevitably played a major role in this uprising. Overall, clergymen belonged to the upper classes, the younger sons of families either fighting or joining the church. Their extended families were the landed gentry who owned the land and kept the villeins tied to the land. During the Plague, many churchmen died, inevitably, given their close contact to those infected. Some were replaced by less well-educated men who were closer to the agricultural workers,

[16] https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/court-kings-bench-records-1200-1600/ November 2025
[17] Griffiths R. A., "Wales and the Marches", *in The Cambridge urban history of Britain,* I: 600–1540,
[18] https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zyb77yc#zc8pp4j November 2025
[19] https://www.britannica.com/topic/poll-tax October 2025

while in other areas, the clergy were absent altogether or served by those who covered several parishes and had less contact with, and influence over, their parishioners. Wycliffe's writings[20] were circulating amongst the better educated and by word of mouth amongst the less literate. He protested against the taxation of the poor, and wrote "What greater injustice could be conceived, than that the king and his nobles …spoil the poor of the things they need to live?" John Ball was a radical preacher who was critical of the feudal system and the Church. He had been excommunicated in 1366, having delivered sermons in which he suggested that society should not be organised by a class system. Medieval society regarded the monarchy and nobility as more important than the peasants, yet John Ball preached that God saw everyone as equal, and that peasants were unfairly treated. His ideas and preaching encouraged peasants to demand changes. He spoke to a crowd of peasants at Blackheath, in the south of London during their rebellious march, encouraging them to rebel and demand greater rights. Later, he was captured, tried and denying nothing, he was hung, drawn and quartered.

The leaders of the rebellion met with the young king on June 14th, but the outcome was dubious despite the promises made by the king. While the meeting took place, the rebels stormed the Tower of London killing those who hid there, including the Lord Chancellor and Lord Treasurer. Richard II sent soldiers to round up the rebels. Leaders of the revolt were executed, including the preacher John Ball and the leader of the Essex rebels, Jack Straw. The revolt had largely failed to achieve the changes and improvements that the peasants were looking for, but it did help to show that they had the ability to organise themselves in mass numbers. This served as a warning message to future monarchs that peasants could form a potentially powerful opposition.

Although serfdom was not abolished, the rules were relaxed over time. Where previously they had been forced to stay on the land they worked on, these changes gave them more freedom to move. And poll tax was not introduced again by any government in England until 1990!

The name 'Peasant's Revolt' is misleading as many middle and some upper-class people supported the revolt either directly or indirectly. Many people thought that this revolt led the country out of serfdom and away from feudalism, but the Black Death causing the decline in population was a major factor in the socio-economic pressures, including the poll tax, leading to the revolt. The Peasants' Revolt in 1381 was not just a revolt against serfdom. It seems to have been a protest against the growth of state power, with the expansion of novel forms of taxation (the imposition of a poll tax) and the creation of gentry justices of the peace to implement the new labour and price-setting legislation. Yet the nature of the legislation, and its loose drafting, meant that it was impossible for elected local officials to implement equitably. This inherent arbitrariness created deep divisions within local communities and generated widespread anger at the poor quality of royal justice among disparate groups which exploded in 1381 in the eastern part of the England.

Owain Glyndŵr and unrest

The unrest in England seems to have been subsumed in Wales into the general discontent over the status of the Welsh in Wales and the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr

[20] https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Wycliffe#Public_declaration_of_his_ideas

at much the same period. The unfairness of the rule of the English King and his Lords over the Welsh upper classes fed into the unrest. There was not only a revolt against serfdom, but also a protest against state power over labour and price setting legislation[21]. Despite the decline of the power of the (land) lords who were imposed by the Norman Kings, resentment by the Welsh people for their inferior status and lack of power compared to the (Anglo)-Normans was never far away and helped to bolster the support for Owen Glyndŵr. The rebellion in Wales brought long years of warfare which had *almost* as much economic effect as the plague. All of Wales experienced the ravages caused by the rebellion and the efforts to suppress it. When it was at its height, economic life was disrupted, and the administration of county and lordship was paralysed. Revenues suffered again and it speeded up the social changes that were in progress.

After the defeat of Owain Glyndŵr

Once the war was over, a post-plague equilibrium gradually established. Gains in income per head flattened and lost their inequality, prices stopped their previous steep rises and lost their volatility, real wages and earnings levelled, and some sectors of the economy even had a tendency towards over-supply. Government labour and economic policies were now weakly enforced – a major triumph for the workers. Responses to the Black Death had changed the institutional framework in important ways. Land ownership had become more mobile and more accessible, and on more commercial terms. Employment levels outside agriculture were higher, even in the countryside. The country's legal framework and culture was becoming more accessible, and serfdom had all but disappeared, although the inequalities of income and status persisted. Wales now possessed an institutional framework on which to capitalise when population and the economy picked up once again in the later fifteenth and into the sixteenth century. In Abergavenny the large number of unfree or partially free peasants was replaced by employed workers who had the freedom to leave for another employer, who could exploit them less because of the threat that they might leave. The early loss of the strip farming in this area, which lasted for a much shorter time than in England, meant that those landscape features were only transient. What we see locally is the pattern of enclosure into small fields to keep in the stock, much more manageable by a reduced population.

Tied housing leased by the landowner for several generations (usually two or three), however, limited their mobility. The difficulties finding somewhere to live, raise a family *and* work the land persist today, together with many other challenges facing farming the land. The shortage of labour persists, with farmers often needing to employ labour from overseas[22] and continued difficulties in making farming pay[23] without subsidies from the Government.

Gill Wakley

[21] Glanmor Williams, *Renewal and Reformation: Wales c.1415-1642* Jan 2026 https://academic.oup.com/book/7592

[22] https://www.nfuonline.com/news/seasonal-worker-scheme-latest-information/nfu-lobbying-seasonal-workers/ Jan 2026

[23] https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8990/Farming-in-Wales-in-2025-Challenges-and-Opportunities/ Jan 2026

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