

The Minister's Wife and the Changing Tide:

A Journey Through Maria Havard's Llanelli

History is often written by the powerful, but it is remembered through the eyes of the observant. In the mid-1850s, a woman named **Maria Havard** arrived in the bustling town of Llanelli. As the wife of the resident Wesleyan minister, she was a familiar figure in the community, yet she moved through the streets with the quiet, sharp eye of an artist.

Through her sketches, recently restored to their original clarity, we can follow the story of a town standing between two worlds.

The Prelude: A Town of Green and Gold (1821)

To understand the world Maria stepped into, we must first look back. In **1821**, Llanelli was a different creature entirely. Looking down over the town toward the shimmering sweep of the bay and the silhouette of Pembrey Mountain, the landscape felt ancient and undisturbed. The air was clear, the hills dominant, and the pace of life followed the tides. It was a vista of potential—a quiet corner of Wales waiting for the fire of the industrial age to arrive.



The Transformation: Smoke and Steeples (1854)

By the time Maria took up her pencil in **1854**, the “quiet corner” had vanished. Standing on Swansea Road, she looked across the valley and saw a town in the midst of a frantic growth spurt.

Her 1854 sketch is a masterpiece of social geography. To the spectator’s left, the steady rising ground of **Bigyn Hill** and the spire of **St. Paul’s Parish Church** represented the town’s spiritual anchors. But the eye is immediately drawn to the centre the **Erw Colliery**, known affectionately as “*Little Old Castle.*” Here, the earth was being opened, and the coal that would fuel the world was being brought to the surface.

Maria didn’t just see a landscape; she saw a community. She meticulously mapped the prominent features of the skyline: the grand Congregational chapels of **Capel Als** and **Capel Zion**, and the newer **Capel Newydd**. These weren’t just buildings; they were the heartbeat of a Victorian town.



The Heart of the Town: Llanelly Parish Church (1854)

As Maria moved closer into the town centre, her focus narrowed to the foundations of the community. Her sketch of **Llanelly Parish Church** in 1854 captures the intersection of the old and the new. Surrounded by the Market and the grand **Llanelly House**, the church stood as a witness to the town’s evolution from a medieval village to an industrial powerhouse.

Her sketches were so evocative that they caught the eye of **Mr. George Broom**, a local stationer. He recognised in her work a pride of place that deserved to be shared. By January 1856, her sketches were being engraved in London and sold as letterheading’s the “postcards” of their day allowing the image of a thriving Llanelli to travel across the globe.



A Legacy Restored

Maria Havard may have been known to her neighbours primarily as the minister's wife, but through her art she became the town's most vital biographer. These restored images allow us to step back into 1854 and see Llanelli not as a collection of old buildings, but as a living, breathing, rising town captured forever by a woman who knew how to see beauty in the smoke.

The Man Behind the Mission: Rev. Stephen P. Havard

While Maria Havard was capturing the physical growth of Llanelli, her husband, **Rev. Stephen P. Havard**, was one of the town's most prominent spiritual architects. Born into a tradition of Welsh Methodism, Stephen was a man of high intellect and deep social conviction. During his station in the **Llanelli Circuit (1852–1854)**, he was much more than a preacher; he was a pillar of a community undergoing the stresses of rapid industrialization.

The Wesleyan ministry was a rigorous life. Ministers were "itinerant," meaning they were moved to a new town every few years. For Stephen, this meant constantly building new congregations; for Maria, it meant a life of constant observation.

An Intellectual Influence

It is clear from Maria's work that Stephen encouraged her artistic pursuits. In many Victorian households, a woman's "hobbies" were secondary to her husband's career. However, the accuracy and technical detail in Maria's sketches suggest she was given the time and the resources fine pencils, watercolours, and travel to document her surroundings.

Stephen's ministry often took him to the very places Maria sketched. While he was visiting the sick or the workers at the **Erw Colliery (Little Old Castle)**, or meeting with the elders at the **Parish Church**, Maria was likely by his side with her sketchbook. His work provided the access, and her talent provided the record.

Their Departure and Legacy

The Havards left a lasting mark on the town. When they moved to their next circuit, they left behind a congregation strengthened by Stephen's sermons and a visual history immortalized by Maria's hand.

Though history often lists her simply as the "wife of a Wesleyan minister," it is through Stephen's role that we find her. He provided the platform, but Maria provided the vision. Together, they arrived as strangers to the Swansea Road, but they left as two of the most important chroniclers of 19th-century Llanelli—one shaping the souls of the people, and the other preserving the face of the town.

Rev. Stephen P. Havard

- **Birth:** c. 1817 in **Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire**.
- **Death:** **September 1888** (aged 71) in the **Headingley** district of **Leeds, Yorkshire**.
- **Burial Clues:** After leaving Llanelli, Stephen served in many English circuits (like Leeds and Sheffield). He spent his final years as a "Supernumerary" (retired) minister in Leeds.
- He is most likely buried in one of the major Victorian cemeteries in Leeds, such as **St. George's Fields** (formerly the Leeds General Cemetery) or **Lawnswood**, though Methodist ministers were sometimes buried in the graveyard of the specific chapel they last served.

Maria Havard (née Boydell)

- **Birth:** c. 1819 in **Leigh, Lancashire**.
- **Marriage:** She married Stephen in **1845** in the Leigh district.
- **Death:** **March 1887** (aged 68) in the **Leeds** district.
- **Burial Clues:** Maria passed away just a year before her husband. It is highly probable they are **buried together** in Leeds.

The Artist as Historian: Reconstructing the Past

One of the most fascinating aspects of Maria Havard's portfolio is her depiction of **Llanelli in 1821**. Because Maria was only a small child of two in Lancashire at that time, this work reveals her role not just as a sketcher of what she saw, but as a **historical researcher**.

In the mid-1850s, Llanelli was changing so fast that the "old town" was already disappearing under layers of coal dust and new brick. To provide context for her 1854 sketches, Maria likely studied earlier archival maps or rare topographical prints from the 1820s perhaps works by early travellers like Gastineau and "re-imagined" them through her own lens.

By recreating the 1821 vista, Maria was able to show her husband's congregation the sheer scale of the transformation they had lived through. It serves as a "Before and After" study:

- **1821:** A world of sweeping pastoral views and quiet hills.
- **1854:** An industrial powerhouse defined by the "Little Old Castle" colliery and the rising spires of new chapels.

This "look back" in 1821 was Maria's way of honouring the town's roots, proving that even as a newcomer and a minister's wife, she had a deep respect for the history of the ground beneath her feet.

A Note on the Restoration

The images featured in this article have been digitally repaired and enhanced from original mid-19th-century framed prints shared by David Chappell of Llanelli. By removing the veil of time, we can once again appreciate the fine detail of Maria Havard's original pencil and watercolour work, preserving her unique perspective for future generations. The images did have text but only one able to save.

Re-discovering Maria: A Digital Historian's Reflection

In the end, this story is not only about a minister's wife or the sketches she left behind. It is also about the quiet power of rediscovery. Maria Havard's name had almost slipped through the cracks of Llanelli's past her life reduced to a few lines in a register, her art scattered across old frames and forgotten drawers. Yet from just a handful of photographs and fragments, her world began to reassemble itself.

This is the strange, rewarding work of the digital historical researcher. You begin with almost nothing a faded print, a pencilled caption, a surname half-remembered and you follow the threads. One image leads to a chapel record; a chapel record leads to a marriage entry; a marriage entry leads to a life lived across counties and circuits. Slowly, the person emerges again.

Maria was never meant to be famous. She didn't sign her sketches boldly or seek recognition. But she looked at Llanelli with a clarity that deserves to be remembered. And through the tools we have today digital restoration, online archives, shared community knowledge we can bring her back into the light, not as a footnote, but as a witness to a town in transformation.

In telling her story, we also honour the thousands of others who shaped Llanelli quietly: the observers, the makers, the record-keepers, the ones who saw beauty in the ordinary. Maria reminds us that history is not only found in grand events, but in the small acts of attention that someone cared enough to record.

By piecing together her life from a few surviving images, we do more than restore a name. We restore a connection to Llanelli's past, to the people who walked its streets before us, and to the stories still waiting to be found.

And perhaps that is the real legacy of Maria Havard: she teaches us that even the faintest traces can become a bridge back to memory, if someone is willing to look closely enough.