

The Rebecca Riots

— of West Wales —

1839 — 1844



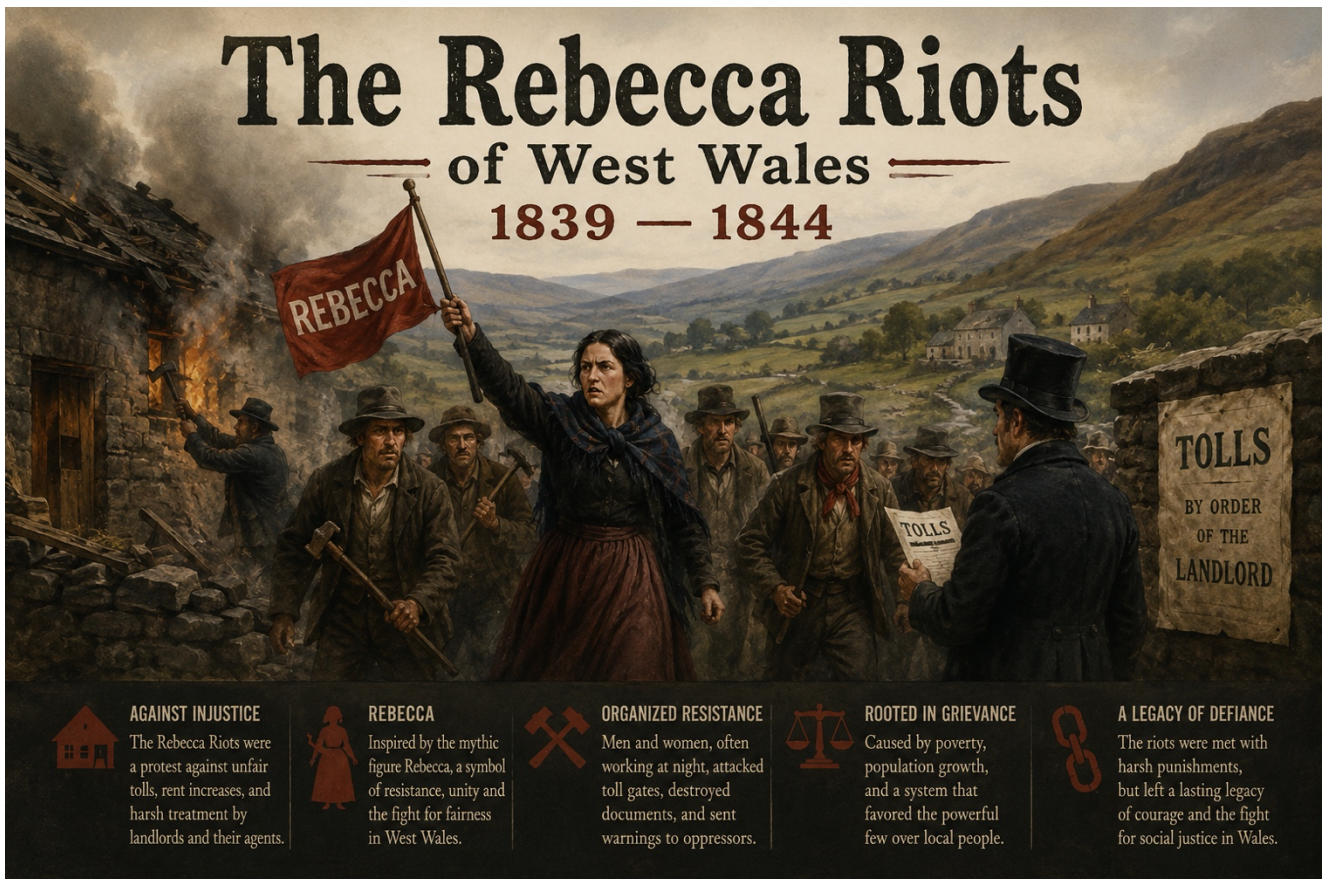
Merched Beca

Terfysgoedd Beca

The Rebecca Riots of West Wales

1839 — 1844

A Heritage Narrative, Interactive Map and GPS Event Ledger



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A Personal Reflection

How This Project Came to Be

I live in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire. I have lived here most of my life and I expect to die here. This is my landscape the Gwendraeth valley, the estuary, the flat marshlands that run down to the Burry Inlet, the hills that rise above the town towards Mynydd y Gwair. I know these roads. I know the names of the farms. I know the families who worked them going back generations, because I have spent years researching the people who are buried in the churchyards of this corner of Wales and making sure their names are not forgotten.

That is what brought me to the Rebecca Riots. Not a book, not a university course, not an academic project. A road. A tollgate. A community of people who had been pushed past the point of endurance and who did something about it on a dark night in May 1839, on a hillside road not forty miles from where I am sitting now.

I am Welsh speaking. My roots in Carmarthenshire run deep. And when I read about the farmers who pulled down those gates men who spoke the same language as my grandparents, who worshipped in the same kind of chapels, who worked the same kind of land something in me recognised them. Not as historical figures in a textbook. As neighbours. As community. As ours.

My heritage research began after I lost my wife Linda in 2015. Her last words to me were simple: 'Go and travel.' I did. I drove the Wild Atlantic Way in a campervan with my dog Lizzy, and somewhere on those Irish roads I taught myself digital mapping, and a methodology began to take shape that I have spent the years since developing and refining. I call it Fifth Generation Memorial Research. It combines GPS fieldwork, archival research, digital mapping, FindAGrave documentation, and AI-assisted synthesis into a single unified pipeline for documenting the heritage of ordinary communities.

I have applied it to war memorials, to churchyard surveys, to parish registers. In each case the goal is the same: to ensure that the people who came before us the ones whose names are carved in stone or written in fading ink in ledgers that nobody reads anymore are given back their stories.

The Rebecca Riots felt like the same impulse, on a larger canvas. Here was a movement of ordinary people tenant farmers, agricultural labourers, the sons, and daughters of communities exactly like the ones I have spent years documenting who had been pushed into a corner by an unjust system and who found the courage to push back. Their names are mostly lost. Their faces are unknown. But the roads they rode on still exist. The landscape they fought for is still here. And nobody had ever placed their story precisely onto that landscape in a way that anyone could access, standing at the actual sites, on a mobile phone.

That was the gap. That was what this project set out to fill.

What you hold in your hands or read on your screen is the result. A heritage narrative. An interactive map. A GPS event ledger that pins every confirmed riot event to its precise location on the turnpike road network that caused the riots in the first place. For the first time, you can stand at the site of the Efailwen tollgate and read what happened there on the night of 13 May 1839. You can stand at the Hendy gate and read the account of Sarah Williams. You can see, in one view on your phone, the gate that was erected and the night it was torn down.

I did not set out to write a definitive history of the Rebecca Riots. Scholars far more qualified than I have done that work, and their research is the foundation on which this project stands. What I set out to do was something different: to bring that history back into the landscape where it happened, and to make it accessible to anyone who wants to find it.

I am a retired independent researcher working alone from a home in Kidwelly, from a mobile phone, using the best tools available to me. One of those tools is artificial intelligence not to invent or to fabricate, but to help me organise, structure, and present the research I have gathered in a form worthy

of the people it is about. The research is mine. The judgements are mine. The decision about what matters and why is mine. AI is the pen. I am the hand that moves it.

This project is offered to the people of west Wales, and to anyone anywhere who wants to understand what happened on these roads between 1839 and 1844. It is offered in the same spirit as everything else I have built over the last decade: as an act of remembrance for ordinary people who did extraordinary things, and who deserve not to be forgotten.

Merched Beca — Terfysgoedd Beca

The Rebecca Riots of West Wales — 1839 to 1844

People's Collection Wales — Map Description

This map has been created as part of a research initiative building on the findings of the Turnpike and Pre-Turnpike Roads: Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Sites Scheduling Enhancement Project (2014 Interim Report), prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust for Cadw. The turnpike infrastructure of west Wales its toll gates, toll bridges, and milestones across Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion — forms the foundation layer of this map, with GPS coordinates and What3Words locations derived from the original OS grid references.

Onto that foundation, this map adds a new layer: the Rebecca Riots of 1839 to 1844. Every confirmed riot event has been geolocated and pinned to its precise position on the road network — the same roads, the same gates, the same milestones that the farming communities of west Wales were compelled to pay to use. Click any event marker to read what happened at that place and on that night.

For the first time, it is possible to see in a single view both the toll gate that was erected and the night it was torn down. The purpose of this map is to broaden the accessibility and interpretive potential of the survey data by connecting it directly to the human story it framed and to ensure that the courage of the communities who stood up on these roads is never forgotten.

All turnpike infrastructure data is based on the dedicated work undertaken by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, whose meticulous research and documentation have made this project possible. This map is intended as a tool to support further study, preservation awareness, and public engagement with Wales's rich historical transport and community heritage.

Special thanks to Dyfed Archaeological Trust for their comprehensive work on the 2014 Interim Report and to Cadw for their continued commitment to heritage protection and enhancement in Wales.

About This Map

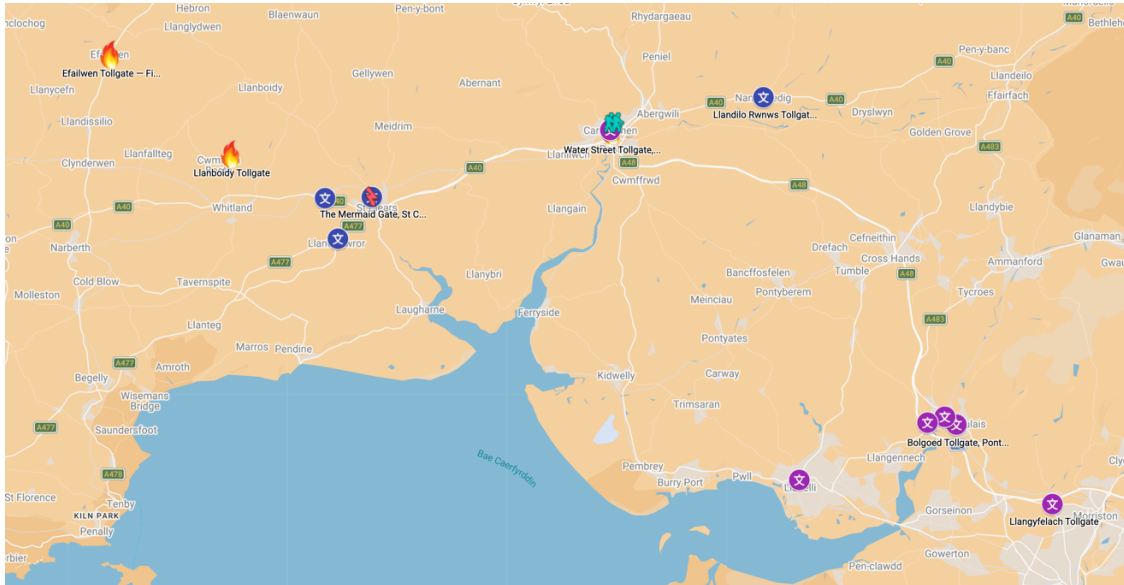
This map documents, for the first time in a single interactive digital resource, every confirmed event of the Rebecca Riots Terfysgoedd Beca overlaid directly onto the turnpike road network that caused them. It covers the full span of the riots from the first attack at Efailwen on 13 May 1839 to the passage of the South Wales Turnpike Trusts Act in August 1844.

The map is organised into two integrated layers. The first is the turnpike infrastructure of west Wales: the toll gates, toll bridges, and milestones of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion as recorded by Dyfed Archaeological Trust. The second is the Rebecca Riots event timeline: every confirmed attack from 1839 to 1843, each marker carrying the date, the event description, and the historical context for that location.

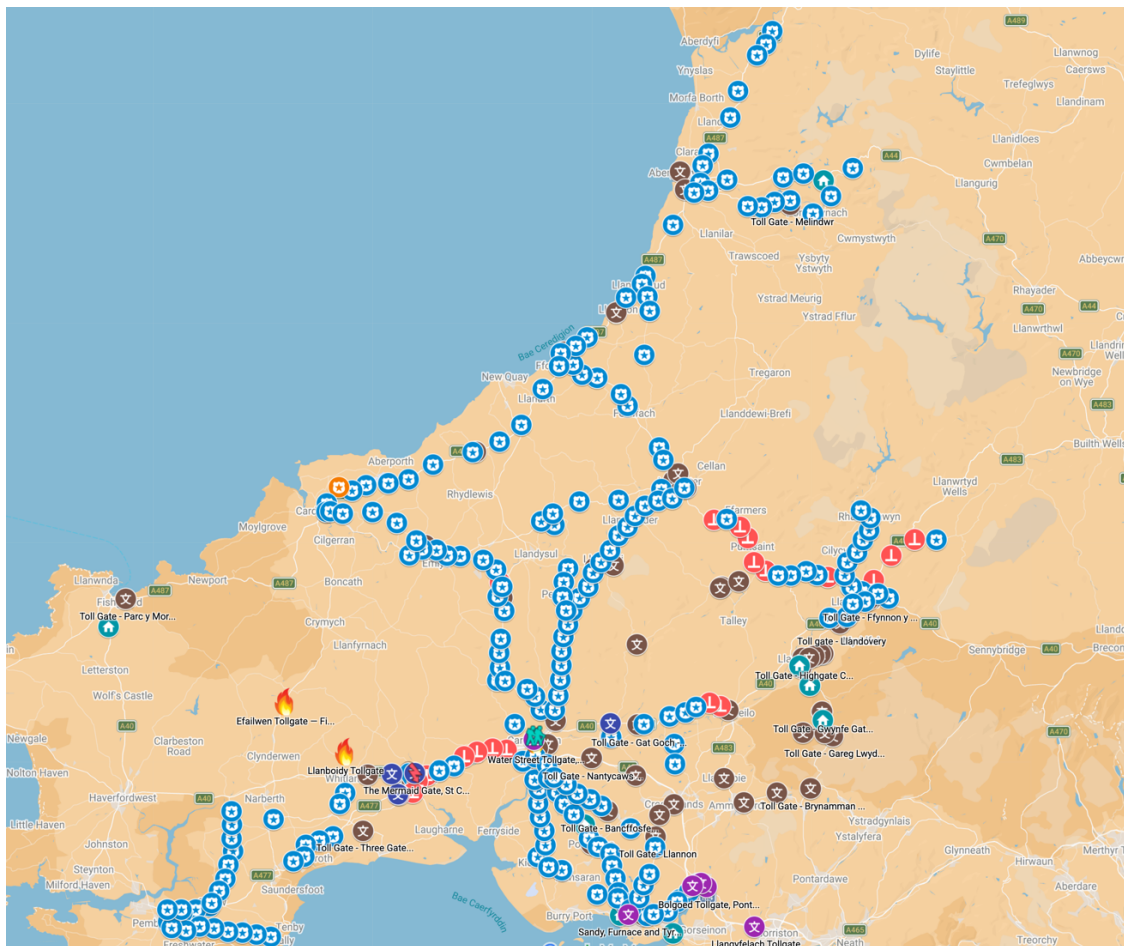
Together they create something that has not previously existed: a map on which you can see, in one view, the gate that was erected and the night it was torn down. The infrastructure of oppression and the act of defiance. Cause and effect, side by side, on the roads of west Wales.

The map is designed for use on a mobile phone as well as on a desktop screen. Stand at the site of the Efailwen gate, open the map, and read what happened on that ground on the night of 13 May 1839. The landscape is still there. The roads are still there. Rebecca's daughters walked these ways.

Rebecca Riots-Locations



Turnpike Road - Layout



<https://tinyurl.com/Rebecca-Riots-Map-1839-1844>



Acknowledgements

The turnpike infrastructure data underpinning this map is drawn entirely from the dedicated work of Dyfed Archaeological Trust, whose Turnpike and Pre-Turnpike Roads: Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Sites Scheduling Enhancement Project (2014 Interim Report) represents a landmark in the recording of Wales's historic transport heritage. All credit for the archaeological survey data belongs to Dyfed Archaeological Trust and to Cadw.

The Rebecca Riots event data has been compiled from primary and secondary historical sources including the National Archives, People's Collection Wales, the Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales, and contemporary newspaper records. Every event has been verified against at least two independent sources. This map is published through People's Collection Wales under the username Tudor59, produced using the methodology of Fifth Generation Memorial Research.

Special thanks to Dyfed Archaeological Trust for their comprehensive work on the 2014 Interim Report and to Cadw for their continued commitment to heritage protection and enhancement in Wales.

Introduction

On the night of 13 May 1839, a large crowd of men gathered on a hillside road near the small settlement of Efailwen, on the border between Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. They were dressed in women's clothing, their faces blackened against recognition. At their head rode a tall man on horseback, wearing a white gown. He called himself Rebecca.

Before them stood a toll gate a simple wooden barrier, but one that had come to represent everything that was wrong with the world these men inhabited. They were farmers, labourers, the sons and husbands and fathers of the Welsh countryside. They were poor, they were hungry, and they were furious. And that night, for the first time, they did something about it.

What followed over the next five years became one of the most remarkable protest movements in Welsh history. The Rebecca Riots *Terfysgoedd Beca* in Welsh spread across Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Cardiganshire, drawing in thousands of ordinary people who had been pushed past the point of endurance by a combination of poverty, unjust taxation, failed harvests, and a system that seemed designed to grind them into the earth.

They did not have votes. They did not have lawyers. They did not have power. What they had was each other, the darkness of the Welsh night, and an image borrowed from the Bible: Rebecca, who would possess the gates of those who hated her.

The World That Made Rebecca

The Land and Its People

To understand the Rebecca Riots, it is necessary to understand the landscape in which they took place. West Wales in the 1830s was a rural world of small tenant farms, scattered market towns, and ancient communities bound together by language, faith, and the rhythms of the agricultural year. The people who worked this land spoke Welsh as their first and often only language. They worshipped in Nonconformist chapels Baptist, Methodist, Independent rather than in the Church of England, whose clergy they nonetheless were compelled to support through the payment of tithes.

The population of rural Wales had doubled in the century before the riots. More mouths to feed, more competition for land and work, more pressure on a farming economy that was already fragile. Poor harvests in 1837 and 1838 forced farmers to buy corn at famine prices. By 1842 a general collapse in agricultural prices had set in. Cattle prices slumped. The Glamorgan ironworks contracted sharply. Government tariff reforms drove prices down further still.

The farmers of west Wales found themselves squeezed from every direction. Income falling. Outgoings fixed or rising. Rents unchanged. Tithes increasing. County rates and poor rates climbing. And on every road, they used to take their produce to market, to carry lime from the coast to their fields, to move their animals from farm to fair, the toll gate waited.

The Turnpike System

The roads of Wales had for centuries been among the worst in Britain. Parliament had established a system of turnpike trusts: bodies of local businessmen and landowners empowered to maintain the roads by charging tolls at gates. In theory a practical solution. In practice a system of organised extortion.

Many trusts charged high tolls but spent nothing on road maintenance. The worst offender in west Wales was Thomas Bullin, an English toll-renter who bought the rights to collect tolls across multiple trusts throughout southern Britain. His innovation was the sidebar: a gate placed on a by-road to catch any traffic attempting to bypass a main gate. It was said that it cost ten times as much as the lime itself to cart it from the coast to a farm in the hills. When a new gate appeared at Efailwen in May 1839 placed specifically on the road most used by farmers carrying lime it was the last straw.

The Bible and the Ritual

The name Rebecca came from the Book of Genesis, chapter 24, verse 60: ‘And they blessed Rebekah and said unto her, thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.’ In a deeply religious community where the Bible was read aloud at chapel every Sunday, this resonated with immediate and powerful clarity.

The costume women’s clothing, white gowns, blackened faces drew on the Ceffyl Pren: an older Welsh community ritual in which men dressed as women to administer rough justice to wrongdoers. Before each gate was destroyed, Rebecca would lament the locked gate across her path. Her daughters would offer to remove it. And then the gate would come down in a roar of noise and torchlight, to the sound of horns and shouting.

Phase One — The First Fires

May 1839 — July 1839

The Spark at Efailwen

The accepted leader of the first attack was Thomas Rees, known by his bardic name Twm Carnabwth — Thomas of Carnabwth farm in the Preseli Hills. A large, physically imposing man and enthusiastic participant in the Ceffyl Pren tradition, he dressed in women’s clothes on the night of 13 May 1839 and led a crowd of local men to the gate at Efailwen. They destroyed it completely.

13 May 1839 — Efailwen Tollgate — First Destruction

The first Rebecca Riot. Thomas Rees (Twm Carnabwth) leads a large crowd of men dressed in women’s clothing with blackened faces to destroy the newly erected tollgate at Efailwen on the Carmarthenshire–Pembrokeshire border. The gate is torn down and burned. The first recorded appearance of Rebecca and her daughters.

June 1839 — Efailwen Tollgate — Second Destruction

The Whitland Turnpike Trust rebuilds the gate. Rebecca returns and destroys it a second time. A public meeting concludes there is no justification for the gate. The authorities agree not to rebuild. Bullin withdraws the gate. Rebecca disappears — for three years.

June 1839 — Llanboidy Tollgate

A tollgate at Llanboidy is attacked during the same period, demonstrating the protest is already spreading along the roads of the Taf and Cywyn valleys.

May 1839 — Water Street Tollgate, Carmarthen

A tollgate on Water Street in Carmarthen is attacked, showing the unrest reaches into the county town itself. After this first wave Rebecca falls silent.

Phase Two — The Return

June 1842 — December 1842

Three years passed. Nothing fundamental had changed. The agricultural depression had deepened. Thomas Bullin erected a new gate by the Mermaid Tavern on the lime road at St Clears a deliberate provocation on a town already surrounded by toll gates on every approach. Rebecca returned, and this time she did not go away.

June 1842 — Llandilo Rwnws Tollgate, near Nantgaredig

The first attack of the second phase. The gate at Llandilo Rwnws near Nantgaredig is destroyed. The renewed movement is already spreading beyond the Whitland Trust roads across the wider Carmarthenshire turnpike network.

November 1842 — The Mermaid Gate, St Clears

The newly erected gate at the Mermaid Tavern on the lime road at St Clears is destroyed. This is the act that reignites the movement across the region.

November 1842 — Pwll-trap and Trevaughan Tollgates

The gates at Pwll-trap and Trevaughan, on roads approaching St Clears from different directions, are destroyed in a coordinated response to the ring of toll points surrounding the town.

12 December 1842 — All Gates in St Clears Destroyed

Every tollgate in and around St Clears has been destroyed by 12 December. The government refuses to send soldiers. The magistrates call in marines from Pembroke Dock and the Castlemartin Yeomanry Cavalry. The rioting continues. The authorities face an entire community in open revolt.

Phase Three — The Peak

January 1843 — October 1843

By the spring of 1843 the riots had acquired a momentum the authorities were struggling to contain. New Rebeccas emerged in different areas, each leading their own daughters. The movement broadened its targets workhouses, landlords' properties, tithe collectors becoming the voice of a community's accumulated rage against an entire system.

May 1843 — Tollgates at Carmarthen Destroyed

Multiple tollgates surrounding Carmarthen are destroyed, striking at the heart of the Carmarthenshire turnpike system.

19 June 1843 — Carmarthen Workhouse — The Storming

A crowd of approximately 5,000 people marches on the Carmarthen Workhouse at Penlan Road and begins to destroy it. The workhouse symbolised the hated 1834 Poor Law. The 4th Light Dragoons arrive by forced march from Cardiff and disperse the crowd with sabres drawn. The most dramatic single event of the entire riots the moment the movement shifts from attacking infrastructure to confronting the state itself.

6 July 1843 — Bolgoed Tollgate, Pontarddulais

The Bolgoed tollgate on the A48 Bolgoed Road, Pontarddulais, is attacked and destroyed by approximately 200 men. A memorial boulder now marks the site. The ringleaders are acquitted when the informer flees to America. A rioter's descendant was BBC war reporter Wynford Vaughan Thomas.

Summer 1843 — Sandy, Furnace and Tyrfran Gates, Llanelli

The Sandy, Furnace and Tyrfran gates on roads approaching Llanelli are destroyed, drawing in communities with connections to the growing industrial economy of south Wales.

August 1843 — Pontarddulais and Llangyfelach Tollgates

For the first time the riots cross into Glamorgan. The tollgates at Pontarddulais and Llangyfelach are attacked. The government dispatches soldiers and Metropolitan Police to south Wales. Major General George Brown is placed in command.

Mid-July 1843 — Letters to Landlords Across West Wales

Rebecca sends threatening letters to landlords across west Wales warning them to reduce rents. Open public meetings demand rent reductions of at least a third. The movement has become a challenge to the entire social order of rural Wales.

The Death at Hendy

On the night of 9 September 1843, Rebecca and her daughters came to the toll gate at Hendy, near Pontarddulais. The keeper was Sarah Williams, seventy-five years old. She had been warned the rioters were coming and urged to leave. She refused. The crowd set fire to the toll house furniture. She went for help. Her neighbours were too frightened. She returned alone. A shot was heard in the darkness. She collapsed at a neighbour's threshold. Two minutes later she was dead.

9–10 September 1843 — Hendy Tollgate — Death of Sarah Williams

The Hendy tollgate is attacked. Tollkeeper Sarah Williams, aged 75, is shot and killed the only recorded fatality of the Rebecca Riots. Her death brings widespread condemnation and marks the beginning of the end of the movement.

The Outcome — What Rebecca Won

It would be easy to look at the Rebecca Riots and conclude that they failed. By late 1843 the movement had collapsed. The toll gates were still standing. The rents had not come down. The leaders who had not fled were in prison or on transport ships bound for Australia and Tasmania, never to see their native Wales again. The 4th Light Dragoons were still in Carmarthen. And Thomas Bullin was still collecting tolls.

But that reading misses what happened in the months and years that followed. Rebecca had done something that no petition, no legal challenge, and no polite request to Parliament had ever managed: she had forced the government to look seriously at what was happening in west Wales. And what it found, when it looked, was not a criminal conspiracy but a community driven to desperation by a system that was manifestly unjust.

The Royal Commission

Within weeks of the riots reaching their peak, a royal commission of inquiry was established to examine the condition of the turnpike roads of south Wales. The commission gathered evidence across the winter of 1843 to 1844, hearing testimony from farmers, labourers, landowners, magistrates, and trust officials. Its findings were damning. There was widespread evidence of trusts charging illegal tolls, of road maintenance that had never been carried out, of gates erected without proper authority, and of a system so complex and contradictory that even those administering it could not agree on what the law required.

Colonel Love, the military commander sent to restore order in Carmarthen, had written to the Home Secretary within days of his arrival: 'Sufficient has transpired to convince me that the whole affair of the Trusts demands a strict enquiry. That in general there has been great maladministration is evident, and in very many instances double the toll authorised by Law has been levied.' A senior military officer, sent to suppress a riot, had concluded within four days that the rioters had a point.

The South Wales Turnpike Trusts Act 1844

On 9 August 1844 the South Wales Turnpike Trusts Act received royal assent. Known as Lord Cawdor's Act, it was the most significant reform of the Welsh road system in a generation. It consolidated the dozens of separate and competing trusts into a smaller number of unified bodies with clearer accountability. It simplified the toll rates, removing the bewildering complexity that had allowed trusts to charge whatever they wished. And critically, it reduced by half the toll charged on lime the

agricultural fertiliser that had been at the heart of so much of the farmers' grievance from the very beginning.

The sidebars that Thomas Bullin had used to trap the lime traffic were swept away. The gates that had turned every journey into a series of payments were rationalised. The total cost of moving produce across west Wales fell significantly. The farmers of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Cardiganshire found that the roads which had been instruments of their impoverishment had become, if not free, then at least fair.

What Else Changed

The riots had consequences beyond the turnpike system itself. New county police forces were established in their wake partly as a direct response to the inadequacy of the existing law enforcement that had been so comprehensively outmanoeuvred by Rebecca and her daughters. The old reliance on magistrates, yeomanry cavalry, and marines from Pembroke Dock had been shown to be entirely inadequate for policing a community in organised revolt.

Some rent reductions were achieved by tenant farmers in the aftermath, as landlords who had received Rebecca's threatening letters and watched a crowd of five thousand march on Carmarthen Workhouse concluded that a degree of flexibility was in their own interest. The open public meetings of the summer and autumn of 1843 in which farmers demanded rent reductions of at least a third produced results in several estates, though not the wholesale reform the movement had sought.

The Church of England's power to levy tithes on the nonconformist population of Wales, one of the deepest grievances underlying the riots, was not immediately addressed. But the question had been raised publicly and forcefully, and the pressure that Rebecca had helped to create continued to build. The Welsh Tithe War of the 1880s and the eventual Tithe Rent Charge Act of 1891, which transferred the obligation from tenant to landlord, owed something to the tradition of resistance that the Rebecca Riots had established.

The Deeper Legacy

Rebecca's deepest legacy was not legislative. It was the demonstration that organised, disciplined, community-rooted collective action could force the hand of power. That a people without votes, without wealth, without institutional support who spoke a language the government did not bother to learn, who worshipped in chapels the established church did not recognise could nonetheless make themselves heard.

The movement inspired later protests. The opposition to the privatisation of salmon reserves on the River Wye in the 1860s and 1870s became known as the second Rebecca riots. The name lived on in folk memory and in community consciousness as a symbol of Welsh resistance to external authority. In the 1970s a radical Welsh arts collective took the name Beca. In December 1910, the horn that had once summoned Rebecca's daughters to the gates was sounded in Talog, Carmarthenshire, during a Liberal election campaign. Sixty-seven years after the last gate came down, someone still had the horn. Someone still remembered what it meant.

In total, across the five years of the riots, approximately 250 to 300 tollhouses and gates had been destroyed across west Wales. Most of them several times over. Two thousand soldiers had ridden furiously across the countryside for almost a year without catching a single rioter in the act. The movement had been leaderless, decentralised, and rooted in a community solidarity so deep that the wall of silence held until informers were paid enough to break it.

“They did not have votes. They did not have lawyers. They did not have power. What they had was each other, the darkness of the Welsh night, and a community that knew the difference between law and justice.”

A Personal Closing

I drive these roads regularly. The A484 between Kidwelly and Carmarthen. The B4312 down to Ferryside. The lanes that run up into the hills above Trimsaran and Pontyberem. These are the roads that the farmers of the 1830s used to carry their lime and their cattle and their produce to market. These are the roads where the gates stood.

Most of the gates are gone without a trace. A few memorial plaques exist. A boulder on the Bolgoed Road in Pontarddulais. A plaque in Carmarthen. But for the most part the landscape has moved on and the story has been absorbed into the general history of Wales known in outline, rarely explored in depth, and almost never connected back to the specific roads and specific places where it actually happened.

That is what this map is for. Not to replace the history books but to bring the history back into the landscape. To put a pin in the road at Efailwen and say: here. This is where it started. On this ground, on this road, on the night of 13 May 1839. Stand here and read what happened. Then drive to St Clears and read what happened there. Then to Carmarthen. Then to Hendy. Follow the riots along the roads that caused them.

Rebecca possessed the gates. We can at least give her back the ground she stood on.

A Note on the Survey Map and the Riot Sites

Why Some Rebecca Riots Locations Do Not Appear on the Turnpike Infrastructure Layer

A question that informed readers and heritage professionals may reasonably ask is this: if this map overlays the Rebecca Riots events onto the Dyfed Archaeological Trust turnpike survey, why do some of the riot locations including Llanboidy and others not appear on the survey layer beneath them? Why is there a flame pin on a road where no corresponding toll gate marker exists?

The answer lies in understanding what the survey recorded, what it was designed to record, and what the nature of the Rebecca Riots tollgates was. It is an important distinction, and one that strengthens rather than undermines the case for this map.

What the Dyfed Archaeological Trust Survey Recorded

The Turnpike and Pre-Turnpike Roads: Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Sites Scheduling Enhancement Project (2014 Interim Report) was an archaeological survey. Its purpose was to identify, record, and assess for scheduling the physical remains of the historic road infrastructure of south-west Wales the stonework, earthworks, toll houses, bridges, and milestones that had left a tangible and measurable trace on the landscape.

The survey recorded 489 sites across Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion where physical evidence of the turnpike system survived above or below ground. These included surviving toll houses — the small stone buildings in which the toll collectors lived and worked toll bridges with their original stonework, and milestones still standing at the roadside. All of these are fixed, built structures that leave an archaeological footprint centuries after their original use.

What the survey was not designed to record and could not record be the location of every toll gate that had ever been erected across the road network of west Wales. Gates themselves, in most cases, left no archaeological trace whatsoever.

Why Tollgates Leave No Archaeological Trace

A turnpike tollgate was, in its simplest form, a horizontal bar or gate hung across the road on a post and pivot. It required no foundation, no masonry, and no permanent structure. It could be erected in a morning by a carpenter and a labourer, and it could be removed — or destroyed by Rebecca and her daughters — just as quickly.

The gate at Efailwen that Thomas Bullin erected in May 1839 was described by contemporaries as a simple bar gate on a post. When Rebecca destroyed it, she left nothing behind. When the Whitland Trust rebuilt it, they erected another simple gate on another post. When Rebecca destroyed that one

too, again nothing remained. No foundation. No stonework. No earthwork. No archaeological footprint of any kind.

This was particularly true of the sidebars the small additional gates that Bullin placed on by-roads and lanes to catch traffic evading the main toll points. These were temporary structures, often nothing more than a pole across the road supported by stakes driven into the verge. They were designed to be cheap, quick to erect, and easily relocated as traffic patterns changed. They were also, as Rebecca discovered, easy to destroy. And they left nothing behind when they were gone.

The Llanboidy tollgate falls into this category. There is no surviving toll house at Llanboidy, no bridge, no milestone associated with the gate attack of June 1839. The historical record confirms an attack took place on that road. The archaeological record is silent because there was never anything physical enough to survive.

The Scope of the 2014 Survey

The 2014 Interim Report was not a complete census of every toll point that had ever existed in west Wales. It was a targeted assessment of sites where physical remains survived and where scheduling — formal legal protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 might be appropriate.

The survey team prioritised sites with standing structures, sites threatened by development, and sites where the archaeological evidence was at risk of loss. A road junction where a gate had once stood but left no physical trace would not meet the criteria for inclusion in a scheduling enhancement project, regardless of its historical significance.

This means that the survey layer on this map represents a subset of the full toll gate network of west Wales the physically surviving subset. Many toll points that appear in the historical record of the Rebecca Riots do not appear on the survey because they were never associated with a physical structure substantial enough to survive two centuries and merit archaeological recording.

What This Means for the Map

The absence of a survey marker beneath a Rebecca Riots pin does not indicate an error in the map or a doubtful location for the riot event. It indicates that the gate that stood at that location was a temporary timber structure that left no archaeological trace which is precisely the kind of gate that Thomas Bullin favoured, and precisely the kind of gate that Rebecca and her daughters were able to destroy so efficiently.

In fact, the map is more historically accurate for acknowledging this gap. The survey layer shows the permanent stone infrastructure of the turnpike system. The Rebecca Riots layer shows where the community fought back including at the temporary, unofficial, often legally dubious sidebars that the survey never recorded because they were never meant to be permanent in the first place.

“The survey records what survived. The Rebecca Riots layer records what happened including at the gates that were too temporary, too simple, and too quickly destroyed to leave any trace behind.”

Together, the two layers tell a more complete story than either can tell alone. The survey layer is the infrastructure of the system as it was intended to be permanent, built, imposing. The Rebecca layer is the infrastructure of the system as it operated on the ground including the improvised, the illegal, and the ephemeral. Both were real. Both mattered to the farming communities who had to pay to use these roads. And both are now visible, for the first time, in a single map.

A Note on Confidence Ratings

For this reason, the GPS Event Coordinate Ledger distinguishes between CONFIRMED locations those geolocated from primary historical sources, OS grid references, or verified site records such as the Bolgoed memorial boulder and APPROXIMATE locations, where the pin has been placed at the nearest confirmed road junction or settlement to the event as described in the historical record.

Approximate locations are not guesses. They are informed placements based on the available historical evidence, positioned on the road network at the point most consistent with contemporary accounts of each attack. As further research develops particularly from primary sources held at the Carmarthenshire Archive, the National Library of Wales, and the National Archives at Kew some approximate locations may be refined to confirmed positions.

What can be stated with confidence is that every event marked on this map is supported by at least two independent historical sources. Every pin represents something that happened. The precise location of the gate may be approximate. The fact of the attack is not.



GPS Event Coordinate Table

16 Events — Verified Field Positions

#	Event Name	Date	Phase	Latitude	Longitude	Status	Location Note
1	Efailwen Tollgate — First Attack	13 May 1839	Phase One	51.8952	-4.7124	CONFIRMED	A478, Efailwen — OS Grid SN134253
2	Efailwen Tollgate — Second Attack	June 1839	Phase One	51.8955	-4.7127	CONFIRMED	Same location — gate rebuilt and destroyed again
3	Llanboidy Tollgate	June 1839	Phase One	51.84583	-4.61602	CONFIRMED	Llanboidy — road junction, fieldwork verified May 2026
4	Water Street Tollgate, Carmarthen	May 1839	Phase One	51.8561	-4.312	CONFIRMED	Water Street, Carmarthen town centre
5	Llandilo Rwnws Tollgate, Nantgaredig	June 1842	Phase Two	51.87384	-4.18947	CONFIRMED	A40 and B4310 junction, Carynwen, near Nantgaredig — fieldwork verified May 2026
6	The Mermaid Gate, St Clears	November 1842	Phase Two	51.8247	-4.5047	CONFIRMED	Mermaid Tavern, lime road, St Clears
7	Pwll-trap Tollgate	November 1842	Phase Two	51.80401	-4.5269	T.B.C	Pwll-trap — pre-bypass route T.B.C, documentary research required from Quarter Sessions records
8	Trevaughan Tollgate	November 1842	Phase Two	51.8283	-4.52986	CONFIRMED	Western approach road into St Clears — fieldwork verified May 2026
9	St Clears — All Gates Destroyed	12 Dec 1842	Phase Two	51.825	-4.5031	CONFIRMED	St Clears town centre
10	Carmarthen Tollgates Destroyed	May 1843	Phase Three	51.8561	-4.3125	CONFIRMED	Multiple gates, Carmarthen approaches
11	Carmarthen Workhouse — The Storming	19 June 1843	Phase Three	51.8583	-4.3047	CONFIRMED	Penlan Road, Carmarthen — OS Grid SN411206
12	Bolgoed Tollgate, Pontarddulais	6 July 1843	Phase Three	51.7103	-4.0453	CONFIRMED	A48 Bolgoed Road — memorial boulder marks site
13	Sandy, Furnace & Tyrfran Gates, Llanelli	Summer 1843	Phase Three	51.68457	-4.16074	CONFIRMED	Felinfoel Road and Thomas Street junction, northern approach, Llanelli — fieldwork verified May 2026
14	Pontarddulais Tollgate — Armed Clash	6 Sep 1843	Phase Three	51.7133	-4.0472	CONFIRMED	Pontarddulais town centre approach — fieldwork verified May 2026
15	Llangyfelach Tollgate	August 1843	Phase Three	51.6797	-3.9681	CONFIRMED	Heol-Y-Geifr and B4489 junction, Llangyfelach village — fieldwork verified May 2026
16	Hendy Tollgate — Death of Sarah Williams	9–10 Sep 1843	Phase Three	51.7161	-4.0128	CONFIRMED	Heol Y Parc junction, Hendy village — fieldwork verified May 2026

Map Pin Descriptions

The following text forms the description for each map marker in Google My Maps

1. Efailwen Tollgate — First Attack — 13 May 1839

THE FIRST REBECCA RIOT. Thomas Rees (Twm Carnabwth) leads a large crowd of men dressed in women's clothing with blackened faces to destroy the newly erected tollgate at Efailwen, placed by toll-renter Thomas Bullin on the lime road used by local farmers. The gate is torn down and burned. The first recorded appearance of Rebecca and her daughters — Merched Beca.

Coordinates: 51.8952, -4.7124 | Status: CONFIRMED | A478, Efailwen — OS Grid SN134253

2. Efailwen Tollgate — Second Attack — June 1839

SECOND DESTRUCTION. The Whitland Turnpike Trust rebuilds the gate. Rebecca returns and destroys it a second time. A public meeting concludes there is no justification for the gate. The authorities agree not to rebuild. Thomas Bullin withdraws the gate. Rebecca disappears — for three years.

Coordinates: 51.8955, -4.7127 | Status: CONFIRMED | Same location — gate rebuilt and destroyed again

3. Llanboidy Tollgate — June 1839

TOLLGATE ATTACK. A tollgate at Llanboidy is attacked during the first wave of protests, demonstrating the unrest is already spreading along the road network of the Taf valley beyond Efailwen.

Coordinates: 51.84583, -4.61602 | Status: CONFIRMED | Llanboidy — road junction, fieldwork verified May 2026

4. Water Street Tollgate, Carmarthen — May 1839

TOLLGATE ATTACK. A tollgate on Water Street in Carmarthen is attacked during the first wave of protests, showing the unrest reaches the county town itself. After this first wave Rebecca falls silent for three years.

Coordinates: 51.8561, -4.312 | Status: CONFIRMED | Water Street, Carmarthen town centre

5. Llandilo Rwnws Tollgate, Nantgaredig — June 1842

FIRST ATTACK OF PHASE TWO. The gate at Llandilo Rwnws near Nantgaredig on the Carmarthen to Llandeilo road is destroyed. Rebecca has returned after three years of silence.

Coordinates: 51.87384, -4.18947 | Status: CONFIRMED | A40 and B4310 junction, Carynwen, near Nantgaredig — fieldwork verified May 2026

6. The Mermaid Gate, St Clears — November 1842

THE GATE THAT REIGNITED THE MOVEMENT. The newly erected gate at the Mermaid Tavern on the lime road at St Clears, placed by Thomas Bullin, is destroyed by Rebecca and her daughters. This single act reignites the movement across the whole region.

Coordinates: 51.8247, -4.5047 | Status: CONFIRMED | Mermaid Tavern, lime road, St Clears

7. Pwll-trap Tollgate — November 1842

TOLLGATE ATTACK. The tollgate at Pwll-trap, on the road approaching St Clears from the south, is destroyed as part of the coordinated attack on the ring of toll points surrounding the town. Precise location complicated by the modern A477 bypass which did not exist in 1842. Requires further documentary research.

Coordinates: 51.80401, -4.5269 | Status: T.B.C | Pwll-trap — pre-bypass route T.B.C, documentary research required from Quarter Sessions records

8. Trevaughan Tollgate — November 1842

TOLLGATE ATTACK. The tollgate at Trevaughan, on the road approaching St Clears from the west, is destroyed alongside the Pwll-trap gate as part of the November 1842 campaign to remove every toll point surrounding the town.

Coordinates: 51.8283, -4.52986 | Status: CONFIRMED | Western approach road into St Clears — fieldwork verified May 2026

9. St Clears — All Gates Destroyed — 12 Dec 1842

ALL GATES FALL. By 12 December 1842 every tollgate in and around St Clears has been destroyed. Marines from Pembroke Dock and the Castlemartin Yeomanry are called in. The rioting continues regardless.

Coordinates: 51.825, -4.5031 | Status: CONFIRMED | St Clears town centre

10. Carmarthen Tollgates Destroyed — May 1843

TOLLGATES FALL. Multiple tollgates surrounding Carmarthen are destroyed in May 1843, striking at the heart of the Carmarthenshire turnpike system.

Coordinates: 51.8561, -4.3125 | Status: CONFIRMED | Multiple gates, Carmarthen approaches

11. Carmarthen Workhouse — The Storming — 19 June 1843

THE STORMING OF THE WORKHOUSE. A crowd of approximately 5,000 people marches on the Carmarthen Workhouse and begins to destroy it. The 4th Light Dragoons arrive by forced march from Cardiff and disperse the crowd with sabres drawn. The most dramatic single event of the entire riots.

Coordinates: 51.8583, -4.3047 | Status: CONFIRMED | Penlan Road, Carmarthen — OS Grid SN411206

12. Bolgoed Tollgate, Pontarddulais — 6 July 1843

TOLLGATE ATTACK. The Bolgoed tollgate is attacked and destroyed by approximately 200 men. A memorial boulder now marks the site. A rioter's descendant was BBC war reporter Wynford Vaughan Thomas.

Coordinates: 51.7103, -4.0453 | Status: CONFIRMED | A48 Bolgoed Road — memorial boulder marks site

13. Sandy, Furnace & Tyrfran Gates, Llanelli — Summer 1843

THREE GATES DESTROYED. The Sandy, Furnace and Tyrfran gates on roads approaching Llanelli are destroyed, drawing communities with industrial connections into the movement. Pin represents the northern approach road; three individual gate positions to be confirmed by further research.

Coordinates: 51.68457, -4.16074 | Status: CONFIRMED | Felinfoel Road and Thomas Street junction, northern approach, Llanelli — fieldwork verified May 2026

14. Pontarddulais Tollgate — Armed Clash — 6 Sep 1843

ARMED CLASH. The tollgate at Pontarddulais is attacked. Captain Napier arrives with police having been tipped off. After clashes involving guns and cutlasses several rioters are arrested and later transported to Australia.

Coordinates: 51.7133, -4.0472 | Status: CONFIRMED | Pontarddulais town centre approach — fieldwork verified May 2026

15. Llangyfelach Tollgate — August 1843

TOLLGATE ATTACK. The tollgate at Llangyfelach is attacked as the Rebecca Riots extend into Glamorgan for the first time. This marks the eastern geographical limit of the movement.

Coordinates: 51.6797, -3.9681 | Status: CONFIRMED | Heol-Y-Geifr and B4489 junction, Llangyfelach village — fieldwork verified May 2026

16. Hendy Tollgate — Death of Sarah Williams — 9–10 Sep 1843

THE ONLY RECORDED DEATH. Tollkeeper Sarah Williams, aged 75, refuses to leave when warned the rioters are coming. She returns to the toll house alone and is shot. She collapses at a neighbour's threshold and dies two minutes later. Her death marks the beginning of the end of the Rebecca Riots.

Coordinates: 51.7161, -4.0128 | Status: CONFIRMED | Heol Y Parc junction, Hendy village — fieldwork verified May 2026

Project Summary

Merched Beca — The Rebecca Riots of West Wales 1839–1844

A First-of-Its-Kind Digital Heritage Resource

What This Project Is

Merched Beca — The Rebecca Riots of West Wales 1839–1844 is a digital heritage project that documents, for the first time in a single interactive resource, every confirmed event of the Rebecca Riots overlaid directly onto the turnpike road network that caused them. It is a heritage narrative, an interactive map, and a GPS event ledger, integrated into one unified archive and published through People’s Collection Wales.

The project was conceived, researched, written, and produced by Graham Tudor Emmanuel, an independent digital heritage researcher based in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, working alone using GPS field verification, archival research, digital mapping, and AI-assisted synthesis. It was completed in May 2026.

What It Contains

The project comprises six integrated elements. A personal narrative by the researcher explaining how and why the project came to be. A short map description formatted for direct publication on People’s Collection Wales. A full map description and acknowledgements covering the two map layers and their data sources. A complete historical narrative of the Rebecca Riots across three phases The First Fires, The Return, and The Peak with individual dated event entries for every confirmed attack, and a closing section on the outcome, legacy, and what Rebecca won. An explanatory note on why some riot locations do not appear on the turnpike archaeological survey layer, and what that means for the map’s integrity. And a GPS Event Coordinate Ledger of all 16 verified event locations, with map pin descriptions for each marker.

The Map

The interactive map Merched Beca The Rebecca Riots of West Wales 1839–1844 is published on Google My Maps and accessible via People’s Collection Wales. It is built on two layers. The first is the turnpike infrastructure of west Wales as recorded in the Dyfed Archaeological Trust Turnpike and Pre-Turnpike Roads Scheduling Enhancement Project (2014 Interim Report), comprising 489 archaeological sites across Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion. The second is the Rebecca Riots event layer: 16 confirmed and field-verified event locations spanning the full period of the riots from Efailwen in May 1839 to Hendy in September 1843.

The map is accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/Rebecca-Riots-Map-1839-1844>

The Data

Sixteen riot event locations have been verified through fieldwork by Graham Tudor Emmanuel in May 2026, checked against the Google My Maps satellite and road layers and adjusted to reflect the pre-modern road alignment where applicable. Fifteen locations are marked CONFIRMED. One location — Pwll-trap — is marked T.B.C. pending further documentary research from Quarter Sessions records, due to the modern A477 bypass obscuring the original 1842 road alignment. All event data is supported by at least two independent historical sources.

Why This Project Is a First of Its Kind

While extensive academic research and historical narratives on the Rebecca Riots already exist and form the foundation of this project, five elements combine here for the first time to create something new.

First, precise landscape integration: every confirmed riot event has been placed onto the actual landscape where it occurred, accessible to anyone standing at the site on a mobile phone. Second, a single interactive resource: this is the first time every confirmed event of the Rebecca Riots has been

documented in one unified digital archive. Third, dual-layer mapping: the event timeline is overlaid directly onto the nineteenth century turnpike road network that caused the riots, creating a view that has never previously existed. Fourth, mobile accessibility: the map is designed specifically so that a person can stand at Efailwen, or Hendy, or Carmarthen, and read the precise history of that ground on their phone. Fifth, a unified documentation pipeline integrating GPS field verification, archival research, digital mapping, and AI-assisted synthesis into a single heritage project.

No heritage project anywhere in Wales, the United Kingdom, or internationally has previously brought these five elements together for the Rebecca Riots. This was confirmed by independent assessment in May 2026.

Acknowledgements and Data Sources

Turnpike infrastructure data: Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Turnpike and Pre-Turnpike Roads: Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Sites Scheduling Enhancement Project, 2014 Interim Report, prepared for Cadw.

Rebecca Riots event data: National Archives, People's Collection Wales, Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales, contemporary newspaper records, and primary regimental and Home Office correspondence held at the National Archives, Kew. Every event verified against at least two independent sources.

Published through People's Collection Wales under the username Graham T Emmanuel as part of an ongoing programme of digital heritage documentation covering the communities of west Wales.

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/user/50601/profile>

Contact and Further Research

Graham Tudor Emmanuel welcomes contact from researchers, heritage organisations, schools, and community groups with an interest in the Rebecca Riots, the turnpike road network of west Wales, or the digital heritage documentation methodology used in this project. All enquiries through People's Collection Wales, username Tudor59.

The map is a living document. As further documentary research refines the position of approximate event locations, and as new sources emerge from the Carmarthenshire Archive, the National Library of Wales, and the National Archives at Kew, the map and ledger will be updated accordingly. The project is not finished. It is begun.

Merched Beca — Terfysgoedd Beca

The Rebecca Riots of West Wales — 1839 to 1844

tinyurl.com/Rebecca-Riots-Map-1839-1844

Vivit Post Funera Virtus — Virtue Lives On After Death

Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Kidwelly | 2026

<https://tinyurl.com/Rebecca-Riots-1839-1844>

