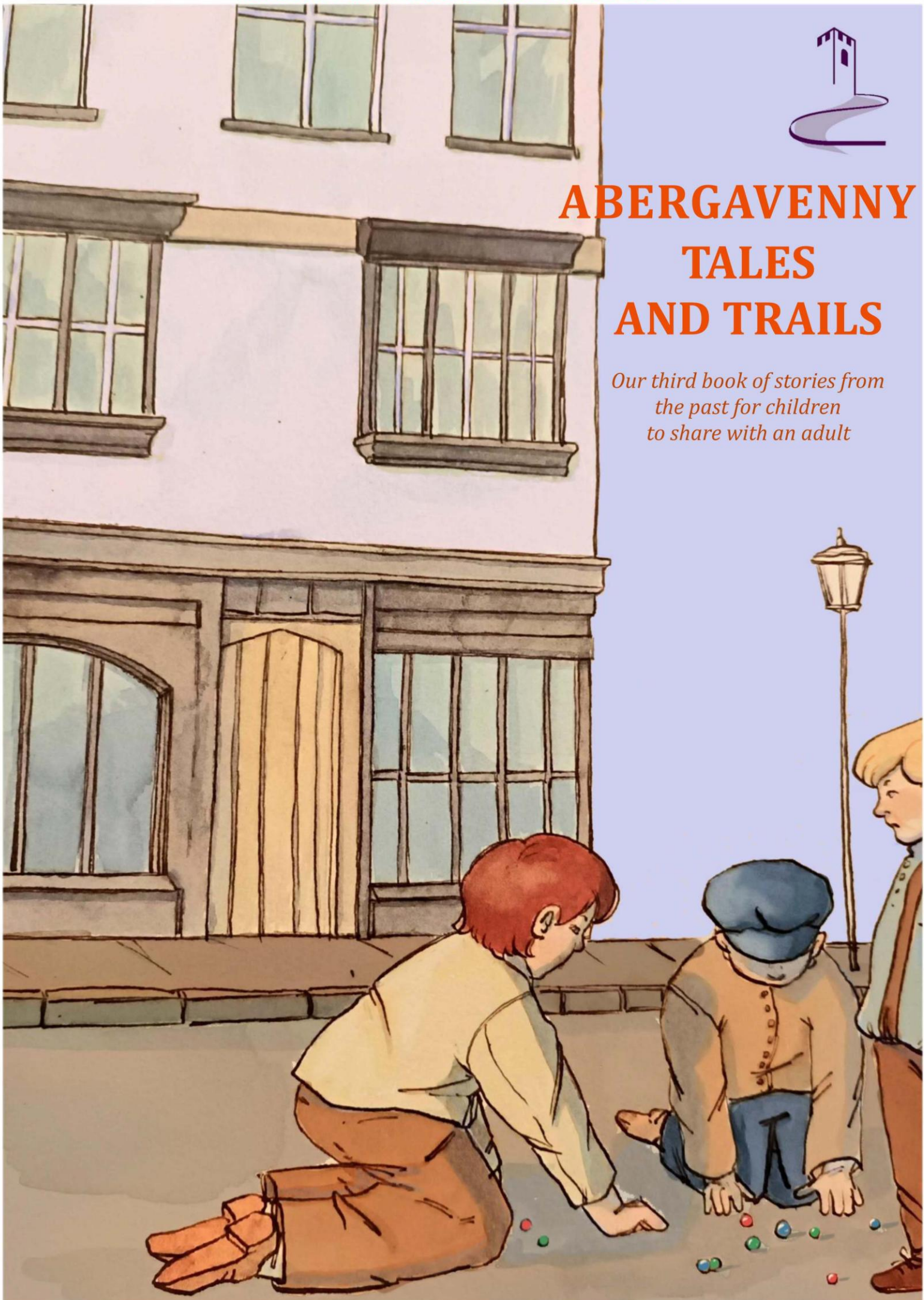




ABERGAVENTNY TALES AND TRAILS

*Our third book of stories from
the past for children
to share with an adult*



Abergavenny Tales and Trails

Our third book of stories, mostly from the past, for children to share with adults

Introduction

In this third edition of Abergavenny Tales and Trails we meet some of the characters from the last edition. First, Aemilia from Roman Abergavenny returns with a new story. Then we meet twins Sybil and Owain again, living in Abergavenny during the Civil War. There is another story about the Gunter family and Richard becoming a brewer's apprentice, a story about a harpist who worked for Lady Llanover and a story about some children whose house caught fire. Then there is a story about a wedding at a local gentleman's house, a race between a horse and a car and a story about a party in the 1950s that didn't quite go to plan. Finally we are back to the present day for a visit to Linda Vista Gardens,

The stories are either based on things that actually happened or on events that might have happened that nobody wrote about at the time. Please go and visit the places where these events may have taken place and use the suggestions at the end of the stories to find out more about Abergavenny as it used to be.

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Keren's Cross

This story is set in about 120 C.E. It follows on from "The Cup", which appeared in a previous edition of Tales and Trails. Things for you to look up about Roman times are mostly in italic letters. Some local place names may seem similar to modern ones, but they are mostly invented for the story. We'll be using some modern Welsh words, but at this time, people mostly spoke Latin or versions of the Celtic language now known as Brythonic.

Aemilia Constantia and her cousin Laurentina Scaevola were busy writing away in the converted *cubiculum* which was their classroom. Rhiannon, the young *liberta* who was their tutor had asked them each to start every day by writing a short note on "what I did yesterday". But it had been raining hard all week in the valley of the *Isca*, and they hadn't been able to leave Laurentina's father's villa, nor had their Silurian friends Angharad and Epponina been able to visit. They were both finding it rather hard to say anything new. It was all so different from last month's excitement, when they had helped to catch two highway robbers. Still, they were doing their best, because they both loved Rhiannon, who was a good teacher and had even started to teach them some Greek – which was what they were trying to write now.

Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap! They both stopped writing and looked at each other. Someone was knocking at the door. "Come in", called Rhiannon. Laurentina put down her slate and sat up (rather hoping it was time for a snack). Instead, a young slave called Brân came into the room carrying a leather bag. He bowed to Rhiannon and said "Excuse me, Mistress. A messenger has brought letters from the fort at Gobannium. I have one here for Mistress Aemilia Constantia". He handed the bag to Aemilia and left the room.

Aemilia quickly emptied the bag onto the table. There was a black glossy necklace (which fitted her beautifully when she tried it on later) and a wooden double writing tablet, with its two halves folded together, tied with string and sealed with wax. The seal had two dolphins and a trident, and Aemilia instantly recognised her father's personal seal. "It's from my *pater!*" she said, "It's the first time he has ever written to me". She carefully cut the string, so she could save the wax seal, and then she opened the two sections of the letter. It was rather difficult to read at first, as it was written in the *cursive script* used by official scribes.

Gaius Aemilius Constantius to his dearest daughter Aemilia. I hope and pray that you are well. Marcus Laurentius Scaevola has written to tell me about your brave help in dealing with bandits. Be assured that I am most proud of you.

I am now in Eboracum with the emperor and his staff. He has appointed me to become one of his advisers. There is unrest among the Brigantes and when that is settled, the emperor intends to build a new Imperial Limes across Britannia. I am ordered to take temporary command of a new military base in Corsopitum. This means that I shall be there for at least a year.

I have written to ask your aunt Cornelia if you, and also Rhiannon if she so wishes, may live with her and uncle Marcus until I return to Venta Silurum.

Farewell my daughter, Farewell. I shall write to you whenever I can. I am ever your loving father.

At the bottom was scrawled rather untidily in everyday handwriting:

I am sending you an antique jet necklace which is a speciality of Brigantia. Pater.



Early jet necklace
@ National Museum Wales

They were all sitting looking at each other, when the door opened and in came aunt Cornelia. She turned to Aemilia and Rhiannon. “I expect you’ve read Aemilia’s father’s letter? I’ve had my own letter from him. All I can say is that if you’re happy, I can offer both of you the hospitality of our home for as long as you need it. Laurentina’s older brothers and sisters have married and moved away, so we have plenty of room.”

Aunt Cornelia and Uncle Marcus Laurentius Scaevola had a fine villa called Plas y Graig, a short way out of Gobannium, where Uncle Marcus was Prefect in charge of the fort. As an added bonus, Aemilia’s elder brother, Lucius Aemilius Constantius was a *Military Tribune*, in charge of a cohort of *Ala 1 Hispanorum Asturum*, a regiment of

Spanish auxiliary cavalry based in the fort. He usually stayed in the villa, but was currently away on duty, relieving the garrison at Dolaucothi and then escorting a consignment of gold from the mines. He was expected back in Gobannium very soon.

Aemilia was delighted and said so at once. She loved her father’s villa in Venta Silurum, but she didn’t have many friends there of her own age. She had also come to love Gobannium and its wooded hills. She enjoyed being with Laurentina and was fond of pony riding with their Silurian friends Angharad and Epponina, who had both taken part in their adventure with the highway robbers.

Then Rhiannon dropped her bombshell! “Thank you so much Cornelia Flaviana. I’d love to be able to stay here for a time. But I have some good news of my own I’d like to share with you. I’ll be getting married quite soon.” Aemilia and Laurentina just gasped, but Cornelia smiled and said “Congratulations, my dear! Who’s the lucky man?”

“He’s called Myrddyn ap Einion ap Hywel”, Rhiannon answered. “His family has a mine and an iron foundry near *Blestium* but he joined the 20th Legion and eventually became a Centurion Engineer. He was officially based at *Deva*, but he was sent with an engineering *vexillation* to join in with the Second Legion to work on the amazing new bridge across the *River Vaga* near Venta Silurum. He and his men lived in a small fort near the bridge, and he often came into Venta for meetings with Aemilia’s father and the civic council. That’s how I first came to meet him.”

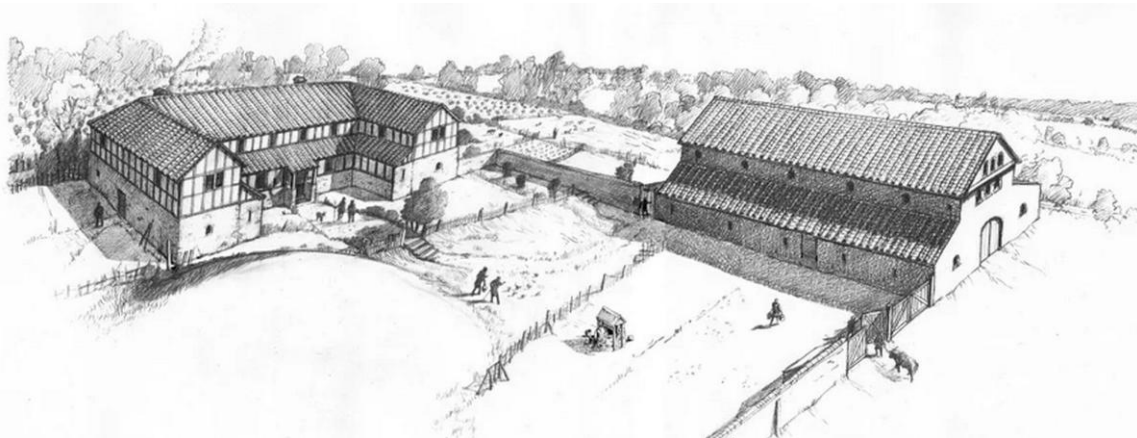
Aemilia was shocked. “Does this mean that you’ll be leaving us and moving away to Deva or Blestium or somewhere far away like that?” Rhiannon walked over to Aemilia and hugged her. “Not at all. Myrddyn retired a couple of years ago after 22 years in the legion and now

comes to Gobannium quite often on family business. He is a good friend of Epponina's brother Llew. They're setting up a business based here in Gobannium. As well as planning and building roads and houses, they will make nails and other ironwork to trade with the legions in Isca and also in *Colonia Glevum*, where there's a lot of new building going on." She smiled and looked at the girls. "Gobannium is where I'll live in future. We're having a smart new house built - so you two won't get away from your lessons *that* easily!"

The next day, the weather had changed completely, and the sun was shining brightly. By the time Aemilia and Laurentina had finished their morning lesson, Epponina and Angharad called at the villa, bringing the ponies Araf and Baris so that they could all go for a ride. Aemilia told them the startling news about Rhiannon, but of course they already knew, because Myrddyn was staying at Epponina's house. "He's a bit of a hunk" said Epponina. "Yes, very manly", agreed Angharad. "They'll make a fine couple."

"And what about Keren?" asked Angharad "He's rather handsome too!". "Who in the world is Keren?" Aemilia and Laurentina both asked at the same time. "He's Myrddyn's personal slave", answered Epponina. "He's very clever, and Myrddyn has trained him to help with his work. But he's still too young to be given his freedom. I'm not sure, but I think his family came from Judaea originally."

Two days later, Aemilia and Laurentina had a chance to meet Myrddyn (and Keren!) for themselves. Epponina's father, Brân ap Hywel and her mother, Ceredwen ferch Brighid, had organised a special dinner at their family home, Ty Gwyn, just north of Gobannium. The feasting hall was quite different from Roman-type houses. It was a large timber-framed thatched building with *cob* walls. It was timber-floored, with a stone fireplace at its centre and a raised platform for important guests at one end. There were galleries built at both ends of the hall. A walkway joined the galleries on each side.



The winged-corridor villa and aisled building at Barcombe Roman Villa
Credit: Andy Gammon. Source: Researchgate.

The hall was fitted out with long tables, with chairs and benches (not couches like those in the *triclinum* in Aemilia's or Laurentina's homes). There were large *terra sigillata* jugs of wine and mead and water, and beautiful pottery beakers and eating bowls. It was all very grand, but quite different from a Roman home.

The girls had a separate table of their own at the end of the high table. Laurentina's personal maidservant, a freedwoman named Gwladus, was in charge of serving them, and she made sure that they had plenty to eat (but only a very small amount of mead!). More importantly,

she made sure that they had a good view of the main table. Myrddyn was sitting next to Rhiannon. Epponina was quite right. He was a very good-looking, well-built man, about forty years old. He had short reddish hair and a splendid moustache.

A young man was standing behind him to serve the couple with food and wine. “Is that Keren?”, asked Aemilia. “That’s right,” replied Epponina. “See! I told you he was handsome.” And indeed, he was. He was a rather dark-skinned young man in his early twenties, wearing a short Roman tunic but with British trousers. Round his neck he had a bronze pendant in the shape of a cross.

After the meal was finished, and while people were gathering round the fireplace to listen to musicians, Epponina called Keren over to the girls’ table. He came and stood in front of them, but wouldn’t sit down because he was a slave. Aemilia asked him “Please tell us about yourself”. Keren thought for a short time, then said “My family originally came from Judaea. My ancestors were wealthy Jews, but my father became a Christian – a believer in the Messiah - after he moved to *Londinium* to run a bank during all the rebuilding following Boudicca’s rebellion.”

“I spent my childhood among a tiny community of believers in the one true God. Christians were persecuted in different places around the Empire, because many Romans thought we were followers of horrible magic. The Emperor Trajan told his Governors not to pursue us unless we were committing actual crimes, but evil people would often make charges against us and tell the courts that we were secret plotters, or even that we were cannibals. All sorts of lies. That’s what happened to us. We were accused of subversion and witchcraft by a wicked man who owed my father a lot of money. Father was executed, our money was confiscated and we were all enslaved.”



Early British Bronze Cross
British Museum Item Number 1880.0501.7
© The Trustees of the British Museum

He was hunched up and silent for a while. The girls were almost in tears. “How did you come to be a slave for my brother’s friend Myrddyn?” asked Epponina. Keren stood up straight. “I was bought in Deva by Martinus Ulpianus Faber.” “Who?” asked all the girls at once. Keren smiled. “Master Myrddyn, of course! He had to take an official *nomen* when he retired and was formally enrolled as a *Roman Citizen*. I think ‘Martinus’ is the nearest the scribes could get to ‘Myrddyn’! He is a very clever man, and has trained me to help him in his work. He was an important engineer when we were building the great bridge across the River Vaga, and I was his assistant. He is a kind master and has promised me *manumission* as soon as I reach the legal age for it, but that’s still a long way off. And he allows me to wear the cross, the symbol of my faith. Many people confuse it with an Egyptian *Ankh* and don’t even recognise it as Christian, so I’m not bothered by troublemakers.”

He looked over to Myrddyn and Rhiannon, and saw that they were standing up to leave the table. “I must go now to serve my master and his promised lady. God bless and keep you all.”

As Keren walked away, Aemilia saw the great door of the hall opening. To her amazement (and great pleasure), in walked her brother Lucius. He was dressed formally and was carrying a *papyrus* scroll. He walked over to Myrddyn and Rhiannon and spoke quietly to them. Both looked delighted for some reason, but Keren, who was standing behind them, looked shocked and clutched his cross to his breast. Lucius handed the scroll to Myrddyn, then walked over to speak to Brân, Epponina's father, who smiled broadly then stood up, clapped his hands loudly and called for quiet.

Lucius stepped up onto the platform and said "Citizens and friends. I have some important news. You probably do not know that during our work on the Vaga bridge, Keren saved the lives of five soldiers, including the senior *Military Tribune* Publius Lemonius Antonius of the Second Legion. Keren tied a rope round himself and rescued them from the incoming tide when they were trapped in deep mud and in danger of drowning. Publius Lemonius appealed to the Emperor Trajan, to ask him to permit Myrddyn (I should say Martinus Ulpianus Faber, but I won't!) to give Keren his freedom below the legal age. Sadly, Trajan died, and it has taken longer than expected, but the Emperor Hadrian has now given his consent and also a large reward has been granted. I'm sure that Myrddyn will organise a formal ceremony and celebration very soon."

As Lucius stepped down into the hall, there was loud cheering, and people rushed over to congratulate Keren on his courage and good fortune, but he just stood looking upwards, holding his cross. Aemilia and her friends simply burst into tears of happiness.

Why Don't You

1. Look up about Roman names
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_naming_conventions
2. Find out about the Roman bridge across the River Wye
3. Read about early Christians in Roman Britain
4. Find out about the manumission of slaves

The Roundheads are Coming!

This is the second story about the twins Sybil and Owain and takes place in Abergavenny in 1646-1647

Clatter, clatter, bang - squelch! This is the sound of our friend William going off to work.

I told you in my last tale of how we helped William the cripple boy to see King Charles and to touch his cloak, when the King visited Abergavenny Castle in July of last year. William had thought that touching the King's cloak would enable him to walk again. Owain and I thought this not very probable but the King gave William a silver penny which William gave to Richard Kerby the joiner who made him some crutches, in exchange. William's crutches mean he can walk again and he got so clever at it that now he can go quite fast and is able to earn money from running messages and carrying goods around the town. He can buy much better food and he has grown somewhat. And he has muscles on his arms and shoulders that used not to be there. He wanted to carry bigger loads so decided he needed a way to drag the loads from place to place and he had a clever idea about how it might be done. So Owain and I went with him to visit the old chair-maker who lives in a bothy at the foot of the Deri. The old man showed us how he uses his pole lathe and how he shapes the seats and how he puts the stick chairs together. He said that lathes like his have been used for hundreds of years. His chairs look beautiful and are very comfortable to sit on.

At first the old man was doubtful about what William wanted but William drew a picture of his idea with a stick of charcoal on the inside of a piece of bark. Then the old man said "Aaah" and then he said "Duw Duw" and then he poked around under some old sacking. After a while he declared that he had some pieces of wood of no use for chairs but might be just what he needed for this job. They spent a long time discussing the cost and how much time William would have to pay what he owed but William went home happy. A week or two later he collected an odd sort of sledge with a loop of rope attached to the front that William could put around his waist or attach to the old leather belt our father had given him, after putting in extra holes. The sledge looks a bit like one of the old chair-maker's stick chairs but upside down, with no back and with more stretchers to stop packages falling out the sides. On the bottom are a pair of runners to help slide over the muddy or stony ground.



William calls this contrivance his carry-er. It works well on level ground and going uphill but when it is going downhill William has to be behind it to stop it running away. This is difficult with crutches and William has gone flying a few times. He says it is easier to manage when it is loaded. It can carry Owain and me, but both of us together is a crush. When we had the sudden heavy snowfall in the winter William's carry-er was the best way to take loads around the town and he earned far more money than usual and was able to pay the old chair-maker much sooner than either of them had expected. But when there is no snow the carry-er can make a lot of strange noises as it bumps and drags over the stones and mud. You can always hear when William is coming.

Owain had returned from visiting the old chair-maker saying how much he wanted to be a chair maker when he grows up. Father looked a bit sad and said "I wanted to be apprenticed to a joiner when I was a boy but there was no money in our family to pay for an apprenticeship." He looked around and added "But I'm happy that matters have turned out as they have done." I believe that Father is happy being an inn-keeper although I know he would prefer to own his inn rather than renting it. He is landlord of The Golden Lion in Frogmore Street, where we all live. Owain soon went back to wanting to be a groom when he is old enough and Father is clever at being an inn-keeper and he is famous for his good ales. But he does like to make things with a knife and small pieces of wood too. He made a tiny wooden doll for me and a tiny wooden horse for Owain. Mother gave me a small piece of linen she said she had no use for and I made a little bag for each of us to keep our treasures in. I sewed an O for Owain on his bag and an S for Sybil on mine. Owain had found a place upstairs where the floorboard can be moved just enough to get his hand into the space below and we keep our treasure bags there, where nobody knows about them. I keep some other things in my bag but I'm not telling you what they are yet.

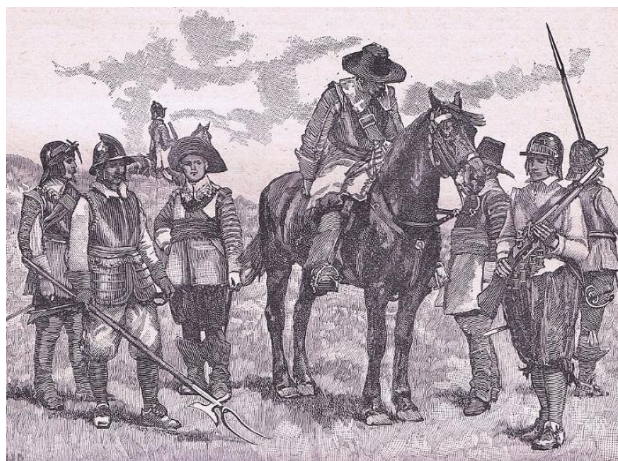
Because Father likes wood and wood carving so much he loves to look at the Jesse tree in the church. It is beautifully carved and goes up a long way towards the roof. He says that all the people carved on it are the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jesse, who is lying at the bottom, and at the very top, where you can hardly see him, is Jesus Christ. There are angels on it too. Father says that someone very rich must have had it made for the monks when the Priory actually had monks in it, a long time ago, before King Henry sent them away, back to France.



As Owain and I are ten years old we can't remember much about the time when the war wasn't happening. Both Mother and Father complain about the prices of everything rising all the time and say that is because of the war. The local garrisons are supposed to be supported by one town each and Abergavenny was meant to support our own garrison at the castle but now there is a garrison at Coldbrook too and soldiers come to Abergavenny from there and from other garrisons too, to collect what they call taxes. We have heard that in some places the villagers arm themselves with pitchforks and knives and go out to stop the soldiers coming. We had heard last October that Colonel Morgan was nearby on his way from Gloucester with a platoon of Parliamentary soldiers and we were afraid he would attack our castle, but in the end, he did not come to Abergavenny.

One of the local farmers said he didn't know who he had paid his rent to last quarter-day as it wasn't a name he had heard before. The last landlord's property had been requisitioned when he had been accused of being a Recusant and his land given to this new man. Recusants are Papists who refuse to go to church on Sundays. Papists would prefer to pray in a Catholic chapel like the one at the top of Holy Mountain. You can sometimes see them walking up there on Sundays. But some papists pray in a private chapel in a house, like the one in the Gunter mansion. Apart from where they pray the papists seem to us to be the same as everyone else, and they wear the same clothes as other people of their station. Many chapel people don't go to church on Sundays either, or only on rare occasions. I usually go

to church with Mother and Father comes when he can. I love the pretty-coloured windows in the church and make up stories in my head about the people in the pictures. Owain goes to the chapel so he can learn reading in their school. He's teaching me some reading too.



This war is a really bad thing. Sometimes a few of the younger men who come often to our inn, say they are going off to be soldiers and we don't see them again. But recently a couple of them did return saying they had given up soldiering as they didn't have the stomach for it any more. It wasn't the fighting that bothered them, with all the blood and guts, or sometimes having to sleep in fields or under haystacks. It was that they didn't get paid regularly and could not be sure they would get provisions. They said it was wrong for them to have to steal off people even

poorer than themselves in order to stay alive. They told us that when the army requisitions supplies they simply take everything they need and if there is no money to pay for it then the farmers can be left to starve or go to the poor house. It is difficult to understand what is happening in the war, even with frequent news arriving with travellers coming to our inn from all manner of places. The King had visited Abergavenny a second time, last September, but it was only for a day and he must have gone back to Raglan castle before nightfall. It was said that he was here to berate some of our local gentry for not giving him more support, but there was no evidence against them so he had gone away, without anyone in the town seeing him go.

In June we heard that Raglan castle was being besieged by the Roundheads but each time we got news it seemed to make matters ever more confusing. Raglan surrendered in August. But in Abergavenny we can see that support for the King is not as great as it used to be. Even during the King's visit in July of last year when everyone came out and cheered like madmen, some were going home saying that it would do no harm to have those Parliamentarians in charge. Now we heard that Prince Rupert was going to come to rally support for the King and we wondered if he would be cheered. He had been here before, in the Spring of last year. Owain and I had gone to see him as we had been told that he had a big white poodle-dog which we wanted to see. But there was no poodle-dog with him and we later heard that it had been killed in the battle of Naseby. We were not destined to see Prince Rupert again anyway as he was called away to a siege at Bristol.

It seemed that the Parliamentary forces were gradually taking over the whole of Monmouthshire and could be in Abergavenny very soon. We had been told that the Roundhead soldiers did a lot of damage to anything they regarded as idolatrous in the towns they captured. Father was getting very worried about what would happen to the lovely things in our church if the Roundheads took over the town, particularly the Jesse tree. Owain and I thought he must be making a secret plan to save it as we could see him having secret talks with Richard Kerby the joiner and several other men, without anyone else hearing.

Eventually Father was forced to tell us what he was planning as he wanted us, and William with his carry-er, to help them. He revealed that all the time when we thought Father had been admiring the carving of the Jesse tree he was looking to see how it was put together,

how it could be taken apart and what size the pieces would be. The plan was that the Jesse tree was to be taken apart in the night and all the pieces were to be hidden in different houses all over the town. It was to be kept secret from everyone, particularly the vicar and curate, so they could not get blamed by the Roundheads. Owain and I were to run with messages as people often see us running about the town and wouldn't think anything of it. I asked if there would be a great many pieces and if they would be very heavy. Father said there would be a lot of different sized pieces but that they might not be too heavy as they were made of fruitwood not the oak that the actual Jesse figure is made from. Betty the maid asked if the sound of the carry-er would not wake people up and make them look out to see what was afoot. It would be better if the gentry did not know about it until the next day. The rest of us had not thought of that and we stared at each other wondering what to suggest. Then Betty said "Why do you not use the old sacks that are kept in the stable loft? You can put them under the runners of the carry-er to muffle the noise. If the two children lay the sacks on the ground in front the carry-er, and behind William, then you might get along in a much more peaceful manner. But you will have to pick up each sack from behind and move it to the front speedily." We all agreed that this was what we must do. We just had to hope that the plan would work.

One day soon after this we heard that Captain Morgan was on his way to Abergavenny with six hundred Parliamentary soldiers in order to take control of the garrison at the castle. The Jesse tree would have to be moved that night! Owain and I ran to tell William then ran all over the town delivering messages to everyone involved in the plan. We were careful that nobody else could hear what we said or suspect that something was afoot. The Vicar was away from home – he usually was – and father advised the curate, without actually telling him anything, that it would go well for him to head early to his bed tonight. We knew that the watchman on duty was the friendly one and there was to be a moon, although it would not rise until late in the night.

After we had eaten our supper father sent Owain and me to have a few hours of sleep although we didn't think we could sleep with the excitement. But almost as soon as we had shut our eyes we felt Mother shaking us awake and she sent us to the church as quietly as we could go to join Father. When we got into the church we found William and we could see movements in the lamplight. Then we saw there was no Jesse Tree standing up high, but piles of carved pieces of wood stacked against the pews. In the gloom I could see Father and Richard Kerby the joiner were taking apart the last few pieces. It was a sight I shall never forget. Men with their heads and faces covered were creeping into the church and bundling the pieces of carved tracery into sacks and coverlets and carrying them out. Sometimes in the lamplight you could espy the carved head of a saint or angel glancing back over somebody's shoulder as they disappeared into the darkness outside. One of the largest pieces was carefully lifted on to the carry-er and tied down. Owain and I grabbed our sacks and helped to steady the heavy load as William headed off over the churchyard. As soon as we got to the road the carry-er made a lot of noise so Owain threw his sack on the ground behind William and in front of the carry-er and I laid mine down in front of Owain's sack as soon as William had moved forward, then quickly laid down another as Owain still couldn't grab the first sack from under the back of the carrier. But Betty's scheme seemed to be working! The carry-er was immediately much less noisy and was far less likely to wake people from their sleep. We saw the Watchman give us a friendly wave and turn the other way.

William dragged his load to Edward James the corvisor's¹ house in Cross Street where the family were waiting for us and quickly took the carving and whisked it away to hide it. Then

we picked up the sacks and headed back to the church at speed to collect our next load. And so it went on through the night. We seemed to take a great many loads. The moon did eventually rise and made it easier for William to choose the smoother parts of the road to drag the carry-er over, but all the picking up and laying down of the sacks was very tiring. We were all, even our strong and seemingly tireless father, tired almost to death. At last there was nothing left of the Jesse carving except for the lonely figure of Jesse with none of his descendants surrounding him, but one angel to protect him. Father swept up a few stray pieces of straw and sacking and said we must away home. Mother gave us some warm ale and sent us to our beds but we could hear her talking with Father downstairs for a long time before we slept again.

In the morning the whole town buzzed with the news that the Jesse tree had been magicked away in the night but none of those involved said anything about what had gone on and have never done so to this day. It was all a secret, as were all the places where the pieces of screen were hidden. Father said they were in lofts and closets and chests all over the town. He really hopes that one day he will be able to put all the pieces together again.

The attention of the whole town was now drawn again to the castle which Captain Morgan and his men captured with very little fighting. In a few days he left the town with most of his men but leaving a small number of cavalrymen under Captain Hopton at the garrison. Father watched the Roundhead soldiers as they moved their belongings in, but they seemed peaceable enough so he hoped they would not do any damage. But the very next day William rushed in saying he had heard the sound of glass breaking from near the church. Owain and I were just about to run over there when Mother said we must bide a while until it was all quiet again and not to touch any broken glass we found or we would be cut. Later, when we went to look there was indeed a large amount of glass both inside and outside the church and some of the windows were broken. I felt very unhappy but then I saw that it was the windows with the heraldic devices on them that were broken and my favourite ones with the lovely colours in were still in place.² I found a small piece of bright blue glass that did not have any really sharp edges so I wrapped it in the corner of my apron and carried it off home to keep in my treasure bag.



On the fifth of December the Royalist army came back and after a short battle attacked the castle again. They killed several of Captain Hopton's cavalrymen but did not recapture the castle. They took several of our local gentlemen as prisoners and Father said they would be held for ransom. After a few weeks when we did not hear much news Sir Thomas Morgan set up a new Royalist garrison between here and Raglan and on twenty-fourth of January a horse regiment from Raglan attacked the castle and took fifty prisoners, but the Parliamentary forces still held.

So now we are becoming used to life under the Parliamentarians. We have been told that they do not approve of singing or dancing or of the boys playing football of a Sunday, but we will have to wait to find out whether life will be very much different now.

Why don't you:

1. Visit the Jesse carving in St Mary's Priory Church.
2. Do you think the plan to save the complete Jesse carving was successful?
3. We don't know what the complete rood carving might have looked like. Maybe you could draw a picture of what you think it may have looked like. This picture shows one artist's idea of what a Jesse tree looked like.



Notes:

1. A corvisor was a maker of smart leather shoes
2. Sadly for Sybil the rest of the stained-glass windows were all destroyed later in the war. All the glass you can see in the church now is old windows brought from France or new windows put in many years later.

References:

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The Diary of Walter Powell of Llantilio Crossenny in the County of Monmouth, gentleman: 1603-54
<https://archive.org/details/diaryofwalterpowoopowerich/mode/2up>

Richard the Brewer's Apprentice

The night before Richard had hardly been able to sleep for excitement. Now today he was feeling less excited and more worried, terrified, in fact. He was to meet the Master Brewer to whom he was to be apprenticed. Frighteningly, he was to go off with him to his house and workplace to learn how to be a brewer. Richard lived with his uncle, Thomas Gunter senior and his aunt in a house outside the south gate of the town. It was a big house with an upstairs floor of rooms with high ceilings and a beautiful plaster ceiling in the parlour. The house still looked new after the extensions and repairs that had been made since his uncle inherited the house and the civil war was over and, since 1660, King Charles II on the throne.



He knew that his father, who had died so long ago that he hardly remembered him, had left papers requiring that his father's brother, his uncle Thomas, should become his guardian and must apprentice him to become a brewer. Now more papers were to be signed to pass the responsibility for him to the Master Brewer. His aunt had put together a pack of clothes some of which were a bit on the big side for him 'to grow into'. He had a new pair of boots which he had to wear with two pairs of thick socks, but she had said that they would protect his feet when working and to make sure that he wore them in case of danger. He had wondered what danger he would meet in a brewery, and his aunt had said that barrels of beer were very heavy, and the sacks of barley and other things that went into beer had sharp bits which could get into your skin if it wasn't protected. She had knitted several pairs of new socks for him as well as he had grown out of the others – the old ones were much darned at the heel and toes where he had worn them into holes. He had a box to keep his belongings in with his name burnt into the lid and a lock and key all for himself like a man. The key fitted onto a metal loop on his belt which had room for other keys. He felt very important and grown up, although he had only recently had his twelfth birthday.

As he waited to be called into the room that his uncle used as an office for his lawyer's business, he could feel the tears welling up inside his eyelids, but he was determined to look grown up and strong, despite feeling worried at not knowing what was ahead of him. What would his Master be like? Would he be fair and just, or critical and punish him for minor things he got wrong. He had known of apprentices being punished and he would have no-one to appeal to – his aunt would not be there to soften any punishment as she so often had done in the past with his uncle who had very high standards for his behaviour. And he would miss his sisters. They had lessons together, learning to read and write, how to keep accounts, but *they* didn't have to be apprenticed to learn a trade. His own father had bought land for them and the income from that helped to provide for them now and would be an attractive prospect for a husband in a few years for them both. They were learning how to manage a

household, how to darn socks, edge the sheets, embroider initials and pretty flowers, sing and look pretty. He cheered up – he would far rather go away to learn how to be a brewer.

Then his swirling thoughts were cut short by his uncle's voice calling him into the room. Uncle Thomas showed him the 'indenture' – a thick piece of paper with lots of curly writing on it. Richard thought "I'm glad I don't have to read that!" Uncle Thomas pointed at the lines and told him that it said that he was apprenticed to Samuel Hurley, Master Brewer, to learn the trade as a brewer under Mr Hurley and his wife. His uncle, as usual, gave him a sermon about behaving himself, not answering back (he tended to do that, he knew), and to keep himself clean and tidy while he applied himself to learning the business. Then he had to grit his teeth again and blink a lot as his Aunt Ann hugged him and told him not to forget her, his cousins and his sisters. He followed his new Master out of the house and climbed into a cart to sit where indicated. Mr Hurley poked him in the chest and waved his hand at a lad sitting patiently behind the horse holding the rein, "That's George – he's good with the horses – but he's from over the Severn, from Bristol." Richard wondered what that meant. He knew that Bristol was in England and it was a big port. There were lots of ships sailing between Chepstow and Bristol trading goods – his uncle often got parcels that way from places like London which was even further away. Mr Hurley told George to get on with it, they'd got what they'd come for (as though Richard was a parcel to be fetched). Richard kept his mouth firmly shut – he'd need to find out how everyone worked together and fitted in with each other – and nodded to George.

Over four weeks later and Richard woke, suddenly alarmed because it was already light - he should be up out of bed! Then he rested back on his straw filled pallet which always poked him with sharp bits no matter how he beat it into shape. He remembered that it was Sunday, a day of (almost) rest in this busy place. He was lying in a little tiny attic at the top of the house, sharing with Alun, who was still lying on his back and snoring. Alun was also an apprentice, three years older than Richard. The roof sloped down sharply and he only just had room for his box with its initials pushed to the side under the eaves and his feet hit the underside of the roof if he wasn't careful turning over.

He ached all over from the unaccustomed physical work. It *was* getting easier and he had developed more muscles and strength. Moving barrels with another apprentice, lifting sacks onto a truck to wheel them somewhere, running up and down stairs and across from one building to another - it was all heavy, hard work. There was less strenuous work as well - measuring out ingredients into wooden casks or pottery containers, and cleaning things, over and over again. And he was glad he had paid attention to his writing and arithmetic lessons as he had to write what he had done onto blackboards. Alun wasn't much good at that, and the other two apprentices just cuffed him (quite gently) and laughed at him if he had to ask for help.

His mind was full of brewing; he hadn't had time to be sad about leaving his sisters and cousins, or living in, what he now realised, was a big smart house in Abergavenny. This house sort of spread out as though it was made of several buildings all merged into other buildings and was built around a yard closed off with a big gate from the road outside. There were barns and outhouses and stables as well as the brewery buildings. They were a little outside the town where it petered out into the countryside, and it was very quiet compared with Abergavenny. Where he lived before, it had always been noisy with the carts, flocks of sheep, pigs, people on and off horses and coming and going through the town gate just up the hill into the town. It hadn't been much quieter at the back of that house, although their garden with its crops and pond kept the people in Beili Lane at the back further away than

in the front. His uncle's business side of the house by the main road opened straight onto the noise and muck from all the animals and people.

Richard screwed up his face remembering, or trying to remember, what he had learnt. He knew that he would be tested again and again by Mr Hurley until he had it straight in his mind. He was learning all the steps of making the beer, then he would work on each step under supervision to make sure he could get it right, before he would be allowed to do things by himself. He was determined that would be as soon as he could make it happen and he would be really good at it.

Already he could see that Alun was not as clever as him and needed reminding about things and couldn't do sums without someone checking them. He had to be careful, though. The other apprentices were bigger and stronger than him. If he was cheeky, they could swipe him and knock him over, especially George who was full of muscles. George was the friendliest, though, easy-going, preferring to look after the big horses that pulled the dray – the big waggon that took the barrels to their customers. George's family had been in some sort of trouble in Bristol where he was from, something to do with religion. His mind skittered away from that – there were too many troubles to do with religion. He knew that his uncle was a Papist, a Roman Catholic. Roman Catholic priests stayed at his house and held services there in the chapel in the attic. This was risky because it was against the law. His uncle could be fined, and the priests might be imprisoned and killed. He had been told that his *own* father went to St Mary Priory Church to worship and that was the safe thing to do if you wanted to avoid trouble. He didn't want to know what had happened to George and his family in case it was bad. The wars were over now but you had to be careful talking about religion in case someone belonged to a religion that wasn't allowed by the government.

Think about brewing, not dangerous stuff like religion. Clean good tasting water, that was the basis of a good brew. Then the barley, soak it in water and spread it out to germinate with little shoots. Then, as soon as it does, stop it by drying. This was now malted barley to add to the water, "1 ton of malt makes 54 barrels of beer" he recited to himself. Next you add hops grown locally up in the air on poles in the fields. They add bitterness, flavour and they stabilise the beer so it doesn't go off and you can keep it for weeks. Not like the ale that his aunt made every day or so. There were many fields around the brewery where hops were grown, their bittersweet scent in the air. Oh, he'd forgotten that the malt barley needs to be crushed in the mill and that makes grist. Grist was mixed with water and mashed and the temperature needs to keep steady. This was made in the tun, not a measure of weight but a container used for mixing hot water with malted grains (which was called mashing) and separating the sugary liquid called wort from the spent grains. The wort was then dropped into the copper with the hops. The brewer tastes it and adds sugar to offset the bitterness of the hops. Then after four to eight days, it's ready to be added in the fermenting barrels. You needed to keep an eye on the fermenting barrels, as the fermentation raised the pressure inside. The barrels had heavy metal hoops around them to stop the wooden sides from splitting apart under the pressure. Everything must be clean or the batch will be stopped, so hands, vessels of any sort, anything that meets the beer must be clean. In the first few days, he had thought he had never heard the word 'clean' so many times.

He thought for a bit, puzzled. He had begun to realise that his Master didn't just mean the vessels and mixtures in them had to be clean, but he felt like that about his workers too, that they must be "clean", but he wasn't quite sure yet what that meant. It seemed to mean more to Mr Hurley than just bodily cleanliness and clean clothes but something about the way you should think. No, he wasn't sure what Mr Hurley meant, and he certainly wasn't going

to ask! He had learnt very quickly that Mr Hurley liked being answered back as little as his Uncle Thomas had and he kept his mouth firmly shut unless he *had* to say something. Then he answered in as few words as possible. No more beatings – although the ones from Mr Hurley were not as bad as the ones he had had from his uncle!

He got up quietly, his bladder full, and he would need a wash, so that he would pass the inspection for “being clean”. The attic ceiling was low, and he had to creep carefully past Alun and lift the latch on the door quietly. He went down the stairs and could hear Mr and Mrs Hurley talking in the kitchen. There were piles of clean clothes on shelves outside the kitchen ready for the apprentices – there was always a pile of clean clothes to meet the rule for being clean. He could hardly believe the amount of washing that went on in this place, the apprentices even had a washroom with a pump to bring up the water into a big tank of water and a drain - no standing out in the yard in the cold with a bucket to upend over his head. The latrines for peeing and pooing were separate too; there was a line of them in a separate building at the back of the yard. Mr Hurley had told him that he had copied the idea from the monks’ latrines at the nearby former monastery. The water was piped from a stream off the hillside to the kitchen and the workshops and then ran under the latrines to carry away the waste down the hill to a big pond with reeds. He could tell Mr Hurley was really proud of the arrangement and he had been careful to express his amazement. It certainly kept the smell away from the house compared with living in a town and having the waste collected by the night soil men or piled up in ditches at the edge of the town or even at the ends of the lanes.

Richard was used to rising early now and after dressing he went into the kitchen for the meal. Mrs Hurley inspected his hands before he was allowed to fetch his food – she seemed almost as keen on being clean as her husband. There were books too on a shelf in the kitchen. He knew that the house where he had lived before was unusual in having books and had been surprised to see books in this place – and not kept in the parlour or the workroom but in the kitchen as though they needed to be near the focus of the house. Mr Hurley was sitting away from the food at one end of the big table and had one of the books down and was reading, following the words carefully with his finger. Abruptly he said, “Have you read the Holy Bible?” Richard didn’t know what to say. “Well, you come from a Holy household, even if they are of the Old Faith. Have you read the Holy Word?” Mr Hurley glared at him. Richard stammered out that he wasn’t good at Latin. Mr Hurley let out a great shout. “Oh Ho! The Bible in Latin is it! *Here* we have a *precious* book. *Here* we have a Bible in English.” “Shush!” said Mrs Hurley, “It’s not safe like to be talking about that even if he is your apprentice!” Mr Hurley subsided, curling himself over the book and reading some more, ignoring Richard in his deep concentration.

Richard thought to himself that Mr Hurley must be a Non-conformist, one of those people who thought that they should be able to read the gospels for themselves and who met separately. He was worried now that he had moved from one house where religion was secret and dangerous (as his uncle and aunt *were* of the Old Catholic Faith), to another where religion had to be secret because it was also against the law that required people to worship at the Established Church – St Mary’s Priory Church in Abergavenny. He felt that funny feeling in his tummy when he worried about that nice Father Lewis who often stayed at his uncle’s house. He always seemed interested in Richard, how he was feeling, whether he felt “well in himself”. That was a question that made him think about Mr Hurley’s “clean” remarks. They both seemed to be talking about the same sort of thing, but Richard wasn’t sure what it was. It was something inside him and he felt anxious and uncomfortable – he hunched over his food and didn’t want to look at anyone.

He was glad then that the other apprentices came into the kitchen, Alun was sent back to clean himself more. Somehow, he had fallen over between the washroom and the house and had dirty hands and knees. The other two were talking, not too loudly with a swift look at Mr Hurley to judge his mood. They sat well away from him and Richard remembered he had noticed this before and had thought it just the deference to a Master, but their looks at the book so fiercely held in Mr Hurley's hands showed that they understood something of Master Hurley's passion for his religious books.

Afterwards, he was able to talk to the other apprentices in what was their only free time. Every other day was packed with work, but on Sundays they had time to talk, to walk or just sit, and they had time with Mrs Hurley where she got them to talk about any problems they had. Richard wanted to avoid talking about religion – all through his life it just seemed to be such a problem. He worried that the priests who came to his uncle's house would be arrested by the magistrate and sent to prison. The punishment was terrible – being hung, drawn and quartered – and that mildly spoken priest, Father Lewis, who came most regularly to the house seemed just to accept this was a risk he had to take. Some of the other priests were much fiercer, making him feel uncomfortable in the same sort of way as Mr Hurley had been that morning. He felt that this religion business was dangerous – well it *was* literally life-threatening!

Time passed quickly and he got used to Mr Hurley's shouting and passion about the best way to work, to keep everything clean *and* his passion for reading his Bible. Sometimes on a Sunday evening other men and women would come and meet in the parlour with Mr and Mrs Hurley. One man seemed to be a leader, listened to by the others - but he also seemed to be constantly nervous his eyes flicking around the brewery with its numerous buildings and careful layout, all kept clean and tidy, as though he could imagine other people hiding there. Richard noticed too how the others in the group often seemed to be arguing with this leader. What started off as a discussion resulted in raised voices and arguments, often, it appeared, about exactly what it was that the Bible said. He compared that with the way things had been in his uncle's house, where the priests said things and no argument resulted like here. There the priests were in charge; here, they were in charge but could be challenged and had to defend their words. He shook his head – it was too difficult for him to work out.

The years passed with a routine developing where Richard knew what he had to do - and did it well. The other apprentices, older than him, left and new younger ones appeared - he and Alun were the ones that they turned to for help and knowledge. Alun still made lots of mistakes. Then, one never-to-be forgotten day, Richard was in the upper floor of one of the working buildings when there was an enormous noise. He went as fast as he could down the steep ladder to the yard. Out of one of the buildings where the beer was fermented was a flood of beer coming through the opening. And Alun, lying at an awkward angle at the bottom of the ladder to the upper floor with beer bubbling and running down the ladder and all around. Everyone had heard the explosion of noise and Mr Hurley quickly organised everyone. He never thought he would hear Mr Hurley be more worried about a person than the beer before, but he was there checking Alun over and paying no attention to the mess of fermenting beer. His wife arrived to help with other helpers from the kitchen. They put Alun on a board and carried him into the kitchen.

The apprentices were sent back to work. Mr Hurley told Richard to help him to clear up the mess and find out what had happened. He really wanted to be with Alun, but the women were looking after him and a doctor was coming. Mr Hurley said briefly that he thought he had 'only' broken his leg. "Fool boy, letting the beer break the barrel like that." Then, looking

quite worried, “I just hope....”, then he broke off and started clearing up the mess of sticky beer everywhere. When they started on the upper floor, they could see what had happened. A metal band round one of the barrels had slipped down and failed to control the pressure inside. The barrel had burst and flooded all over the floor and down the ladder and over the floor below. Alun must have been pushed by the tide of beer down the ladder and fallen on the floor below.

By the end of that week, Alun was looking much better although obviously in pain. Mrs Hurley had put a truckle bed downstairs and the kitchen girls were looking after him. Then there was some sort of agreement reached at the Sunday meeting in the parlour and Alun went off to the house of one of that group to be looked after. Richard was relieved that Alun hadn't been thrown out or had to go back to his family who could not have looked after him. He just hoped he would heal up and be able to work properly again. He felt somehow that perhaps he should have noticed the slipped metal band himself, but he couldn't check Alun's work all the time.... No, he told himself, he couldn't do that and his own work as well.

A couple of months later and Richard had some tests from two other brewers from the town. He had to show them how he could make beer completely by himself and it was drunk cautiously by the men as though they were afraid it might not pass muster – but they pronounced it excellent and that Mr Hurley had done a good job in teaching him. Then, shortly after that, Mrs Hurley said that his uncle would be coming to fetch him next week. Richard was to be given some money that his father had left him to be able to set up as a brewer himself at his uncle's house. He could hardly believe his good fortune.

When he returned to his uncle's house, he realised how much things had changed. Uncle Thomas consulted him as to what he needed and between them they altered things at the house to have all the equipment and supplies to run his own business as a brewer. A new building was added near the kitchen and other rooms set aside for his use. Soon he was set up as an independent brewer himself. After the strict instruction he had received and the years of practice, he could now make an excellent income himself as a master brewer. His aunt and uncle bought another house in Frogmore Street and they spent most of their time there. After the awful business when the Catholic priests were rounded up and killed, his uncle and aunt were desolated by the terrible



events of the persecution. His uncle gave the house in Cross Street to Richard. The chapel on the top floor of that house was closed up and everyone tried to forget what had happened. Richard was sorry for the anguish that his uncle and aunt were suffering, but he felt that it was better to keep your distance from anything like that. Brewing was safer and brought in lots of money!

Things to find out

1. When were the Non-conformists able to worship in their own chapels and where they were built in Abergavenny? There is a pamphlet with a walk around the churches and chapels in Abergavenny (available online on the ALHS website) which takes you around most of them in the central area.
2. There is more information about Richard Gunter, and the house Plas Gunter Mansion, online. The house is currently being restored – find out what is happening there.
3. Find out where the brewery for the Kings Arms public house used to be – the Abergavenny Street Survey will help (look at Nevill Street) – and have a walk around the area.
4. How is traditional beer made now – can you find out on-line?

Notes:

Richard Gunter lived in the house now known as Plas Gunter Mansion, in Lower Cross Street. You can find out more on <https://www.plasguntermansion.org.uk/>

The Geneva Bible (1560) was the preferred version for Puritans and Dissenters (Non-Conformists) because it was translated by English exiles in Geneva. It had notes that supported their interpretation. They disliked the King James Bible (1611) used in the Established church as they considered it a 'State' project.

The 'Old Faith' was the term for Roman Catholicism and Richard's uncle and aunt were known to subscribe to that faith which was held in Latin. Both Non-conformists and Roman Catholics were fined for non-attendance at the Established Church in the seventeenth century. Roman Catholic priests were regarded by the Government as traitors and, if caught practising their faith and preaching it to others, could be prosecuted and hung, drawn and quartered.

When Richard died, the inventory of what was in the house showed that he was a rich man with lots of brewing equipment.

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

The night of November 29th 1837 was dark and cold, but Mr and Mrs George Baker and family were tucked up comfortably in their beds above their shop in Frogmore Street where Mr Baker was a cooper and seller of household goods. Their three children, eight-year-old Elizabeth, six-year-old George, and baby Edward at just one year old, were all in the next room happily dreaming of Christmas which was only a few weeks away.

Suddenly at about two o'clock in the morning Mrs Baker awoke with a start. She had heard a loud bang coming from downstairs. "George! George!" She shook him as she whispered sharply. "Wake up! I think there is someone in the shop." They both sat up and listened in silence for a few minutes but there was no sound.

"Go back to sleep, Ann," said George. "You must have been dreaming," so they settled down comfortably once more. It was still dark at about 5 o'clock when a wagon driver was guiding his team of horses through Frogmore Street. He spied a strange glow coming from one of the shops. As he drew nearer, he could see that the inside of the shop was on fire. Immediately the wagon driver jumped down, left his horses and rushed to raise the alarm "Fire! Fire! Fire!" he shouted as he ran from house to house banging on all the doors. Within minutes the street was crowded with people, many still in their night clothes. They didn't stop to watch but promptly spun into action. As some formed an orderly line stretching from the shop to a nearby water pump, others gathered basins, buckets, bowls, and anything that could be used to hold water, and began to pass the vessels from hand to hand, bravely trying as best they could to douse the flames. It soon became apparent that this was not working. They sent for the local fire engine but it could not come! It was in for repairs whilst another was also out of action.

Concern was now growing for the houses on either side of Mr Baker. One belonged to Mr Isaacs, who was a pawnbroker, and the other to Mr Richard George. Both houses held valuable goods. The wind was quite strong, and it looked as if the roof of Mr Isaacs' shop would catch fire at any minute. It was hastily decided to send off to Hereford and Monmouth seeking help, and a bold young man by the name of George Green junior spoke up. "Leave it to me," he said. "I can saddle up my horse and be on my way in no time." In a few minutes he had set out and was galloping away as fast as he could to Monmouth.

Meanwhile with the help of friends and neighbours, Mr Baker and his family escaped down the stairs which led into their back room and kitchen. They found shelter with friends nearby, although nobody was quite sure where to find them at the time because of the frightening situation all around. Despite feeling a bit scared, Elizabeth and George thought it was a great adventure, while baby Edward slept peacefully all through the escape.

Elizabeth suddenly remembered something. "Oh dear", she said, "I've left my purse with my precious belongings on the chair beside my bed. I hope it doesn't burn." "Well, it is too late to go back for it now," replied her mother. "We shall be lucky if anything in our house is saved tonight" and tears filled her eyes at the thought.

Word of the fire had spread, and nearby Morgan's Brewery Company very generously sent a double action pump which was part of their brewery equipment. This was proved to be of great help, together with even greater efforts from the men in the street to keep the water flowing.

The battle to stop the flames from spreading to the houses of Mr Isaacs and Mr Richard George continued. They needed to save the valuable items inside both houses, in particular those of Mr Isaacs, as he was a pawnbroker and jeweller. Some brave young men placed a ladder against the wall of Mr Isaacs' house and climbed up to the roof to try to stop the flames from reaching his rafters. By this time the heat was so strong that the windows of the houses on the opposite side of the street became blistered and some paint fell in large flakes to the ground beneath. This was a very dangerous place to be. The whole of Mr Baker's house was filled with smoke but the men on the roof of Mr Isaacs' house had managed to cut his rafters away from those of Mr Baker's house and thanks to the people below, the water kept flowing which helped to keep the flames from spreading.



A double action water pump which might be similar to the one from Morgan's Brewery
(with kind permission of Hungerford Virtual Museum)

However, just at that moment there was a sudden loud crash and the whole of Mr Baker's house collapsed on to the people below. Amid screams and cries of help it was feared that people had been killed, but luckily there were only some people who received injuries, with broken limbs, cuts and grazes. Eventually also, two boys were dug out of the rubble.

Only a short time later, the Monmouth fire engine arrived in record time. The cart was led by two horses, and it carried about six men and a large pump. It had indeed been a very fast journey, as it had taken young Mr Green who returned with it, only two hours and twenty minutes to travel to Monmouth and back. The Monmouth party had met the Hereford team on the way and it had been decided to send the Hereford team back to the depot as the two engines would take up too much room in the narrow Frogmore Street.

After some argument, the men who had bravely worked through the night to save the houses, all agreed to help the Monmouth Fire Brigade and very soon afterwards with the help of the powerful fire engine, the fire was brought under control.

Sadly, Mr Baker's house, his furniture and all his stock was all destroyed, including Elizabeth's purse. It had contained her favourite handkerchief, a small comb, and a snippet of her own pink silk hair ribbon with which she used to like to braid her doll's hair. Her doll had gone too - she was heartbroken. Mr Baker was not a rich man, and his shop and its stock were not insured. He and his family were left with only their night clothes they were wearing and clothes which had all been donated by kind friends.

At six o'clock that evening a meeting was held at the town hall, with the local vicar in charge. It was decided that a new fire engine should be ordered for the town, and the two existing ones should be repaired. Many people said, "Better late than never." Those present had been relieved to see the Monmouth Fire Brigade arriving at full gallop, but also ashamed that their own town had been unable to answer the call. A few days later a special dinner was held where a special collection of money was made to help Mr Baker and his family.

It is still not known how the fire started, but it is thought that a lighted candle in the shop had not been properly snuffed out. It could have been smouldering for some time, and the bang which Mrs Baker heard at two o'clock in the morning could have been caused by a row of brooms in the shop falling off the line of string which held them up, as the fire burned through it.

Remember never to leave a lighted candle unattended and be sure to check that it is properly put out when you have finished using it!

On 2nd December three days later, the Hereford Times reported that Elizabeth had been fast asleep when her family had been rescued, but that the purse on the chair at the side of her bed was already in flames. Mr & Mrs Baker, Elizabeth, George and Edward would never forget that terrible night, but they were lucky to be alive and happily recovered to spend more years in Abergavenny. If you look at the census for 1841 you will find their names.

Things to do

1. Can you find a picture of a Victorian Fire Engine and find out how it worked?
2. When did Victoria become Queen?
3. Look at an Ordnance Survey map and work out how you would get between Abergavenny and Monmouth without using the dual carriageway A40. An old map of Monmouthshire would help. (Hint: the National Library of Scotland maps site is good for old maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/>)
4. Walk along Frogmore Street and imagine where the fire might have been – perhaps opposite the burnt-out Richard's store – and think about the difference in managing the fire then and when Richard's burnt down.
5. What does a cooper make?
6. What work did a wagon driver do then and why would he be in Frogmore Street so early in the morning?

Disclaimer – This story, including the surnames of the people involved in the incident are based on two newspaper articles from the period. (The Monmouthshire Merlin and the Hereford Times both published on Saturday 2nd December, 1837)

The precise names of the Baker family are, however, taken on a 'best fit' basis from those of a Baker family who were recorded as living in Frogmore Street in the 1841 Census, 4 years after the fire. The ages of that family appear to be a good fit for those in the story.

Walter Watkins, Harper to Lady Llanover

Can you speak Welsh? Are you proud of being Welsh? Nowadays the language and culture of Wales is respected and often promoted. However, it was not always the case. Walter Watkins who lived at Llanover Court in the 1850s can tell you something about his childhood and his career in Wales.

Early years and the ‘Welsh not’



I was born in 1830 in Cwmdru near Crickhowell in Brecknockshire which you will know as Powys. As a boy I was quite musical and had a good singing voice. We spoke Welsh at home but at school all the lessons were in English. I really struggled with this language and sometimes I was punished if the teacher caught me speaking in Welsh. One afternoon we were learning about famous houses and I mistakenly use the word ‘ty’ instead of ‘house’. Of course that sound rang out in class and the teacher called me to the front and said that I would wear the ‘Welsh not’ for the rest of the day unless another pupil was caught speaking Welsh and I could pass it on to them. The ‘Welsh not’ was a piece of wood inscribed with those words which hung on rope around my neck for all the others in my class to see and laugh at me. Fortunately, that day my friend Llewellyn also slipped up and the teacher heard him speak in Welsh so I was able to pass the ‘Welsh not’ onto him. I wasn’t so lucky the following day. Again, I couldn’t remember the correct English word to use and this time the teacher caught me referring to ‘eglwys’ instead of church. It was close to the end of the school day and as I still had the ‘Welsh not’ around my neck when the final bell rang I was the one who was punished that day. I got three strikes of the cane on my hand. It really hurt! When I complained about it to my father expecting him to side with me and say how unfair this was, instead he agreed with the teacher and stressed that I needed to speak in English if I wanted to make anything of myself and have a good job in the future. I later learned that nearly all the other schools in this part of Wales did not impose the English language as strictly as my school did and the ‘Welsh not’ was used more in West and North Wales.

By a strange turn of events the very opposite to what my father predicted happened for me. I was rewarded for speaking Welsh. When I left school I was taken on by Lady Augusta Hall of Llanover Court, just outside Abergavenny. She was married to the MP Sir Benjamin Hall and Llanover Court was an impressive manor house with many servants. It was very

different from my humble home in Cwmdu. She had heard that I had a good singing voice and as I was fluent in Welsh she took me to work for her at the big house. Lady Llanover was a very influential lady. Although she was originally English she took it upon herself to be a great promoter of the Welsh language and culture. She preferred to employ Welsh speakers as servants in her house so that was good for me when I went to work there. She also insisted on Welsh being spoken at Church and she insisted that the Welsh language was taught at the two local schools in Llanover. Lady Llanover was also very influential in the Eisteddfodau - Cymdeithas Cymreigyddion y Fenni (the Abergavenny Welsh Society) from 1834 to 1853. She helped organise and sponsored ten Eisteddfodau in Abergavenny during those years. She saw this as a way of promoting the Welsh culture and she brought many influential friends and acquaintances from England and abroad to Llanover when the Eisteddfodau were on. Lady Llanover was also very keen on the adoption of the triple harp as the national instrument of Wales. She began by having her own family harper and she also gave scholarships to pupils to learn to play the triple harp. These days the word harpist is used but in the 1800s the word was 'harper'. By the time I was living at Llanover Court



Lady Llanover's Servants -
We do not know when this photo was taken but it was probably after Walter Watkins' time there.

her harper was the famous Thomas Gruffydd. Thomas was actually virtually blind, he had lost one eye as a three-year-old and almost lost the other following a blow at school. His lack of sight did not stop him from playing beautifully and he also took me on as one of his pupils. The triple harp is an interesting instrument which as you might guess has three sets of strings. Lady Llanover considered that it should be the national instrument of Wales and did a lot to promote it at Eisteddfodau locally and farther afield. She employed two local harp makers Abram Jeremiah and Elias Francis as well as buying harps from other makers.

The Eisteddfodau

Thomas Gruffydd and Lady Llanover encouraged me to participate in Eisteddfodau both in Abergavenny and wider afield. I began by singing at the Eisteddfod held in Abergavenny in 1845 when I was 14 years old. I sang with John Thomas and two girls called Eos Fach and Y Dryn Fach and the Monmouthshire Beacon thought that my voice vied 'with that of Rubini'. I had to ask Thomas Gruffydd who Rubini was and he told me he was a famous Italian tenor. I was pleased with that. I also won a prize that year for being the best male singer to the harp by singing the first two verses in Welsh of the air 'Callin Serchus' and was given a copy of the Miss Jane Williams's Collection of National Airs of Gwent. So, my Welsh language and my singing were appreciated in Abergavenny.

I had begun to learn the triple harp with Thomas Gruffydd as my main tutor. At the Abergavenny Eisteddfod in 1845 I won a prize for the best performer of the triple harp, under twelve years of age and won a medal that was valued at three guineas. Mr. Gruffydd said not to mention to anyone that I was actually fourteen, so I kept quiet and tried to look young. What I really wanted to do was to win a triple harp in a competition. This was made difficult because a lot of the time I was competing against the master harper Thomas Gruffydd who some said was the greatest Welsh harper of his age. In 1845 I was competing for triple harps that were valued at ten pounds and ten shillings. Thomas Gruffydd had entered alongside myself and another young harper called William Evans. Thomas Gruffydd won the first prize and William Evans won the second prize. However, at the big dinner that was held after the Eisteddfod an Indian Prince called Dwarkanauth Tagore who was staying with Lady Llanover announced that he was going to award me four pounds to go towards getting a harp as my playing had been nearly as good at that of the successful candidate. I had no idea who this great man was and only understood that India was a long way away and it had taken him a long time to get to Wales, but I was very grateful for the money. It would have gone nearly half way to getting a harp but as I was only fourteen I had to send some of the money home to my family.

Lady Llanover encouraged us to enter Eisteddfodau further afield. Ten years later in 1855 Thomas Gruffydd and I entered the harp competition at the Royal London Eisteddfod. True to form Thomas won the first prize of five guineas and I won the second prize of four guineas. There are a number of blind Welsh harpers and it does seem that their lack of sight makes their sense of hearing and musicality more acute. I also wonder if it helps them in competitions that they cannot see the audience and so do not get as nervous as I do. Thomas Gruffydd was a particularly talented harper and went on to become Special Welsh harpist to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in 1869.

Lady Llanover also influenced the other competitions at the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau that were good for local producers and businesses. For example there was a prize of three pounds for the best specimen of colour in Welsh yarn dyed in Gwent or Morganwg which was awarded to Charles Price a dyer from Abergavenny. There was also a prize of two pounds and two shillings for the best lady's beaver hat which Lady Llanover regarded as part of the Welsh national costume. This was won by Mr. David Davies who had sent in two hats. However, he didn't have any competition as he was the only entrant!

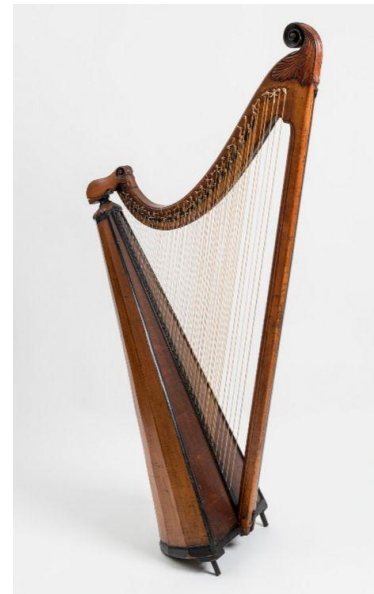
The Eisteddfod Balls

Following the competitions in the day a ball would often be held at Llanover Court in the evening. In 1853 Lady Llanover hosted the Cymreigyddion Welsh Costume Ball at Llanover Court and about three hundred people attended. As well as the local rich people there were friends of Lady Llanover from London and foreign countries. Reading the guest list I saw the names of Earls, Ladies and Lords, MPs, Excellencies and even Prince Ladislaus Czartoryski who was a Polish prince in exile. Lady Llanover encouraged the guests, especially the ladies, to wear some version of a Welsh costume. They were a remarkable sight as the costumes were made of the finest silk and wool and looked really beautiful. Thomas Gruffydd and I were required to play for the assembled guests and requested to play familiar old Welsh tunes after the evening meal. These were quite easy to play as we were well practised and it was wonderful to watch all the guests enjoying themselves. Lady Llanover had designed a special uniform for her harpers to wear which was made of her

own Welsh tweed and made us look very grand. Two days later there was another costume ball at the big house at Llanarth with nearly three hundred people present. Lady Llanover sent us over there to play again and it was great fun watching the guests from around the world dancing and enjoying themselves while we played traditional Welsh music.

Conclusion

I really enjoyed my time as harper to Lady Llanover. Speaking Welsh was always favoured at Llanover Court and it was good to be amongst other Welsh speakers and in an environment where Welsh culture was promoted. I did become a proficient harper but was never as good as my master the famous Thomas Gruffydd.



Why Don't You

1. Find out more about Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/collections/511160>
2. Take a look at a triple harp and the costume worn by Thomas Gruffydd It is likely that Walter Watkins wore a similar costume.
3. Find out more about Wesh Not - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Not

Horse Travel versus Motorised Transport

Last week I had cause to drive from Crickhowell to Abergavenny in my car on a midweek morning. I drove carefully taking account of the changes in speed limits and traffic hazards that I encountered on the way. I reached the war memorial in Abergavenny in around 20 minutes having travelled around 6 miles. My average speed was therefore 18 miles per hour. I started thinking about how much slower the journey might have been if I was living in the nineteenth century and had to make the journey by horse and buggy. Then, when undertaking some historical research, I came across an old newspaper article which gave me a surprising answer. In 1887 a man called James Holly from Brynmawr accepted a challenge from his friend that he could not get from the Bear Hotel in Crickhowell in less than 26 minutes whilst travelling in a buggy pulled by his fine trotting horse called Polly to the Old Hereford House Hotel, Abergavenny, (now called Auberge Bar and Restaurant). A trotting horse is a horse that is bred and trained to trot at speed rather than gallop and the special buggy to which it is harnessed is called a sulky. Mr Holly accepted the challenge and even bet his friend £10 that he could do it. This was a very substantial bet and in today's money it would be worth around £1,200.

Harness Racing
By an unknown artist,
(with kind permission of
Brave Fine Arts)



In the event, Mr Holly completed the challenge in 22 minutes, so winning the challenge and the £10. Surprisingly, the time taken was not markedly different from my time for the same journey made by car. Furthermore, if he had ridden a conventional horse on horseback and allowed it to gallop for short distances, I am sure that time would be reduced even further. In addition, there would have been far less traffic to deal with on the road than I encountered on my journey. My conclusion was, therefore, that purely based on travel times, short journeys by horse drawn transport would not be much different from today's motorised transport.

Travel time alone, however, is not the only consideration when comparing horse transport with cars. At the start of a journey by horse, there would have been a need to bridle the horse and harness it to a buggy or cart whereas with a car it is just a matter of getting in and starting the engine. At the end of my journey by car, I was able to park it at a car park, pay my parking fee and go about my business in town for as long as I needed. If I had travelled by horse, however, I could not simply have tied it up and left it. The longest advisable time to leave a horse tethered without food or water is around 30 minutes. If I was intending to

spend a long time in the town, therefore, I would have had to leave the horse in the care of a livery yard or stable where men called ostlers would care for the horse and feed and water it. There would, of course, be a fee to be paid to the ostler for his work. The larger Inns and Hotels in Abergavenny in the nineteenth century had livery stables and offered the services of an ostler and grooms.

I then got to thinking about longer journeys and discovered that, for more extensive travel, the difference between horse and motorised transport was much more marked. In the nineteenth century the building which is currently Cafe Nero in Frogmore Street was part of a large Inn called the Golden Lion. The Inn also acted as a staging post for horse drawn coaches travelling to Newport and beyond and even linked with steamboats called 'packets' travelling across the Bristol Channel to the city of Bristol. In the summer of 1850, the Inn advertised day excursions to Newport Station where passengers could then board a steam train travelling on to Chepstow. At this time, travel involving a steam locomotive was a new experience so the trip represented an exciting and adventurous day out. The advertisement stated that the coach would leave Abergavenny at 6.45am and arrive at Newport station at 9.45am to connect with the train to Chepstow at 10.10am. The journey time to Newport was therefore 3 hours. This compares very badly with the current travel time by car to Newport Station which is around 40 minutes. Even current bus timetables show a travel time of around 1hr 30mins with multiple stops included on the journey. The excursion was planned to return to Abergavenny at 10.40pm so it would have been a very long day out and at a ticket price of 10 shillings per person it would have been expensive. In today's money it would be around £60-£70 per ticket.

Comfort in horse drawn coaches would also be rudimentary with no heating, little suspension and only basic protection from wind and rain. The condition of the roads would also mean that a 'bumpy ride' was an almost a guaranteed part of the experience. So next time you are travelling in a warm comfortable car or bus just consider how lucky you are to be able to make your journey without having to worry about the weather or the rattle and roll of the coach and more importantly not having to care about the condition of the horses at journey's end.

Question

Why would £10 in 1835 be worth £1,100 today?

References:

The story of the "Trotting Match" was printed in the South Wales Daily News on 29th October 1887.

The excursion to Chepstow is based on an advertisement printed in the Hereford Times on 31st August 1850.

The current value of nineteenth century money was estimated using the website: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

The Wedding in Maindiff Court

It is 1884. My name is Mary, I am twelve years' old and I work as a scullery maid at Maindiff Court Mansion, just outside Abergavenny. My mother Elizabeth is one of the cooks. She makes the most delicious cakes and puddings. My older sister Martha is a chamber maid. I would like to do that when I am older. Now I wash the dishes and put them away, clean the pots and pans and make them shine. I sweep and wash the floors and often help with other chores when we are busy. I wear a uniform as we all do. It is black and I wear a white apron and a white mop cap. I have soft black shoes to wear so that I don't make any noise while I am working.

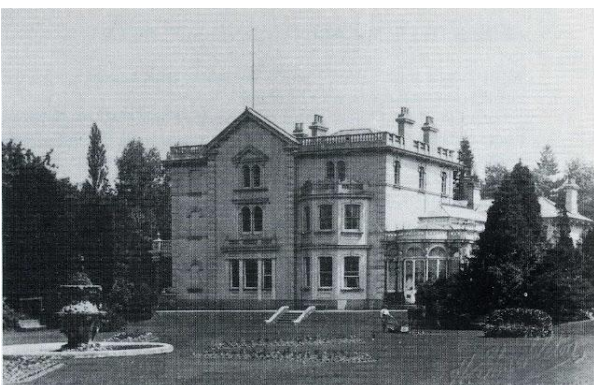


"The Kitchen Maid" by Harold Gilman
(by permission of Amgueddfa Cymru Museum of Wales)

I must be careful as I pay for my uniform from my wages, so the longer it lasts the better. I think I am luckier than most maids because I work with my mother who is the cook. My Dad is the gardener. He grows the vegetables which are cooked and served in the house. We have a small home in Llantilio Pertholey, but we are rarely there together for we work almost every day of the week

I work for Mr Crawshay Bailey Junior. His father, Crawshay Bailey was a very important Iron Master and very wealthy. When he died, he left all his property to my master, who wasn't very interested in business or the iron works and concentrated more on developing his estates.

Maindiff Court Mansion



The outside of the house



The stairs and hallway

The lady of the house is Countess Elizabeth Selina Gwynne Maclaine. She is such a beautiful and gracious lady, she has lots of friends and the house is always full of visitors. My mother is kept busy preparing special cakes and sweet treats for them.

I have heard Mr Bailey is a benevolent man. In late 1883, he took over the lease of a small piece of land along the Hereford Road which was known as Priory Meadow and decided that the land should become a park for the people of Abergavenny. The Chronicle reported on Mr. Bailey's requirements for the governing and orderly keeping of the park. He insisted that no games, of any nature, should be allowed to be played in the park without the club having a licence from the responsible person- appointed by himself. He also appointed a park keeper to control and regulate the grounds around the clock.

Mr Johnson, the designer of Bailey Park, planned to build stone walls with iron fencing on them in some areas and other borders to be of wood. The main entrance would be from Hereford Road where there would be two big gates held up by big pillars wide enough for a carriage, with two smaller gates on either side for pedestrians. There would be a circular path around the edges for cyclists and there were plans for the facilities for cricket and football, a pond, a grandstand, a bandstand and a pavilion. He also left an area for an outdoor swimming pool. Pretty much all that the town could have wished for. It was to be ready by the 1st of May 1884. Of course, he still owned the park. However after his death in 1887, the town commissioners decided to ask to buy the freehold from the family. They agreed to the sum of £5000, and the park became the property of the town.

1884 is such a special year in our lives! Clara Bailey got married in Cheltenham to W J G Canning on the 22nd of April. Oh, how exciting it was for all of us. Mr Bailey always shared his special times with us, and this was the wedding of his eldest daughter. Such preparations had to be made - lots of food for the wedding guests and there would be a picnic in the grounds. One of the cooks was to prepare the meat for the sandwiches and there would be ham and beef and chicken. All needed to be cooked and then sliced thinly for sandwiches in crusty bread – of course one of the cooks would make the bread. They would be putting the dough to rise the night before and start baking early in the morning. There was salmon smoked and thinly sliced for sandwiches- also eggs were collected from the chickens, boiled, sliced up and put in into sandwiches.

My Dad had to have the right vegetables ready for the feast. He grew tomatoes and cucumbers in the hot house, brought on early ready for the occasion. Celery and radishes too. Cucumbers and carrots and turnips had been made into pickles when they were ripe. There were lots of salads, even coleslaw and potato salad were made.

My mother was baking for several days. She made biscuits, scones, fruit cakes and loads of pies. There were all kinds of fruit pies because the fruit had been bottled when it was ripe and was ready to use. There were also jellies and blancmanges, custards and puddings to get ready and keep cool, and they were all put in individual cups. To drink there would be lemonade, ginger beer and fruit juice. I had a lovely cotton dress to wear. Of course it wasn't new, it was a hand me down from my sister Martha. I felt very good in it. I also had a bonnet to wear. Because it was a wedding we went into the fields around the house and picked daisies, primroses, cherry blossom and bluebells, lovely bright colours. We wove them with ribbon to go around my bonnet. I made chains of flowers like necklaces. Long tables were put out at the entrance to the field with all the food and napkins ready for the food to be displayed.

It seems it wasn't just us in the house who were excited! Mr Bailey was so popular, and well respected, that almost the whole town turned out to welcome his daughter Clara. She was married on the 22nd of April in Cheltenham where her husband William James Gordon Canning was from. They came to Abergavenny by train and, when they arrived at the station and got out of their carriages, they were greeted by hundreds of happy cheering people. A marching band led the procession. The streets were decorated with banners and flags along their route to Maindiff Court. When they arrived, there was a choir of local school children singing for them. The crowds were not disappointed because when they got to Maindiff Court they turned in to the field and there were all the delicious treats which Mr Bailey had laid on for them and which we had been preparing for the last few days. Great fun was had by all. In the evening as it became dark, we were entertained by a wonderful firework display. As the fireworks finished beacons were lit on the hills around. A memorable day for us all.

Things you could do

1. Look at the gates to Bailey Park which have been refurbished and look splendid. What colours are they? What are the decorations? Have a look at the gateposts -what animal is on the top?
2. You could visit St Mary's church which is normally open.
3. Take a picnic to Bailey Park.
Can you spot the flowers that were mentioned? They are spring flowers as the wedding was in April - daisies, primroses, bluebells and cherry blossom are easy to spot in Abergavenny.



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The Party

This story takes place in the 1950s.

The spelling and grammar mistakes are there because that's how Peter wrote it, before he knew better!

I hate parties! I don't know why I agreed to go to Geoffrey's party that afternoon. The Lucky Dip bag of stamps that I sent off a postal order for had arrived in the post that morning and I would really have liked to spend the afternoon sorting them and putting them in my stamp album. But Mummy said we sent back the RSVP so I had to go and now I must go upstairs and wash and change! Robin my little brother bounced up and said Ooh he'd go instead and pretend to be me. As we do look quite alike, I thought this was a really good idea. But Mummy said as it was all my Class going to the party, they were bound to notice the difference. I don't know why Robin likes parties so much when he always says he prefers animals to people and is going to be a vet when he grows up. His idea of a perfect treat is really to spend a day in Abergavenny market watching the animals being auctioned. My idea of a perfect treat is to spend the day in a bookshop with three book tokens to spend. I want to have my own bookshop when I grow up.

While I was putting on my Sunday clothes, even though most of the boys will be wearing their school clothes, Mummy came in with a bright blue bow on a circle of elastic and said she'd bought it for me to make me feel more party-like. Oh No! A Bow Tie! I was too shocked to say anything. Robin didn't help by bouncing up and down and saying how much he'd like to wear it. I magnanimously said he could wear it at Christmas. Magnanimously is a good word that I got out of a William book. But I saw that I would have to wear the tie as Mummy had bought it specially. So, we set off for the party and I kept my chin down as far as I could while I walked to hide the tie. Mrs Judd down the road called out did we want any roobarb and does Peter have a stiff neck. I must look up how to spell roobarb in the dictionary because it doesn't look right at the moment. Mummy said yes please could she pick some up later on their way back from dropping me at the party. She pretended she hadn't heard the bit about my neck. When she heard where the party was being held Mrs Judd said Oo you'll get a good a good tea there, bach! Then I felt a bit more cheerful at the thought of a good tea.

When we got to Geoffrey's house I handed him his present and he said Thanks and ripped off the paper and threw the book on a pile of presents. It was a book on railway engines that I would have liked to have kept. I saw that he had one of those Mr Potato-Head games too. Geoffrey's little sister Lucy was there. She has long bright ginger hair in ringlets and she had blue bows the same colour as my bow tie. Mummy said she would collect me later and she and Robin went off to buy school shoes because his feet are growing so fast. I wished I was going because the shoe shop has one of those x-ray machines that means you can see your toes inside your shoes.

I was taken into the front room where all the boys were walking around waiting for something to happen. The girls were showing off their party-frocks to each other and one of them noticed my bow tie and I could hear her giggling and showing Lucy that her bows were the same colour. Lucy stuck out her tongue at me, so I strolled nonchalantly over to a book case and started reading the titles. Nonchalantly is another good word from William. I could hear a voice from the hall saying He's not here yet and another saying I'm sure he will be soon and I wondered who had not arrived.



Geoffrey's mummy and an Auntie came in and said it was time to start the games, so we had Musical Bumps. Geoffrey's daddy pulled open the front of the big radiogram and put a record on the turntable. It was Teddy Bears Picnic. I think this is really a game meant for little children and Lucy laughed a lot. I was the first person to be Out. I'm almost always the first Out in games. Then we had Pin the Tail on the Donkey. I'm not so bad at that as I think about it scientifically and don't just trust to luck. Then we played Pass the Parcel. When the parcel got to me it was tied with string in a really tight knot. I had nearly got it undone when

the music started again and I was shouted at to pass it on. When the next person got it they ripped off the string and two whole layers of paper in one go. The parcel only had a bar of Five Boys chocolate in the middle and Geoffrey got that in the end. We had Kim's Game next where you look at a tray full of little things and then you have to write down all the things you can remember. I'm good at that game and would have won except they said they couldn't read my writing.

Then they had a game I hadn't played before and everyone else said it was the Flour Cake. We all had to move to the edge of the room and they laid down a big plastic tablecloth. Geoffrey's mummy came in very slowly carrying a tray and on the tray was a big white cake made of flour and she carefully put it in the middle. It had a big red sweet on top. What you had to do was cut a slice of the cake without making the sweet fall off the top. It looked quite easy at the start but you could see the flour cracking as more people took slices. When it got to my turn I tried to calculate how big a slice to take but they shouted at me to get on with it, so I quickly cut a tiny slice and of course the sweet toppled down! Everyone cheered and said now I had to eat the sweet. I put out my hand to take it and they shouted No you have to take it without using your hands! So I had to lean right over and put my face in the flour and try to grab it with my mouth and try not to breathe in any flour. I got it in the end and stood up brushing the flour off my face. I looked out of the window and could see a blue van stopping outside. It had Mr Marvo the Magician written on the side. Of course – that was why I had wanted to come to this party. Geoffrey had said there might be a magician. My handkerchief which had been in my pocket when we set out had of course disappeared so I had to use my sleeve to wipe my face. Everyone was laughing at me but I had the magician to look forward to now.

Then they said it was time for tea. So we all trooped into the dining room and sat down. I was madly sucking my sweet but it was very big and hard and didn't taste nice. I think it must have been a cough sweet. I couldn't bite it either. They started handing round the sandwiches. We always have to start with the savoury stuff. I didn't want to eat sandwiches with the sweet in my mouth but there wasn't anywhere to spit it out. I didn't want to say No Thank you in case they thought I wasn't hungry. So, I was polite and took the nearest sandwich and pushed the sweet into my cheek. I must have looked like a hamster. Oh no! It was bloaters' paste! Even in the War people wouldn't have had to eat bloaters' paste at a party! At that moment someone came round with a jug of orange juice and my tumbler was filled. I took a mouthful then decided to see if I could slide the sweet out of my mouth and down inside the tumbler. It stuck on the side near the bottom and made the squash a funny colour and taste odd but at last I had got rid of it. When the sandwiches were handed round again, I asked for a sausage roll instead but was told they were not starting on those yet. I took another sandwich and of course it was bloaters' paste again.

Anyway, we did have sausage rolls after that and there were some crisps too, but they had forgotten to shake the salt over the crisps from the little blue twist of paper. Then we had a butterfly cake each and then there was an enormous jelly that was red at the top, then yellow in the middle and green at the bottom. It had bits of tinned fruit salad in it too. And we had a slice of that neelopitan ice cream that is in three different coloured stripes from a block. I had hoped for some red jelly with some peach in it, but I mostly got green jelly with one piece of pear. Then there was the Birthday Cake and Geoffrey blew out the candles, and we all sang Happy Birthday but didn't eat the cake.



After that we were sent to a room the other side of the hall. Geoffrey's house has a lot more rooms than ours. In there was a tall man with a moustache in a top hat standing behind a table. He said he was Mr Marvo and started doing all sorts of clever things with cards. Some of the tricks didn't look too difficult and I think I might be able to learn some of them. He did lots of other things too like magicking things from behind people's ears. Then he did some tricks with his top hat and in the end produced a guinea pig out of it. The guinea pig

ran around on the floor and even left a few pellets of droppings on the carpet. Someone said did we know that if you held a guinea pig up by the tail its eyes would fall out. Lucy held it up and we could all see that it didn't have a tail at all just a tiny stub. We knew then that it was a joke and we all laughed.

After that the magician finished, and we all clapped like mad and went into the dining room again where all the furniture had been moved and the chairs set out for Musical Chairs. There wasn't a gramophone in that room, but they had one of the new Dansette record players. Geoffrey's daddy played Waltzing Cats on it. That's on the other side of the Coronation Scott record and the instruments sound like cats meowing. We started playing and I was the second person Out and went to sit on a chair next to a girl I didn't know and we watched the others going round and round. She said This is boring and I agreed. She said she would much rather be sticking cuttings into her scrapbook. And I said I'd rather be putting my Lucky Dip stamps into my album but that reading is nearly as good. She said Yes reading is just as good. I asked what her favourite book is and she said Just Willam and she was reading all the William books just now. I was quite impressed as I didn't think girls liked the William books. She said she is Geoffrey and Lucy's cousin.

Suddenly a terrific scream started and went on and on. We leant over and saw that Lucy was on the floor and her leg looked a funny shape. She didn't stop screaming. I don't know how anyone can keep it up so long without breathing. The girl I was sitting with shouted that it sounded like Violet Elizabeth Bott. She is a person in the William books who can scream and scream until she is sick. I said Do you think Lucy will be Sick? And the cousin said I hope so as she'll have to stop screaming then. I saw Geoffrey go to the Dansette and turn the knob to make it louder to cover the screaming and someone went into the hall to phone for an ambulance.

With all the screaming and meowing going on I decided to put my fingers in my ears. Then the auntie made us all go into the room where the magician had been. All his things were

gone but there were still some guinea pig droppings on the carpet. It was quieter here, but we just milled around and didn't know what to do. Then someone said they could hear the ambulance so we all rushed to the window and after a while the big white ambulance came up with the bell ringing like mad. Two men in black uniforms got out and carried a rolled up stretcher to the door. Then we heard a man saying Now then Young Lady what's been going on here and the screaming stopped. After a while we saw Lucy being carried out on the stretcher and put into the ambulance and her mummy got in too. We saw Geoffrey's daddy drive a big black car out of the garage and drive off after the ambulance. Then Geoffrey came into the room and said importantly that Lucy has a dislocated knee. They are taking her to the Victoria Cottage Hospital and Daddy is following in the Humber.

The auntie said that there is half an hour until you will be collected so let's play some quiet card games. She rummaged in a cupboard for some cards and Geoffrey said urgently that we can't use those cards they are for Bridge. But the auntie just shrugged and said "Needs Must". She divided us into those who could play Rummy and the rest who played Beggar My Neighbour. I grabbed a pack of cards and tried to fan them out like the magician had done but they all fell on the carpet. The others shouted at me, but they were well shuffled when we had picked them up.

After a while the mummies started arriving to collect the children and the auntie said, "Oh I nearly forgot the Cake". When my mummy and Robin arrived, I went into the hall, and the auntie was handing out slices of cake in paper napkins to the children as they said goodbye. Robin said Oooh and his eyes went all big and round so the auntie said he could have some cake too. We balanced both slices on top of the roobard in Mummy's basket. It wasn't really fair as he hadn't been at the party but at least, I wouldn't be expected to share my cake with him. I said, "Thank you for having me." to Geoffrey.

As we walked home, I told Robin about the ambulance and the guinea pig, and he said he is going to have some guinea pigs when he has saved up enough. Then he told me about the x-ray machine. He is tall enough now to see in properly though the viewing holes. We were eating our cake in the kitchen when Daddy came in and said "Wo-Ho that looks like good cake!" and pretended to steal a bit off Robin's plate. He said "How was the party?" I shrugged and said it was OK. There was a magician and an ambulance and please can I have a book on magic for Christmas.

THE END

p. s. Mummy says Roobarb is spelt with an H !!

Why don't you –

1. Find out where the Livestock Market and the Victoria Cottage Hospital used to be in Abergavenny.
2. Listen to the Teddy Bears Picnic - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZANKFsrcKU> or the Waltzing Cat - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJWPpbwb6vg>
3. Read one of the William books written by Richmal Crompton.
4. Make some butterfly cakes using this old family recipe. If you have scales that weigh ounces you could try using all Imperial measurements, but we have added the grammes for you.

Butterfly Cakes

3 oz (100g) hard margarine
3 oz (100g) caster sugar
1 large or two small eggs
6 oz (170g) self raising flour, sifted
A little milk
1/2 teaspoon of vanilla essence



Beat the margarine and sugar with a spoon until pale and fluffy. Beat the egg with a fork then beat it a little at a time into the margarine and sugar. Add the essence. Fold in the flour in two or three lots adding a little milk until the mixture is smooth and a soft dropping consistency. Put 12 small cake cases into a bun tin and divide the mixture between them evenly. Bake in a moderate oven for 15-20 minutes until golden and a skewer pushed in comes out clean. Leave them to cool on a rack.

Take 2 oz (60g) of butter or block margarine and cream it with a spoon then gradually mix in 4 oz (120g) sifted icing sugar and beat until it is light and fluffy. Add a few drops of essence. Cut a slice off the top of each cake and spoon or pipe on some icing. Cut the cake slice in half and push the straight edges into the icing to make butterfly wings. Sprinkle on some hundreds and thousands for a party and arrange the cakes daintily on a doily.

Playtime in Linda Vista Gardens

My sister and I often play in Linda Vista Gardens. The Gardens once belonged to the large house on the hill called Linda Vista, a Spanish name meaning 'beautiful view'. The house was built in 1875 by Henry Jenkins who lived in Chicken Street (now called Flannel Street) as a child. He and his two older brothers, William and John, moved to Chile and made a fortune from their building business. Henry returned to Abergavenny with his family and lived in Brecon Road whilst the house was built. In 1957 the Gardens were sold to the Abergavenny Corporation for use as a public park, which opened in 1965. The Gardens were enlarged over the years to include part of Castle Meadows and are now owned by Monmouthshire County Council.

There is plenty to explore in Linda Vista Gardens. We can play on the swing, run up and down the log stepping stones and through the living willow tunnel, whilst Mummy and Daddy watch from the seats carved from a tree. Sadly, the tree we loved was blown over in the strong winds we had during the winter in 2026.

The Play area in Linda Vista Gardens with the fallen tree

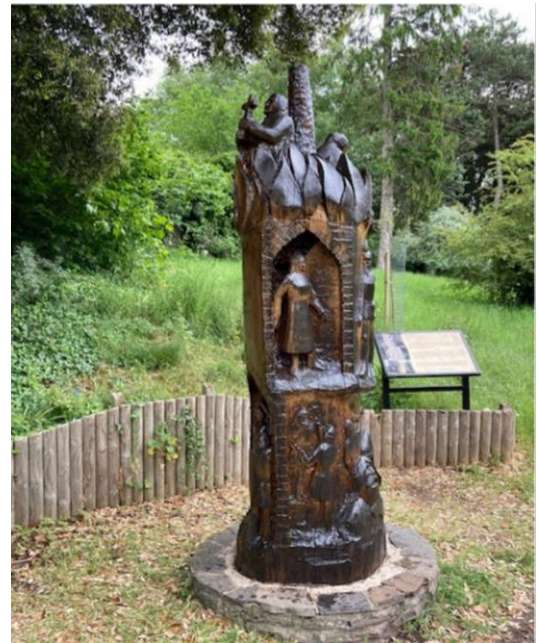


There is a path that leads up to the Café. The paving stones are carved with the names of the businesses and organisations who donated them. A monument stands near the path, a present from our twinned town Östringen in Germany.

Photos to show the two sides of the monument near the path



Near the entrance to the Gardens from the Byefield car park is a large wooden sculpture, carved from a dead blue cedar tree. The top shows two Roman Catholic priests, St David Lewis and Phillip Evans. The priests were not burned as shown in the carving. They were executed in the late 1670s by being hung, drawn and quartered, the punishment at the time, for holding forbidden Catholic services in Gunter House in Cross Street. The middle section describes what is believed to be a woman supporter of Owain Glyndwr, who opened a gate into the walled town (named Traitor's Lane, but now called Market Street), in 1404, so that he could cause mayhem in the Town and set fire to the Tithe Barn in Monk Street. The lower section tells the story of the Christmas Day Massacre in 1175 of the Welsh chieftains by William de Braose, the Norman Lord. You can find out more about these events on the noticeboard by the carving.



*The Wooden Sculpture in
Linda Vista Gardens*

A new tree trail gives information on the unusual trees here, such as the Monkey Puzzle tree, the Foxglove tree, the Indian Bean tree and the Judas tree, plus there are lots of plants, an orchard and a bug house to attract wild life.

After playing and exploring we can enjoy a picnic lunch or a drink and ice cream from the Café. On our way home we say 'hello' to the cows grazing in Castle Meadows. We are so lucky to have Linda Vista Gardens to play in and explore.

Why don't you:

1. Visit Linda Vista Gardens – what do you remember best about the visit? Did you see all the things mentioned in the story?
2. Which trees were you able to identify?
3. Can you name the mountains you can see from the Gardens?

Information from:

Paddy Benyon, History of Linda Vista Gardens ALHS Newsletter No. 30 August 2014 pp: 13 – 17. Available at: www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk/gallery/2014.pdf

Tim Butters, The curious history of Linda Vista House and Gardens Abergavenny Chronicle 23 April 2025 Available at: www.abergavennychronicle.com/news/the-curious-history-of-linda-vista-hous-and-gardens-786658

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