

Cydweli – Our Kidwelly: A Living Legacy

Look around you. The same river that once carried Norman longships still flows past our castle walls. The same stones that echoed with Gwenllian's defiance now hear our children's laughter. Kidwelly isn't just a place where history happened—it's where our story lives.



That hulking silhouette of Kidwelly Castle isn't just a tourist postcard. It's our fortress. Every time we pass it, we walk in the footsteps of giants—like Gwenllïan ferch Gruffudd, the warrior princess who dared to challenge an empire here in 1136. They say her last breath near these walls became the first breath of Welsh resistance. Her memorial isn't just a plaque; it's a challenge to remember who we are.

And oh, how we've answered that challenge! When the Industrial Revolution roared through Wales, Kidwelly didn't just watch—we built. Our great-grandparents' sweat turned riverbanks into tinsplate workshops, their calloused hands fuelling an empire of steel. You can still feel that grit in the air near the old works, where the ghosts of industry whisper: "We made something here."

This town's magic. It's not frozen in time. It's in the way castle shadows stretch across schoolyards, how the smell of the Gwendraeth mixes with chip shop vinegar, and why a rugby match at Mynydd-y-Garreg feels like a bard's tale. Kidwelly's past isn't behind glass—it's the ground we stand on, waiting for us to add our chapter.

St. Mary's and the Soul of Our Town



At the heart of Kidwelly, where the centuries kneel in quiet reverence, St. Mary's Church stands as more than stone and stained glass—it's the keeper of our collective memory. For 700 years, its spire has watched over us like a steadfast sentinel, bearing witness to every chapter of our story: the clash of swords, the roar of furnaces, and the whispered prayers of generations. This is where we've christened our children, buried our loved ones, and sung our hopes into the Welsh sky.

St. Mary's Church in Kidwelly stands as a monument to centuries of faith and architectural evolution. Its origins trace back to pre-conquest times when it was likely dedicated to St. Cadog. By the medieval period, it had become part of the Deanery of Kidwelly, and between 1107 and 1115, it was granted to the Benedictines of Sherborne Abbey, transforming into a priory.



Despite its monastic status, the priory remained humble, with records from 1377 noting only a single monk in residence. Its dissolution in 1539 marked the transfer of its patronage to the Crown, but the church itself endured, its stones whispering tales of resilience.

The present church rises from the foundations of an earlier structure, possibly a temporary building erected after Prince Llewelyn's destruction of Kidwelly in 1222. Unlike many monastic sites, St. Mary's survived the suppression of the monasteries, echoing the fates of Brecon and Monkton priory churches in the Diocese of St. David's.

Dedicated to St. Mary, the church is a masterpiece of the Decorated Gothic style, its grandeur earning it a Grade I listing and the distinction of being the largest parish church in southwest Wales.

Architecturally, St. Mary's is a study in harmony and adaptation. The original 13th-century church was lost to fire, and the current structure, built primarily in the mid-14th century, showcases intricate detailing like ballflowers and wave mouldings. The nave served as the parish church, while the chancel functioned as the monastic priory.

The tower, added around 1400, is among the earliest in the region, its imposing presence a testament to the skill of medieval masons. Over the centuries, restorations have carefully preserved its character, such as the 1884 renovation that introduced a new font, pews, and belfry clock.



Sir George Gilbert Scott's 1854 report offers fascinating insights into the church's design. He noted the nave's unusual 33-foot span, the absence of aisles, and the elegant simplicity of its transepts and spire. Scott argued persuasively that the entire church, despite stylistic variations, was likely constructed in a single campaign during the early 14th century.

The tower's lancet windows, for instance, reflect not an earlier epoch but a deliberate austerity, possibly due to budgetary constraints. Inside, the vaulted lower story of the tower and the nave's bold arches speak to a unified vision, while the chancel's flowing tracery adds a touch of refinement.

Within the church, history lingers in every corner.

Four staircases wind through the walls, their purposes as varied as the rituals they once facilitated access to rostrums, the rood loft, or even an anchoret's cell. The chancel arch, unusually low, hints at the presence of a now-lost rood loft above. Six sepulchral recesses, some empty and others holding 15th-century effigies, line the walls, their silent occupants a reminder of the generations who have passed through these doors.

A mutilated but exquisite alabaster Virgin and Child, once venerated in a niche above the south porch, now awaits restoration in the sacristy, its survival a small miracle of preservation.

The church's treasures extend beyond its architecture 1552 inventory lists silver chalices, a censer, and four bells, though only a splendid Elizabethan chalice from 1574 remains today. The parish registers, dating back to 1626 with earlier Latin excerpts, offer glimpses into the lives of Kidwelly's inhabitants, including a poignant 1481 entry lamenting the steeple's collapse during a storm.

Later restorations, like the 1884 repairs after lightning struck the tower and the 1902 recasting of the bells, underscore the community's enduring stewardship.

Today, St. Mary's stands not just as a place of worship but as a chronicle in stone—a bridge between Norman ambition and Gothic artistry, between monastic solitude and parish vitality.

Its spire, rising defiantly against the Welsh sky, invites visitors to step inside and trace the echoes of a thousand years.

The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again

Beneath the castle's shadow, our town's tale unfolds—a saga of resilience written in mortar and marrow. When the Normans carved Kidwelly into a borough in 1115, they couldn't have imagined how fiercely this place would cling to life.



We bled before we built. The 13th century saw our walls scarred by Welsh princes' sieges—yet each attack only hardened Kidwelly's resolve. By the 1300s, we'd risen from the ashes to become a thriving port, where Flemish wool merchants haggled beside French wine traders, and the Gwendraeth's waters glittered with commerce. Then came the silt.

The 18th century choked our estuary and our fortunes. But true to form, Kidwelly spat the grit from its teeth and reinvented itself. Enter Thomas Kymer, our visionary. His canal (1768) didn't just move coal—it pumped lifeblood back into the town, linking us to the world beyond Carmarthen Bay.

The clang of industry became our heartbeat. The tinsplate works of 1737 forged more than metal—it forged an identity. Victorian ambition gave us the Town Hall's Gothic spires, while the black cat on our coat of arms slyly reminded us: Kidwelly always lands on its feet.

The Legends That Walk Among Us

Some towns have ghosts. We have Gwenllian. Her spirit lingers not just in Maes Gwenllian's grass, but in every stubborn streak of Kidwelly character. That nursery rhyme we all learned as babbies—"Hen Fenyw Fach Cydweli"—isn't just a ditty. It's a coded love letter from our ancestors, stitching folklore into our bones.



And let's talk about that black cat. Superstition? Maybe. But when you've seen this town survive plagues, wars, and economic tides, you start to believe there's magic in our soil.

The Unbroken Thread

Today, when the morning sun gilds the castle walls, it illuminates a truth: Kidwelly was never just about surviving. It's about thriving on our own terms. The same river that carried medieval trade now draws kayakers and artists. The tinsplate works' silence is filled with museum visitors and dreamers.

We're still writing this story. Every rugby match at **Ray Gravel's** old stomping grounds, every summer fair on the Quay, every debate in the Market Arms about whether the castle looks better at sunrise or sunset—it's all part of the next layer in Kidwelly's legacy.

So, here's to us—the latest caretakers of this stubborn, glorious town. May we honour the past without being trapped by it. After all, what's 900 years of history if not permission to make some more?

Blood and Honour: The Battles That Forged Kidwelly's Soul

When morning mist rolls in from the Gwendraeth these days, it's hard to imagine those same fields running red with blood. But stand quiet by Maes Gwenllian at dawn, and you might just hear the ghostly echo of clashing steel - a reminder that our pretty market town was once the stage for battles that shaped Wales itself. 1136:

The Princess Who Fought Like a Dragon

The year Henry I died, when Norman lords thought Wales was ripe for the taking, they hadn't counted on Gwenllian ferch Gruffydd.

Picture her - a princess of Gwynedd, wife to Deheubarth's prince, mother of future kings - leading warriors from these very fields.

That spring morning in 1136 wasn't some romantic last stand. It was brutal, desperate house-to-house fighting through the Norman settlement outside the castle. Our Gwenllian didn't just command from the rear; she was in the thick of it, her sword singing until the moment Maurice de Londres' men dragged her down.

The Normans thought beheading her would break us. Instead, they made her immortal.

Funny thing is, walk through Kidwelly today and her presence is everywhere - in the schoolgirls who bear her name, in the fierce debates at the rugby club, in the way we still bristle at being told what to do. Gwenllian didn't win the battle, but she won the war for our collective memory.

1257-58: Llywelyn's Gambit

A century later, when Llywelyn ap Gruffydd - the last true Prince of Wales - came knocking, Kidwelly was ready to write another chapter. This wasn't some haphazard raid; it was a masterstroke of medieval strategy that nearly tore Norman control of South Wales apart at the seams.

The key? Maredudd ap Rhys Gryg's betrayal - a Norman loyalist who switched sides so dramatically it sent Patrick de Chaworth scrambling. For months, Llywelyn's forces turned the countryside around Kidwelly into their playground, burning Norman outposts, starving the castle garrison, and turning the very bridge over the Gwendraeth into a slaughterhouse.

That final battle was no tidy affair. Maredudd took a spear through the gut near the river crossing. Dafydd ap Hywel - one of Llywelyn's best commanders - fell in the mud with a dozen wounds. But when the survivors limped home to Strata Florida Abbey, they carried something precious: proof that Norman invincibility was a myth.

The Battlefields Beneath Our Feet

What's extraordinary isn't that these battles happened - it's that their legacy thrums through Kidwelly still:

In our stubbornness - That same refusal to yield that Gwennllian showed lives on in every community fight to save the library or the leisure centre.

In our loyalty - Like Maredudd, we might grumble about outsiders, but cross one of ours and discover what Welsh kinship really means.

In our land - Those "historic field" signs aren't just for tourists. That soil remembers. Farm a field near the castle and you'll still turn up arrowheads with the plough. Next time you're queuing at the traffic lights by the castle, look past the cars and see it: Norman sentries squinting at torchlight in the valley. Welsh warriors wading the river under moonlit shields. Seven centuries vanish in a heartbeat.

This is why we tell these stories - not to dwell in the past, but to remember what we're capable of. Because in Kidwelly, history isn't just something in books. It's the fire in our bellies. And God knows, we'll need it for whatever battles come next.

Bricks & Grit: The Kilns That Built Industrial Wales

Let's talk about the real foundations of Kidwelly—not the castle's Norman stone, but the millions of fire-baked bricks that literally built the Industrial Revolution in South Wales. While the tinplate works get the glory, it was our brickworks—four mighty temples of industry—that kept the furnaces of Wales burning. Walk the old sites today, and you're treading on the ashes of a vanished empire of heat and sweat.

The Silica Kings

At **Dinas Silica Brick and Cement Works**, they didn't just make bricks—they forged the backbone of heavy industry. These weren't your garden-wall reds; these were golden-yellow silica bricks, capable of withstanding blast furnace infernos without flinching. Every ton produced here lined the belly of Wales's iron giants—from Dowlais to Ebbw Vale—their heat-resistant alchemy turning Kidwelly clay into industrial gold.

A mile east, **Stephens Silica Brickworks** took the science further. That 1937 aerial photo in the Industrial Museum shows a sprawling complex where men in leather aprons (if you look closely, you can still find their discarded clay pipes in the rubble) perfected bricks so precise they were shipped to steelworks as far as Sheffield. Today, those same bricks likely still line some forgotten furnace, quietly outlasting the empires they served.

The Small Giants

Up at **Alexander Young's brickworks** near Penymynydd Farm, the game was diversification. Between 1900-1927, they didn't just fire bricks—they fed lime kilns that turned local limestone into mortar, literally cementing Kidwelly's place in Wales's building boom.

You can still spot their legacy in the brick courses of Edwardian houses across Carmarthenshire—that russet hue is Young's signature.

And let's not forget Kymer's Canal—the unsung hero. While it hauled coal to the docks by day, by night it floated barges stacked with Kidwelly bricks down to Llanelli's docks.

Every brick that rattled along those tracks was a tiny piece of Kidwelly sailing off to build docks in Cardiff, factories in Swansea, even London's Underground tunnels.
The Ghost Kilns

What's left? More than you'd think:

The Dinas works' chimney still stands like a brick lighthouse, its weathered sides bearing the scars of a hundred thousand firings. Stephens' drying sheds, now home to nesting kestrels, their timber bones bleached silver by time.

The canal's stone edges, where bricklayers once sharpened their trowels on the coping stones, leaving grooves you can still run your fingers over. Most poignant are the rejects—the misshapen bricks tossed into spoil heaps that now dot the countryside.

Kids today dig them up, these warped relics stamped with "KIDWELLY" in bold Victorian lettering, and don't realize they're holding the DNA of industrial Wales.
Why It Matters

Those brickworks weren't just factories—they were universities of hard knocks. Generations of Kidwelly boys learned thermodynamics the hard way, shovelling coal into kilns hot enough to melt modern health-and-safety manuals. The women who packed bricks into straw for shipping could tell you about friction burns that no wage packet could heal.

Yet this was our golden age of making. When Wales moved the world, Kidwelly moved the materials that moved Wales. Next time you pass a surviving brick terrace on Water Street, knock on the wall—you're hearing the heartbeat of a town that built things to last.

The kilns are cold now, but their lesson burns bright: Kidwelly's never been about the size of its industry, but the quality of its craft. From Gwenllian's defiance to those perfect silica bricks, we've always punched above our weight.

The Tin Works: Where Kidwelly's Heartbeat Rang Loudest

Listen close when the wind blows from the river, and you might still hear it—the rhythmic clang-clang of the tinsplate rollers, the hiss of steam in the annealing sheds, the shouts of men calling across the yard in three languages.



For nearly 200 years, the Kidwelly Tin Works wasn't just a factory; it was the town's pulse.

The Forge of Fortunes (1737-1941)

When the first tinsplate rolled off the lines in 1737, it sparked a revolution. Kidwelly's secret? Geography as destiny:

Our Gwendraeth coal fired the furnaces hotter than Satan's front porch. The river and Kymer's Canal carried finished sheets to global markets—from London biscuit tins to New Orleans roofing.

Welsh craftsmanship turned base metal into art; workers could gauge thickness by the song the rollers sang.

By Victoria's reign, the Works employed one in three Kidwelly men. Whole families owed their bread to its chimneys—grandfathers, fathers, and sons working the same mills, their calloused hands passing down tricks of the trade like heirlooms.

The tinsplate stamped "MADE IN KIDWELLY" became a mark of quality across empires.

The Slow Fade (1941-1981)

War came, and with it, the cruellest irony: the 1941 closure wasn't due to bombs, but economics. Cheaper foreign tinplate flooded markets, and suddenly, our pride was "redundant." The silence that fell over the Works was deafening—no more 6 a.m. whistles, no more soot-smudged workers flooding Bridge Street at shift's end. For forty years, the abandoned site became Kidwelly's ghost limb—rotting buildings where kids dared each other to enter, rusted machinery slowly sinking into the earth like fallen warriors.



The Museum That Almost Saved Us (1981-2020)

Then came the dreamers. Local historians—many sons and daughters of tin workers—fought to turn ruin into remembrance. The Kidwelly Industrial Museum opened in 1981, its crowning jewel the restored rolling mill, where visitors could feel the floor tremble under simulated production.



For a glorious stretch, it worked:

Schoolkids gasped as guides demonstrated how ingots became gleaming sheets. Grandfathers pointed out their old workstations with misty-eyed pride. The annual Tinplate Festival brought the site roaring back to life with blacksmith demos and brass band marches.

But museums run on money as much as memory. By 2020, the grants dried up, the roof leaks multiplied, and the painful notice went up: CLOSED INDEFINITELY.

What Remains

Walk the overgrown site today, and the past whispers at every turn: The weighbridge office, where workers clocked in, still bears graffiti from 1897—a tally of football bets scratched into the brick.

In the pattern shop, sunlight filters through broken roof slats onto century-old blueprints curling at the edges.

Down by the old canal spur, rusted chains still dangle where barges loaded finished tinplate for Swansea docks.

Most heart-breaking? The unfinished exhibits—a 1920s worker's lunch tin left on a half-curated display table, a video screen frozen mid-interview with retired tinsmith Gwyn Thomas (RIP 2019).

The Fire Still Burns

Yet here's the truth: The Works never really dies while:

Stories survive—like the 1889 strike when women workers pelted strike-breakers with rivets.

Skills live on—local artisans still craft jewellery from salvaged tinfoil.

The fight continues—the Friends of the Museum group quietly fundraises, waiting for their moment.

That's Kidwelly's lesson. We've always been a town of second acts—from Gwenllian's defeat birthing resistance to tinfoil's collapse birthing preservation. However dark the Works' future seems, remember furnaces cool, but community endures.

Kymer's Canal: A Reflection on the Waterway That Transformed Kidwelly

There are places in a town's story that mark a before and after—turning points that shape what a community becomes. For Kidwelly, Kymer's Canal was one of those turning points.



Though the water today flows quietly, watched over by trees and time, this canal was once the artery of a thriving, ambitious town. In the late 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution swept across Britain, our quiet medieval settlement stood on the edge of great change. And it was Thomas Kymer, a local entrepreneur with foresight and determination, who set that change in motion.

In 1768, Kymer's vision became reality with the completion of the canal that would bear his name. It stretched from Kidwelly to Carmarthen Bay, becoming one of the earliest canals built in Wales. More than a feat of engineering, it was a bold step into the future—a link to the sea, to opportunity, and to the wider world.

For the people of Kidwelly, Kymer's Canal quickly became a lifeline. It powered the rise of industry, carrying coal from the Gwendraeth Valley to our ironworks and tinfoil factories. These industries flourished because of it. Iron ore came in, iron goods went out. Tin and coal passed through the canal's waters, feeding furnaces,

and fuelling a booming economy. The Kidwelly Tinplate Works, one of the largest in Wales, owed much of its success to this vital waterway.

We remember how the town expanded in response—how new homes, shops, and roads grew alongside industry. Families moved in. Work was steady. A sense of purpose filled the air. The canal didn't just carry materials; it carried hope, livelihoods, and the rhythm of everyday life. It reshaped not just our town, but our identity as a hardworking, forward-looking community.

Eventually, progress moved on. The arrival of the railway in the mid-19th century signalled a decline for the canal. Trains were faster, more efficient. The waters that once bustled with barges and workers began to quiet. But the change it had brought was already done—and lasting.



Today, what remains of Kymer's Canal is a monument to the past. Its stonework, its curves through the land, are reminders of what was once possible through vision, collaboration, and effort. It stands as a tribute to the people who built it, worked it, and built their lives around it.

We don't walk those paths without thinking of what came before—the industry, the noise, the energy of a town on the rise. Kymer's Canal was more than just a waterway. It was a catalyst. A connector. A symbol of a time when Kidwelly stepped onto the stage of history with confidence and purpose.

And though the barges no longer glide through its waters, its legacy flows on—in the stories we tell, in the foundations of our town, and in the enduring spirit of those who came before us.

Kidwelly's Crucial Role in D-Day

Preparations: American Forces Gear Up for Operation Overlord

As the world commemorates the 80th anniversary of D-Day, it is essential to remember the vital preparations that took place far from the beaches of Normandy. The town of Kidwelly played a significant role in the lead-up to Operation Overlord, hosting American forces as they readied themselves for the monumental invasion that would turn the tide of World War II at Broomhill House near Parc Y Bocs.



In the months leading up to June 6, 1944, Kidwelly and its surrounding areas became temporary homes to thousands of American soldiers. These troops, part of the extensive build-up for the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe, were billeted in various locations around the town. Local fields, barns, and community halls were transformed into makeshift barracks and training grounds, while the soldiers prepared for the most significant military operation in history.

The arrival of the American forces brought a unique dynamic to Kidwelly. The town, which had been relatively untouched by the direct impacts of the war, suddenly found itself at the heart of a crucial military effort. The presence of the soldiers was a constant reminder of the impending invasion and the critical role that Kidwelly would play in its success.

The preparations in Kidwelly were comprehensive and intense. Soldiers engaged in rigorous physical training, honing their skills in marksmanship, tactics, and amphibious operations. The surrounding countryside, with its diverse terrain, provided an ideal setting for the kind of exercises that would be crucial during the

landings in Normandy. Training also included the use of mock-ups and simulations to prepare troops for the specific challenges they would face on the beaches of France.

Beyond the physical preparations, the presence of American forces in Kidwelly also required extensive logistical support. Supplies had to be stored and transported, equipment maintained, and communication lines established. The local population played a crucial role in supporting these efforts, often interacting with the soldiers, and providing hospitality. The bond between the American troops and the people of Kidwelly grew strong, creating a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect.

Despite the secrecy surrounding the specifics of Operation Overlord, the townspeople were aware that something monumental was underway. The increased military activity, combined with the presence of high-ranking officers and the visible build-up of men and material, left little doubt that a significant operation was imminent.

On the eve of D-Day, the tension in Kidwelly was palpable. Soldiers wrote letters home, polished their gear, and steeled themselves for the daunting task ahead. The local community, too, felt the weight of the moment, understanding that the success of the invasion could hinge on the readiness of the troops that had been among them.

As the American forces departed Kidwelly for the south coast of England and then across the English Channel to Normandy, the town's role in the grander scheme of the war became clear. The rigorous training and preparation conducted in Kidwelly contributed to the success of the D-Day landings, a pivotal moment in the fight against Nazi tyranny.

Today, as we reflect on the bravery and sacrifice of those who stormed the beaches of Normandy, we also remember the critical contributions of places like Kidwelly. The town's support and the training it facilitated were integral to the success of Operation Overlord. The legacy of this period remains a proud part of Kidwelly's history, a testament to the town's role in one of the most significant military campaigns of the 20th century.

<https://tinyurl.com/Kidwelly-War-Memorials-WW1-WW2>



The British American Optical Company Ltd.:
A Post-War Catalyst for Economic Revival in Kidwelly

Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire - The establishment of the British American Optical Company Ltd. in Kidwelly represents a pivotal post-World War II initiative aimed at stimulating economic growth in economically depressed regions. This endeavour, part of the British government's plan to promote light industries in "special areas," marked a significant shift from traditional industries to more diversified economic activities in the area.



In 1946, the ambitious project began with the turning of the first sod on farmland known as "Greenfields." This development was part of a broader strategy to modernise and rejuvenate the local economy, providing much-needed employment and reducing the region's reliance on coal mining and agriculture. The post-war period saw many areas like Kidwelly struggling with economic hardships, and the government's intervention through such industrial projects was crucial for regional development.

The factory began its operations in June 1950, producing optical goods such as lenses and precision instruments. This not only created numerous job opportunities but also significantly enhanced the skills of the local workforce. The introduction of such a specialized industry required training and skill development, leading to a more skilled and versatile labour force in the region.

The economic activity generated by the factory had a ripple effect, benefiting local businesses and services. Shops, restaurants, and other service-oriented businesses experienced increased patronage from the factory workers and their families, contributing to the overall economic health of Kidwelly. This growth helped stabilise

the local economy and provided a buffer against the volatility of the traditional industries that had previously dominated the region.

The British American Optical Company Ltd. is a prime example of a successful post-war industrial policy, illustrating the government's efforts to create balanced and resilient regional economies. Its establishment and operations played a key role in the economic revitalization of Kidwelly, leaving a legacy in the region's industrial history. The factory's presence not only diversified the local economy but also showcased the potential of strategic government intervention in fostering long-term economic sustainability.

In addition to its economic contributions, the factory also had a significant social impact on Kidwelly. The influx of workers and their families brought about demographic changes, leading to increased demand for housing, education, and healthcare services. This, in turn, prompted improvements in local infrastructure and public services, enhancing the overall quality of life for the residents.

The success of the British American Optical Company Ltd. in Kidwelly also served as a model for other regions facing similar economic challenges. It demonstrated that with the right support and investment, even areas heavily reliant on declining industries could transition to more diverse and sustainable economic bases. This strategic approach helped to ensure that the benefits of post-war prosperity were more evenly distributed across the country, preventing economic stagnation in vulnerable areas.

Today, the legacy of the British American Optical Company Ltd. continues to be felt in Kidwelly. The skills, infrastructure, and economic stability it brought to the region have had long-lasting effects, proving the enduring value of targeted economic interventions. As Kidwelly looks to the future, the lessons learned from this post-war initiative remain relevant, offering insights into how regional economies can adapt and thrive in changing economic landscapes.

Celebrating Notable Figures from Kidwelly:

A Legacy of Passion and Perseverance

Kidwelly is not only rich in industrial heritage but also boasts a legacy of notable individuals whose contributions have left an indelible mark on Welsh culture and history. Among these figures are Ray Gravell, a beloved rugby icon; the Reverend Peter Williams, a dedicated minister and scholar; Hugh Williams, a passionate activist in the Chartism and Rebecca Riots movements; as well as George Ernest John Powell, a philanthropic landowner; Arthur Mee, an influential educator and writer; Sir Thomas Stepney, a significant political figure; and Nigel Owens, a renowned rugby referee.

Ray Gravell: A Rugby Legend

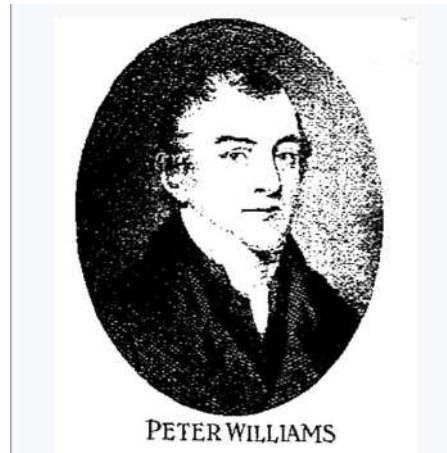
Ray Gravell, born in Kidwelly in 1951, is a name synonymous with Welsh rugby. Known for his fierce play and passionate spirit, Gravell became a celebrated figure in the rugby world. He earned 23 caps for the Welsh national team and was a key player in the Llanelli RFC team, which famously defeated the New Zealand All Blacks in 1972.



Beyond his rugby career, Gravell was a respected broadcaster and actor, contributing significantly to Welsh media and culture. He was known for his warmth, charisma, and deep love for Wales, qualities that endeared him to many. Gravell's legacy lives on, inspiring future generations both on and off the field.

Reverend Peter Williams: A Faithful Scholar and Minister

Another illustrious figure from Kidwelly is the Reverend Peter Williams, born in 1723. Reverend Williams dedicated his life to the ministry and scholarly pursuits, becoming renowned for his significant contributions to Welsh religious literature. He published three editions of a Welsh Bible with explanatory notes, one in octavo format, as well as a concordance and numerous pamphlets in Welsh.



Despite his scholarly achievements, Reverend Williams faced persecution and ingratitude for his work. However, he remained steadfast in his faith and dedication, continuing as a laborious minister of the gospel for 53 years. He passed away on August 8, 1796, at the age of 74, finding joy in his faith until the end.

Reverend Williams is buried in St Maelog's Church, Llandefaelog, remembered for his unwavering commitment to his faith and his invaluable contributions to Welsh religious literature.

Hugh Williams: A Voice for Justice and Reform

Hugh Williams, another notable figure, played a significant role in the Chartism and Rebecca Riots movements in the 19th century. These movements were crucial in advocating for political reform and addressing the grievances of the working class in Wales.



Williams was deeply involved in the struggle for justice and better living conditions. His activism during the Rebecca Riots, where protesters disguised as women destroyed toll gates in protest of unfair tolls, highlighted his commitment to social justice. His efforts in the Chartism movement also underscored his dedication to securing political rights and representation for all.



Hugh Williams is buried in St. Ishmael's Church in Ferryside, leaving behind a legacy of activism and advocacy that continues to inspire those fighting for justice and equality.

George Ernest John Powell: The Philanthropic Landowner

George Ernest John Powell, born in 1842, was a prominent figure in Kidwelly's history. A landowner and philanthropist, Powell is best known for his significant contributions to Welsh culture and education. He was deeply involved in the National Eisteddfod, a festival celebrating Welsh literature, music, and performance, where he promoted the arts and supported local talent.



Powell's dedication to education was evident through his generous donations to schools and scholarships, enabling many young Welsh people to pursue higher education. His legacy of philanthropy continues to benefit the community, underscoring the importance of supporting cultural and educational initiatives.

Arthur Mee: The Educator and Encyclopaedist

Arthur Mee, born in 1875, was an influential educator and writer who spent part of his life in Kidwelly. He is best known for his work on "The Children's Encyclopaedia" and "The King's England," a comprehensive guide to the counties of England.

Mee's works were pioneering in their time, making knowledge accessible and engaging for children and the public.



His connection to Kidwelly adds to the town's rich literary heritage, highlighting its role as a nurturing ground for intellectual and educational pursuits.

Mee's contributions to education and literature have had a lasting impact, inspiring generations of learners and readers.

Sir Thomas Stepney: The Influential Baronet

Sir Thomas Stepney, the 7th Baronet, was a prominent figure in the 18th century with ties to Kidwelly. As a landowner and politician, he played a significant role in the local and national political landscape. Sir Thomas was an advocate for agricultural and economic development, supporting innovations that benefitted the local community.

His involvement in politics and development projects helped shape the economic foundation of Kidwelly, fostering growth and prosperity in the region. Sir Thomas Stepney's legacy is remembered for his contributions to public service and community development.

Nigel Owens: The Renowned Rugby Referee

Another notable sports figure linked to Kidwelly is Nigel Owens, widely regarded as one of the best rugby referees in the world. Born in Mynydd y garreg, near Kidwelly, in 1971, Owens has officiated numerous international matches, including World Cup finals. His professionalism, fairness, and commitment to the sport have earned him respect and admiration globally.



Owens' connection to Kidwelly highlights the town's contribution to the world of rugby, complementing the legacy of Ray Gravell. His achievements in sports officiating have brought pride to the community, showcasing the town's ongoing influence in the sporting world.

The contributions of Ray Gravell, Reverend Peter Williams, Hugh Williams, George Ernest John Powell, Arthur Mee, Sir Thomas Stepney, and Nigel Owens are integral to Kidwelly's rich historical tapestry. Their lives and work reflect the town's spirit of resilience, passion, and dedication. As Kidwelly continues to grow and evolve, the legacies of these remarkable individuals serve as a beacon of inspiration, reminding us of the enduring impact of dedication and perseverance.

The Story of Kidwelly's Steam Bakery

"Rise and Aroma: The Steam Bakery of Kidwelly in the Mid-20th Century"



In the bustling town of Kidwelly, during the early 20th century, the aroma of freshly baked bread wafted through the air, tantalising the senses of the locals.

This delightful scent originated from the Steam Bakery, a cherished establishment run by John and Bessie Pugh-Jones, the Great Uncle and Aunt of Seimon Pugh-Jones. Their bakery was an integral part of Iscoed Bakeries Ltd, which also operated a similar bakery in Llanelli, with its headquarters situated in Pontyates. Seimon Pugh-Jones, fortunate to be nurtured amidst the enticing fragrance of baked goods, held cherished memories deeply rooted in the stories and experiences tied to these family-owned bakeries. The recollections of his upbringing were interwoven with the tales of these historic establishments.

The artistic portrayal of the Steam Bakery during the early 1940s or 1950s, depicted in a painting by E.A. Read, offers a glimpse into that era. E.A. Read, affiliated with the Kardomah gang, captured the essence of the time through his artistic lens, immortalizing the essence of the bakery and its surroundings. Adjacent to the Steam Bakery, a Chemist operated, further enriching the local community's lifestyle.

The juxtaposition of the bakery and the Chemist not only embodied the thriving business environment but also symbolized the interconnectedness of various trades in the town. The Steam Bakery was conveniently located beside the River Gwendraeth Fach, with a bridge spanning the river nearby.

The landscape and river played a crucial role in the daily operations and aesthetics of the area. The 1940s was a time of turbulence, with the world engulfed in the throes of World War II. It was a time when resilience and fortitude were paramount.

During such challenging times, the Steam Bakery continued to serve the community, providing sustenance and comfort, even as the world grappled with the uncertainties of war. The Steam Bakery of Kidwelly, run by John and Bessie Pugh-Jones, remains a fond memory in the hearts of those who were fortunate enough to experience its warmth and the delectable scents that lingered in the air.

Today, the painting by E.A. Read and the stories passed down through generations pay homage to this historic bakery and its significant place in the tapestry of Kidwelly's past.

A Final Thought on Kidwelly's Journey Through Time

From Gwenllian's defiant stand to the clatter of tinsplate machines, from the whispers of American GIs to the quiet resilience of a post-industrial town—Kidwelly's story is not one of relics gathering dust, but of a living, breathing community that has always refused to be defined by any single era.

Our castle keeps watch. Our river still finds its way to the sea. And though the factories have fallen silent, the spirit that built them—that same stubborn, inventive, fiercely proud spirit—still courses through these streets. Kidwelly has been a Norman stronghold, an industrial powerhouse, a wartime training ground, and now, a keeper of stories that refuse to be forgotten.

As we look to the future, we carry this truth: towns like ours aren't chapters in a history book waiting to be closed. We're manuscripts still being written. Every child kicking a ball near Maes Gwenllian, every volunteer preserving our museum fragments, every new voice adding to Kidwelly's song—they're all proof that our greatest legacy isn't in the stones of the past, but in the hands that shape tomorrow.

The next time you walk past the castle or pause by the canal, listen closely. Beneath the modern hum of traffic and laughter, you'll hear it—the steady heartbeat of a town that has weathered centuries by knowing this simple truth:

We endure. We adapt. We remember. And above all, we continue.

Hen fenyw fach Cydweli



***Hen fenyw fach Cydweli
Yn gwerthy losin du,
Yn rhifo deg am ddime,
Ond unarddeg i mi.
Wel dyma'r newydd gorau ddaeth i mi, i mi,
Oedd rhifo deg am ddime,
Ond unarddeg i mi.***

***Mi es i Faes y Croesau,
Mi ges i groeso mawr,
Afalau wedi'u pobi
A stôl i eistedd i lawr.
Wel dyma'r newydd gorau ddaeth i mi, i mi,
Afalau wedi'u pobi,
A stôl i eistedd i lawr.***

***Mae gen i fegin newydd
A honno'n llawn o wynt,
Mae'r byd yn gwenu arnaf
Fel yn y dyddiau gynt.
Wel dyma'r newydd gorau ddaeth i mi, i mi,
Mae'r byd yn gwenu arnaf
Fel yn y dyddiau gynt.***

<https://tinyurl.com/Kidwelly-Cydweli-Living-Legacy>



Graham T Emmanuel 2025