

THE LAST DRAGON

A BOOK OF PEMBROKESHIRE FOLK TALES

Brian John



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DEDICATION

To the people of Pembrokeshire, young and old, who have done so much over the years to keep "the unwritten learning of tradition" alive. And to those who have kindly sent me stories, some new and some old, for inclusion in this book.

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Contents

CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

Glossary of Welsh Terms

The Sources of the Stories

The Story Locations

Section One: Tales of the Saints

- 1.1 The Miraculous Birth of St David
- 1.2 Brynach and the Lusty Princess
- 1.3 Brynach, the Devils and the Angels
- 1.4 Samson and the Honey
- 1.5 The Saints and the Firewood
- 1.6 Samson and the Pestiferous Beast
- 1.7 Brynach and the Beloved Blodwen
- 1.8 St David the Champion
- 1.9 Modomnoc and the Bees
- 1.10 The Unsaintly Monks of St Dogmael's

Section Two: Heroic Deeds

- 2.1 The Strange Courtship of Pwyll and Rhiannon
- 2.2 Gallows for a Thieving Mouse
- 2.3 The Triumph of Henry Tudor
- 2.4 The Last Great Tournament
- 2.5 The Pioneering Aviator

Section Three: Strange Happenings

- 3.1 The Bluestone Expedition
- 3.2 The Loss of the "Phoebe and Peggy"
- 3.3 Tragedy at the Copper Mine
- 3.4 The Golden Treasure at Trewern
- 3.5 Duel at Fortune's Frolic
- 3.6 The Mysterious Visitor to Walwyn's Castle
- 3.7 The Voice from the Grave
- 3.8 The Bishop and the Lady of Ill Repute
- 3.9 Whisky on the Rocks
- 3.10 Hard Drinking at the Polls
- 3.11 Premature Funeral at Mynachlogddu
- 3.12 Sad Event at Pen-y-bryn
- 3.13 Dark Deed in Honey Harfat

PREFACE

Following the publication of **Pembrokeshire Folk Tales** in 1991 I have been inundated with further tales from those who have kindly taken an interest in my folk tale project. Many other readers have suggested sources for stories ancient and modern. It is therefore a pleasure to publish this collection of tales (the second volume of a planned Trilogy) and to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all those who have given help and encouragement. I have not been able to use all the tales submitted to me, and I apologise to any readers whose material does not find its way into print in this volume. I have well over 150 tales on the file, and with room for only 114 of them I had to make very difficult judgements (largely to do with the "balance" of the book) concerning the ones to be published.

I hope that the stories contained in this little book will appeal to readers as varied, informative and entertaining. My main sources have again been the four classics of Welsh folk-lore, namely **British Goblins** (1880) by Wirt Sikes, **Celtic Folk-Lore** (1901) by Sir John Rhys, **Folk-Lore of Mid and West Wales** (1911) by J Ceredig Davies, and **Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales** (1909) by Marie Trevelyan. Other valuable material has come from **Welsh Folklore and Folk Custom** (1930) by T. Gwynn Jones, from **Cambrian Superstitions** (1831) by William Howells, and from **A Pembrokeshire Anthology** (1983) and other writings by local author Dillwyn Miles.

As in my previous volume of folk tales, I have made no attempt to analyse the stories or to look for original sources or connections between them. Again, I leave that task to those who make a special study of folklore; but to help those who want to research certain stories which might be of interest to them, I have again given full details as to my sources.

It is a pleasure to thank all those who have helped in the creation of this book, and in particular Malcolm Gordon and his colleagues at the Haverfordwest Public Library; Robin Gwyndaf of the Welsh Folk Museum; Graham Hadlow for the cover illustration; Rod Crow, Neil Davies and their colleagues at C.I.Thomas & Sons Ltd for their efficiency and expertise in the printing process. I am very grateful to Catrin Ladd-Lewis for her help with Welsh translations. Finally I must thank my wife Inger for her constant support and help in listening to the stories, advising on wording, proofreading and many other matters.



..... sometimes these enchanted isles were seen by sailors passing through St George's Channel and close to the Pembrokeshire coast. (See page 63).

INTRODUCTION

Where, and when, was the Last Dragon in Wales encountered? What did it look like? And what happened to it? Dragon-watchers (who belong to a dying breed) disagree on these matters, but from a search through the old texts it seems that Pembrokeshire has a better claim than any other part of Wales to the last authenticated sighting. More precisely, we should refer to the Pembrokeshire borders, for the tale recounted on page 72 of this book is set in the Teifi Valley area. The story is clearly no older than 1763, for the hero had just returned home after fighting the French in the Seven Years War. This may surprise some readers who may have assumed that dragons died out long before the eighteenth century; but one should never be surprised at what one finds in folk tales!

In this volume I have assembled a number of local dragon tales. This has proved to be a remarkably difficult task, for dragons were never particularly numerous either in Pembrokeshire or in Wales as a whole. In spite of the fact that the dragon is prominent on the national flag of Wales, there are probably no more than half a dozen genuine dragon stories in the annals of Welsh folklore, including the famous one in the tale of Lludd and Llevelys. In this tale, a red dragon fights with a white dragon in the air, spreading terror among all those who see the battle. Dragons also occur in the writings of Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth, and of course King Arthur, Tristan, Merlin the Wizard and St George knew all about dragons.

In a number of Welsh country parishes there are traditions of dragons protecting great hoards of hidden treasure; and it is not too fanciful to suggest that dragons are therefore the secret guardians of the ancient wisdom of Wales. To the inveterate folk tale collector Wirt Sikes, dragons were "the personifications of the baleful influences that reside in caverns, graves and subterranean regions generally". And to others (including the people of modern China) dragons are symbols of chivalry, honour, heroism and leadership. It seems from some of the old church carvings that dragons were also seen as symbols of fertility. However, the coming of Christianity brought with it the Dragon of the Apocalypse, and it became fashionable to portray dragons as the fiery harbingers of evil, to be conquered and slain by knights in shining armour who represented the power of good.

One of the problems with Welsh dragon tales is that Welsh people never seem to have been too sure what to call their fiery dragons. In England there are dragons, wyverns, serpents and worms; perhaps the most famous dragon of all is the Lambton Worm of County Durham. In Wales the beasts are sometimes referred to as *Dreic* or *Draig* (dragon), these words having been derived from the Latin *Draco*. But more often the fearsome creatures in Welsh folk tales are called *Afanc*, *Gwiber*, *Sarff*, *Carrog*, *Bych*, or *Llamhigyn y Dwr*. At least two of these are really water monsters, while the *Carrog* and *Bych* are so terrible that nobody has ever managed to describe them. Proper dragons, which have hard dry scales, wings and fire-breathing nostrils, are usually referred to by the word *Gwiber* in Welsh; this word, derived from the Latin *Vipera*, is of course similar to the word *Viper* in English, but the important thing about the Welsh creature is that it can fly.

All in all, we have to use the storytellers' descriptions of their own particular beasts in order to help us decide which of the tales actually do refer to dragons. Thus the "pestiferous beast" banished by St Samson (Story 1.6) was clearly a dragon, as was the *Gwiber* in the well at St Edren's (Story 4.7). The *Afanc* at Brynberian (Story 4.6) was clearly not a dragon. Two of the fearsome creatures featured in *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales* -- namely the great black snake of Presely (Story 4.9) and the Wiston basilisk (Story 8.8) -- were most probably dragons. And although some authors refer to the beast in Story 4.15 of the present volume as a wyvern, this is likely to be a mistake since the wyvern is really a heraldic creature seldom if ever referred to in traditional folk tales. We must conclude that the creature killed in 1763 was indeed the last dragon.....

There is much more to this book than dragons. Following the warm reception given to *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales*, I have decided to stick to the formula used in the earlier volume. All of the tales used in this book are new; and as before they have been culled from a great variety of sources. For those who wish to study the tales I have provided full citations, and I have mentioned individuals by name where they have provided unique stories. There is a glossary of Welsh terms, a comprehensive bibliography, and a listing of story locations.

The book is divided into eight sections, with individual tales located wherever appropriate. We begin with a section entitled *Tales of the Saints* (10 tales), followed by a section on *Heroic Deeds* (5 tales), and a section on *Strange Happenings* (17 tales). Then follows a group of 15 *Fairy Tales* and a section on *Witchcraft and Magic* (13 tales). Next comes a section of 16 tales on *Signs, Omens and Portents*, and a group of 13 hair-raising *Ghostly Tales*. In the final section of the book there are 24 tales of *Folk Heroes, Great and Small* which are difficult to classify elsewhere.

While working on the current collection of tales I have been impressed once again by their broad geographical spread throughout all parts of Pembrokeshire; by the obvious morality of the tales, again demonstrating how they have been used over the centuries in order to teach children how to behave and to reinforce the civilised values of Pembrokeshire society; and by the manner in which new tales (i.e. from within the last decade or so) keep on appearing. Again one comes away from reading the tales convinced that the "folk tale tradition" of the county is alive and well.

One difference between this book and *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales* is the emphasis I have been able to give here to some of the wildly eccentric folk heroes who still live in the communal memory. Among these we can count Shemi Wad of Goodwick, Twm Waunbwl of Glandwr, Twm Carnabwth of Mynachlogddu, Daniel y Pant, Billy Biddle and Wil Canaan. Many of the stories in Section 8 have, so far as I know, never before been published; and they have been pieced together from snippets of information from many kind Pembrokeshire people. These are the real folk tales, involving no magic, no fairies, no devils or ghosts or goblins. Some of the tales are outrageous "tall stories", but they have a simple and naive quality which is captured perhaps best of all in Wil Canaan's Tale (8.6). These tales have been told and re-told with a twinkle in the eye and with affection in the heart; and it is a special pleasure to publish them here in the hope that they will reach a wider listening audience.

Brian John
October 1992

GLOSSARY OF WELSH TERMS

Aderyn y Gorff: a corpse bird, harbinger of death.
Afanc: a water monster, or alternatively a beaver.
Annwn: land of fairies, the underworld, hell.
Bwbach: a sprite, ghost or goblin able to transport people through the air.
Canwyll gorff: corpse candle; light denoting a death or the passage of a funeral
Cawr: giant.
Ceffyl Dwr: a small beautiful spectral horse or other supernatural animal
Coblyn: a goblin, a "knocker spirit" in mines or caves
Consuriwr: a magician or man with special or supernatural powers.
Crefishgyn: spirit.
Cwm Annwn: the hounds of Hell, corpse dogs or sky dogs They are smaller than the Gwyllgi.
Cyfaredd: charm, fascination, spell.
Cyfarwydd: a skilled teller of stories.
Cyhyraeth: death omen, heard but not seen; phantom funeral.
Cythraul: devil.
Diawl: devil.
Draig: dragon or winged serpent.
Drychiolaeth: apparition or spectre.
Dyn hysbys: a wise man or wizard (literally: a knowing one).
Dynon bach teg: fairies (literally: fair little folk).
Ellyll: elf or goblin.
Gwenhudwy: mermaid or sea divinity
Gwraig hyspys: witch.
Gwiber: winged serpent or dragon.
Gwyddon: hag, witch or sorceress.
Gwlad y Tylwyth Teg: Fairyland.
Gwrach: hag, witch.
Gwrach y Rhybyn: screaming banshee
Gwylnos: vigil or wake.
Hirwen-gwd: white bag or shroud; custom associated with Gwylnos
Hudol: magician or sorcerer.
Llan: monastic community or enclosure.
Noson Lawen: "merry evening" of light entertainment.
Plant Rhys Ddwfn: fairies dwelling on the invisible islands off the Pembrokeshire coast (literally: children of Rhys the Deep).
Pwnc: chapel festival involving chanting or recitation of scripture.
Rhamanta: magic divination
Rheibio: to curse or bewitch.
Simnai fawr: big open fireplace or inglenook.
Tân ellyll: will o' the wisp, dancing light over boggy ground.
Tanwedd: death omen in the form of a falling light
Teir-nos Ysprydion: the three nights of the year when spirits roam.
Toili: a phantom funeral.
Tolaeth: death omen such as a tolling bell or the sound of coffin-making.
Tylwyth Teg: fair folk or fairies
Ychen bannog: oxen of the spirit world, connected with water stories.
Ysbryd drwg: evil spirit or devil

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THE STORY LOCATIONS

- Aberporth 8.9
Angle 3.9
- Bosherston 7.9
Brawdy 8.2
Bridell 6.12
Brynberian 4.6
Bwlch-gwynt 3.16
- Caldey Island 1.4, 1.6
Canaston Bridge 3.1
Cantre'r Gwaelod 4.3
Capel Iwan 6.10
Cardigan 1.10, 4.2, 4.3, 4.10, 4.13, 5.5, 8.4, 8.11
Cardigan Bay 4.3, 4.4
Carn Alw 4.9
Carn Meini 3.1
Carnabwth 8.15
Carnedd Meibion Owen 4.11
Carew 2.3, 2.4, 8.1, 8.7
Carringli 1.3
Carregwastad 8.14
Castle Villa 8.2
Cenarth 4.15, 8.1
Cilgerran 3.12, 4.12, 5.5
Cilgwyn 4.11, 5.3
Cresswell 5.7
Crymych 7.11
Cwm (Fishguard) 8.20, 8.21
Cwm Cerwyn 4.9
Cwm Cych 6.10
Cwm Gwaun 1.3, 6.4
Cwrt-y-Cadno 5.2
- Dale 2.3
Daugleddau 1.6
Dewisland 1.1, 1.9, 3.3, 4.14, 6.7
Dinas 5.6
Dolrannog 6.4
- Eastern Cleddau 3.1, 3.15
Efailwen 8.15
Eglwysrwrw 4.9, 7.14, 8.16, 8.17
- Fishguard 2.5, 4.4, 4.5, 5.10, 5.11, 8.19, 8.20, 8.21
Foel Dyrch 4.11
- Fortune's Frolic 3.5
Freni Fawr 4.11
- Glandwr 6.5, 8.8, 8.9, 8.10, 8.12, 8.13
Glogue 7.4
Glyn Cuch 6.10
Glyn Rhosyn 1.3, 1.5, 1.9
Glynsaethmaen 8.6, 8.15
Goodwick 2.5, 8.14, 8.18, 8.19, 8.21, 8.24
Grassholm 4.8
Gwaun Valley: see Cwm Gwaun
- Hakin 8.22
Harbour Village 2.5
Haverfordwest 3.5, 3.10, 3.13, 5.12, 6.16, 7.6, 7.7
- Jeffreyston 8.7
Jordanston 5.10
- Kensington Hall 6.3
- Lamphey 2.4
Laugharne 6.11
Letterston 7.12
Little Newcastle 5.9
Llanboidy 6.6, 6.8
Llanerch 6.4
Llanfyrnach 7.4
Llanstinan 5.13
Llantood 7.14
Llanwnda 8.14
Llanycefn 6.14
Llawhaden 3.8
Login 6.8
- Maenclochog 5.4
Marros 7.1
Mathry 5.8
Milford Haven 1.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.9, 4.8, 6.1, 6.2, 6.16, 7.3, 8.20
Mill Bay 2.3
Moylgrove 4.1
Mullock Bridge 2.3
Mynachlogddu 3.11, 4.9, 8.6, 8.15
Mynydd Presely, see Presely Hills

Narberth 2.1, 2.2, 7.10
 Nevern 1.3, 1.7, 3.4, 3.7, 5.2, 5.3,
 6.13
 Newcastle Emlyn 4.15
 New Inn 3.16
 Newport 3.4, 3.14, 7.8, 8.5
 Neyland 8.23

Orielton 3.8

Pant-cou 5.2, 5.9
 Pantyderi 8.16
 Parrog (Goodwick) 8.18
 Parrog (Newport) 8.5
 Pencaer 8.14
 Pentood 4.2
 Pentregethin 5.1
 Pen-y-bryn 3.12
 Picton 8.2
 Pontfaen 1.3
 Pont Clegyr 7.2
 Porth Taflod 3.3
 Porth Clais 1.9
 Prendergast 3.10, 7.6
 Presely Hills 3.1, 3.11, 3.16, 4.6,
 4.9, 4.11
 Pwllgwaelod 4.8

Rhydwlwym 6.15, 8.6
 Rosebush 3.16

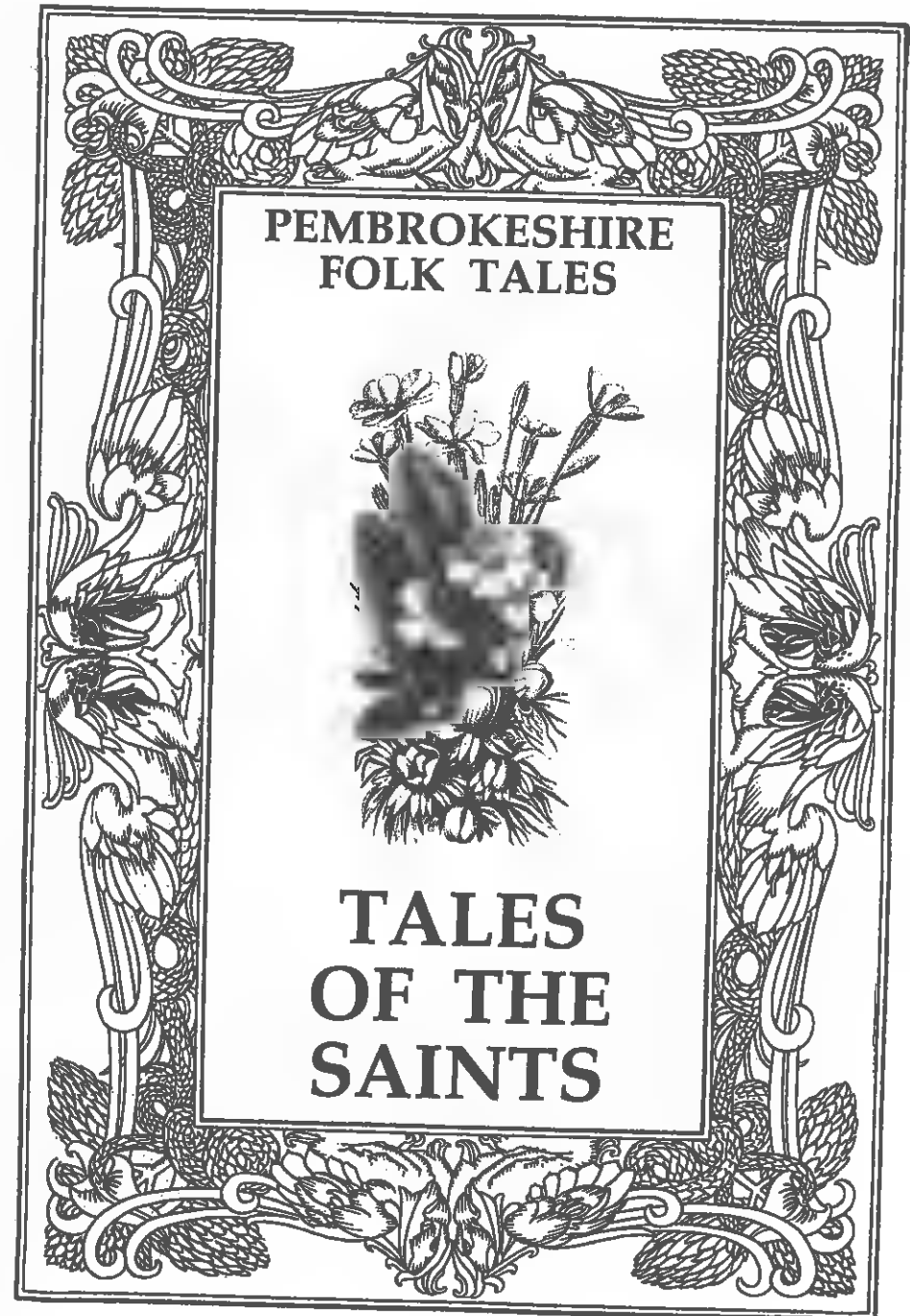
St Bride's 6.3
 St Bride's Bay 3.2, 5.1

St David's 1.1, 1.5, 1.9, 3.3, 3.17,
 6.7

St Dogmael's 1.10, 4.1, 4.13, 7.13
 St Edren's 4.7
 St Govans 1.6
 St Nons 1.1
 Slebech 3.15
 Smalls Lighthouse 5.1, 8.3
 Solva 3.2, 4.14, 7.2, 8.3, 8.14
 Stackpole 7.5

Tafarn Newydd 3.16
 Teifi Valley 4.2, 4.12, 4.15
 Temple Bar 5.3
 Thorn Island 3.9
 Thornton 7.3
 Tregaron 4.4
 Treginnis 3.3
 Treleddyn 8.3
 Trecwn 5.13
 Trewern 3.4
 Tycanol Wood 4.11

Walwyn's Castle 3.6
 Waunbwll 8.8, 8.10, 8.12, 8.13
 Werdew 5.6
 Western Cleddau 1.6
 Whitland 6.6, 6.11
 Wiston 3.6



1.1 The Miraculous Birth of St David

The miraculous birth of St David was foretold in both the pagan and Christian worlds. One old prophecy in West Wales told that a man would come "whose power will fill the whole land". The legendary Merlin prophesied that "a preacher of Ireland shall be dumb on account of an infant growing in the womb", and in the old Christian texts there are a number of mentions of the imminent coming of a great Christian leader to West Wales. St Patrick liked the look of Glyn Rhosyn and wished to build a monastery there; but he was told by an angel that the place was reserved for another saint who would appear in thirty years' time. Before David was born his father Sant had a vision that he should set aside portions of three treasures (a stag, a salmon and a swarm of bees) for a great son yet to be born. The treasures were symbols for the triumph of good over evil, for asceticism and for secret wisdom.

Sant, David's evil father, was of royal blood, being the son of Ceredig, a prince of Ceredigion. One day he was out riding in the area later to be known as Dewisland when he saw a beautiful woman and proceeded to rape her. She happened to be Non, the daughter of a local chieftain called Cynir. According to legend, two standing stones appeared at the scene of the crime. Non became pregnant, and during her pregnancy she hid in a church where an Irish priest named Gildas was preaching. Gildas found himself unable to speak so long as Non and her unborn child were there, for according to tradition the lesser cannot speak in the presence of the greater.

When the time came for David to be born, Non sought out a special place for the birth. According to one legend she had to hide from her own father who wished to kill both her and the child, being mindful of the old prophecy and fearful that his power would be usurped by a new king. Non came to the serene and beautiful place which we now know as St Non's, but the birth was anything but serene and beautiful, for her labour was long and hard, and in her pain she grasped a stone which took on the imprints of her fingers. The stone split into two, one part moving to her head and the other to her feet to give her protection. Then a terrible and elemental storm broke out, with thunder and lightning, floods and hail. Non's enemies were forced to flee, but Non herself was unaffected by the storm; and as she gave birth the place was lit by an unearthly light, brighter than the sun, and everything became calm and serene. At the spot where David was born a spring of crystal clear water issued from the rock, and this spring continues to flow to this day.

Later on the infant David was baptised by Elvis, the Bishop of Munster. During the ceremony the baby was held in the arms of a blind monk called Movi. Some of the baptismal water splashed accidentally into his eyes, and immediately his sight was restored.

Date: c 500 AD

Sources: Rees 1992, p 9; Evans 1988, p 43

1.2 Brynach and the Lusty Princess

St Brynach was an Irish nobleman who was converted to Christianity around the year 530 AD. He travelled on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he did various miraculous things and was treated, like all the best saints, as something of a superstar. However, all the adulation became too much for him to cope with, so he decided to return to the peace and quiet of Britain. He tried to find a convenient ship that would carry him across the sea, but no vessel could be found. So he found a convenient flat slab of rock instead, and was miraculously transported to Milford Haven.

He was made welcome by a certain nobleman, who allowed him to set up a small community near the shore of the waterway. Now Brynach was a striking figure of a man, with noble blood in his veins and with tales to tell of foreign parts, and he was very attractive to the ladies. The nobleman's daughter fell madly in love with him, and Brynach found it very difficult to resist her amorous advances. According to one legend, the two were married and had several children. At any rate, the young lady was far more interested than Brynach in the joys of sex. In due course the noble saint, believing that abstinence was good for the soul, determined that he would put aside the things of the flesh; but naturally enough his lusty princess was not too happy about this turn of events. She did her best to subdue his religious fervour, without great success. At last, in desperation, she gave him a secret love potion, but Brynach was warned in a dream not to drink it.



The princess, thus thwarted in love, now became very angry indeed, and she hired a gang of thugs to ambush Brynach and murder him. So one day they lay in wait for him near his monastery, and attacked him viciously with lances and cudgels. One man stabbed Brynach with a lance, causing him a cruel injury. But then Brynach's fellow monks heard his cries for help and rushed out to rescue him. The ruffians were outnumbered and forced to retreat without completing their task. Although he was very seriously injured, Brynach bathed his wounds in a nearby spring, making the water run red with blood; and he was miraculously healed. The man who had pierced his side with a lance did not fare so well, for in divine retribution he was so afflicted by winged insects that he died.

By now Brynach had had enough of the love-sick princess, and fled from the area. For some time he travelled in the Cleddau and Taf valleys, and eventually found his way to north Pembrokeshire, where he spent many happy years in peace.

Date: 538 AD

Source: Rees W.J p 291

1.3 Brynach, the Devils and the Angels

Following his unfortunate experiences at Milford Haven, Brynach eventually found his way, via the Treffgarne Gorge, to north Pembrokeshire. There he lived an interesting life in which devils and angels figured prominently. He was very intent upon missionary work, and founded a number of churches in the Gwaun Valley, at Henry's Moat, and at Cwm-yr-Eglwys. His main church was at Pontfaen, but life was made very difficult for him there by the presence of assorted evil spirits and witches which had made the area almost uninhabitable. Every night they wandered about, frightening the local people with their "dreadful outcries and horrid howlings". Through his persistent ministry Brynach at last managed to subdue the evil spirits, but he was not happy at Pontfaen and he was eventually told by God to move with his little band of disciples to the Nevern valley.

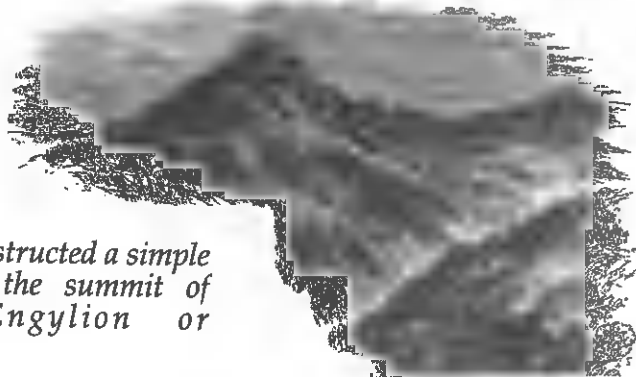
On their arrival in Nevern Brynach and the brothers built their *llan* or monastic settlement out of timber and stone. Brynach himself lived a simple and austere life, wearing rough clothes, owning no possessions, and helping the poor and needy. He became a great friend of Dewi (Saint David), who liked to call in on his journeys between his monastery in Glyn Rhosyn and his other communities further east.

Brynach was much happier at Nevern than he had been at Pontfaen, and it is said that he constructed a simple cell near the summit of Carn Engylion or Carningli. There, among the great volcanic crags, with the countryside spread out below him, he would stay for days on end, in prayer and contemplation and untroubled by the pressing needs of his fellow monks or passing travellers. According to local people, he "communed with the angels" while on the summit of Carningli, which was also referred to as Mons Angelorum. He also learned how to communicate with animals, and was able to tame even the fiercest of wild creatures. Two stags pulled his cart for him, and his favourite milk cow was looked after by a tame wolf.

Like many other Celtic saints, Brynach moved on after perhaps a decade at Nevern, driven by missionary zeal. After further journeys he settled as an old man and died at Braunton in Devon.

Date: c 550 AD

Sources: Rees W.J p 293; Spencer p 15



.....he constructed a simple cell near the summit of Carn Engylion or Carningli.

1.4 Samson and the Honey

St Samson was one of the earliest Welsh saints, being a contemporary of St David and St Dubricius. He was born around the year 485 AD and died around 565 AD. He was the son of a Breton chieftain and a Welsh princess, and received a good education in Glamorgan. He was exceptionally quick in his studies and austere in his ways, so he was marked out for a life devoted to the service of God. He became a pupil at the monastery of St Illyd, where he was ordained by St Dubricius. According to legend, when he was ordained a dove descended onto his shoulder while he was kneeling at the altar, and refused to fly away until the ceremony was complete; this miracle was observed only by the other saints at the ceremony, and not by the ordinary brothers. Such was Samson's holiness that some of Abbot Illyd's nephews became jealous of him and tried to poison him; but by divine intervention the monastery cat drank the poison instead, which did it no good at all.

To protect Samson from poisoning and petty jealousies, Illyd sent him to Caldey Island, where Abbot Pyro was in charge of a monastic community. Young Samson was, however, much too saintly for the monks on Caldey, who had fallen into bad habits. Pyro himself had a reputation as a hard-drinking man, and the monastery wine cellar was well stocked and well used. Bishop Dubricius was in the habit of spending Lent on Caldey Island with the little community, and one year, perhaps in an attempt to reform the monks, he decided to place the abstemious Samson in charge of the wine cellar and food store. This aroused the jealousy of the brother who had previously been in charge of the supplies, and he devised a cunning plan in order to discredit Samson.

So one night the wicked brother crept down to the cellar and poured away most of the honey that had been stored there in great earthenware jars. Then, next day, he accused Samson of wasting the honey. Bishop Dubricius heard the accusation, and had to promise to investigate. But before visiting the cellar he sent a warning to Samson concerning his intention, and Samson went before him to see what had happened to the honey. Finding the jars almost empty, he prayed to God for a miracle and made the sign of the cross. A few minutes later, when the Bishop arrived, he found all the jars quite full. This so impressed him that he determined that Samson should be further promoted within the community.

Soon afterwards Pyro died after falling into a well, having consumed a great quantity of red wine. On the suggestion of Dubricius, Samson was unanimously chosen as Pyro's successor. As abbot he did his best to reform the monks and bring some discipline to the community, but even he found this too much of an uphill struggle, and in the end he went off to Ireland to found a monastery there. But the story of the honey jars miracle lived on in local folklore, and was written down eventually in the "Life of Samson".

Date: c 510 AD

Sources: Doble p 56; Spencer p 71

1.5 The Saints and the Firewood

Around the year 560 AD the monastic community of St David was well established in the valley of Glyn Rhosyn, with a little group of brothers devoting their lives to prayer, study of the scriptures, and good works. Two of David's favourite disciples were the youthful Aidan and Teilo, who was then an old man. One day they were sitting in the atrium of the monastery quietly reading through *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* (unlike most of the other brothers, whose preferred reading was modern poetry or tales of the old heroes), when a servant arrived with a message from David. He said that there was no fuel left in the store for lighting the fire, and that the brothers would most likely have to go without a hot supper that evening. Would they please, therefore, kindly go out into the woods and collect some firewood immediately?

Our heroes were not too pleased with having to collect firewood when they were half-way through *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* and were just getting to the exciting bit, but they had vowed to obey their abbot. They went outside, placed their open book on a stone slab outside the door, and set off into the woods. While they were away it started to rain heavily, and they both got extremely wet. They both forgot about their valuable book which had been left out in the open. However, they worked quickly and gathered up a good pile of firewood, and they were about to drag the heavy loads of faggots back to the monastery when two magnificent stags sprang out from the undergrowth. The animals offered to carry the firewood for the brothers, who were only too pleased to accept. So they loaded all the wood onto the animals' backs, and off they went. Aidan and Teilo led the way, with the heavily-laden stags following obediently, watched with amazement by various local people.

The brothers were back at the monastery so quickly that they were able to get the fire going in the kitchen and to think about returning to their reading while it was still light. Then, with horror, they remembered that they had left their manuscript book out in the rain, and with sinking hearts they ran back to the atrium, expecting to find it soggy, if not totally destroyed. But by a miracle the book was still perfectly dry, and after thanking God they returned to their studies while the other brothers made the supper. Their devotion to learning was greatly rewarded, for the two stags returned, day after day, to collect more piles of firewood for the monastery. This miracle greatly impressed David and the local people, and it was concluded that Aidan and Teilo were destined for high office. And so it happened; both men became great bishops, and Aidan took over as abbot of the Glyn Rhosyn community on the death of its founder David.

Date: c 560 AD

Sources Doble p 172; Spencer p 54



1.6 Samson and the Pestiferous Beast

There are not many tales of dragons in Pembrokeshire, although a number of old legends refer to worms, basilisks, serpents or flying snakes. Some of these strange creatures had stings in their tails, and some were fire-breathing monsters which laid waste the countryside. Sometimes they lived in wells or pools, and the Welsh word *Afanc* is thought by some to refer to a sort of water monster. Another dragon-like creature was the *Gwiber* or flying snake. Dragons had a liking for beautiful maidens in general and beautiful princesses in particular, and they also tended to assemble hoards of treasure, which they guarded with great ferocity. They were very difficult to kill, having thick scaly hides, and only heroes and saints were able to get rid of them.

One of the saints associated with Pembrokeshire is Samson, who lived in the early sixth century AD. He was Abbott of the monastic community of Caldey Island, and spent a great deal of his early life there. One of the miracles associated with him concerns a "pestiferous beast" which was probably a dragon or *Draig*. According to legend, this beast was of vast size, and destroyed two districts of South Wales with its deadly breath. It lived in a cave, probably on the banks of the River Cleddau. Samson was urged to rid the area of the beast, so he agreed to see what he could do. He set out from Caldey with only a young boy to help him, and approached the dragon's lair. On smelling the approach of human beings the dragon let out a mighty roar, and started breathing fire and brimstone. But then Samson started to talk to the monster, and it became as docile as a newborn lamb. According to the legend, "it did not lift up its terrible wings, nor gnash its teeth, nor put out its tongue to emit its fiery breath." To the amazement of the young lad who was with him, Samson took the linen girdle which was round his waist, tied it round the dragon's neck, and led it from its cave. Then, as if he was taking a puppy for a walk, he led the gigantic creature to the top of a high cliff on the sea coast (probably at St Govan's Head), untied the girdle, and instructed it to leap into the sea. This it did without hesitation, and disappeared beneath the swirling waves, never to be seen again in South Wales.

According to some ancient authorities, the dragon swam across the sea to Ireland, where it came ashore and began to guard the fabulous treasure of O'Rourke. But that is another story.

Date: c 520 AD

Sources Bromwich p 93; Sikes p 393.



1.7 Brynach and the Beloved Blodwen

It was a fine summer's morning in the *llan* or monastic community of St Brynach, at the place we now know as Nevern. The woodland birds were singing their hearts out, and after their morning devotions and a good breakfast, the brothers were going about their daily tasks as the morning mist rose from the grassy river banks.

Now it happened that Abbot Brynach had a beloved cow whose name was probably Blodwen (this is a good name for a favourite cow today, as indeed it was then). Blodwen was larger, fatter, and more docile than the other cows, and was the best milker in the herd. On this particular beautiful day, Brynach had finished milking his cow, and his tame wolf was, as usual, taking her back to her meadow where she would spend the day amid the buttercups and sweet grasses and tasty herbs. Suddenly the peace of the community was broken by a rough fellow who came running through the woods. He shouted that he wanted to speak to Brynach, and when the abbot appeared he said that he brought a message from his king, who had recently arrived in the area with his entourage. The king desired tribute from Brynach and his monks in the form of a good dinner and accommodation for the night.

Brynach had heard of this king, who was nothing more than a marauding chieftain looking for trouble. Besides, the real king of the territory round about Nevern had already been converted to Christianity together with his sons, and he was the only one with any right to demand tribute from those who lived there. So Brynach sent the messenger back to the king, saying that he would not take orders from a scoundrel, and would not feed or accommodate either him or his warriors. On receiving the message, the wicked king became furious, since he and his men had been travelling for many hours and were tired and hungry after looting and pillaging the countryside. He decided to teach Brynach a lesson, and sent scouts to discover whether they might be able to steal some livestock with which to fill their cooking pots.

The spies returned to report the presence of a magnificent cow, all by itself in the buttercup meadow; and in no time at all they had captured the docile Blodwen and led her through the woods to their camp. Then some of the men slaughtered her, skinned her and took out her entrails while others prepared a fire and filled the cooking pots with water. When all was ready the carcass was cut up into pieces, and the meat was put into the cooking pots over the fire. Then, amid noisy rejoicing, the men settled down happily to await their supper.

Meanwhile Brynach's tame wolf had gone as usual to fetch Blodwen for the evening milking. When it found no trace of the beloved cow, it ran back to its master's feet and lay there whining. Brynach knew at once that something was wrong, and followed the wolf back to the meadow. He and the other brothers searched everywhere, and eventually had to conclude that the animal had been stolen by the wicked king and his henchmen. Brynach was heartbroken, for he loved all animals and had a particularly soft spot for Blodwen. He did not know what to do, so he knelt in the buttercup meadow and prayed for divine intervention.

Brynach's prayers were answered in miraculous fashion. A few hundred yards away, at the king's encampment, the men were getting restless. No

matter how they built up the fire and no matter where they placed the cooking pots, the water inside them (and the pieces of meat intended for their supper) remained ice cold. They fetched new water from the river and tried that, but the fresh water also refused to become even luke-warm. Then they decided to abandon the idea of boiling the meat, and determined to roast it instead, but still it would not heat up. At last, when it was pitch dark and when the king and his men were hungrier than they had ever been in their lives, they began to feel scared, for there was clearly some power at work that they did not understand. So it was that they made their way in a procession through the dark woods back to the meadow, where they found Brynach still on his knees, still praying in the damp dewy grass.

So it was that the king and his bunch of ruffians pleaded for forgiveness and were converted by St Brynach. Having given themselves to God, they all made their way back to the monastery where they worshipped in the church. Then they were given a hearty vegetarian supper and were offered comfortable accommodation for the night.

Next day the king and his band of good Christian men made their way peacefully back to their own country. On the way they passed the buttercup meadow; and there, peacefully grazing among the summer flowers and looking fatter than ever, they saw Blodwen the beloved cow, who had been miraculously put together again and restored to life.

Date: 550 AD

Source: Rees, W.J. p 297



1.10 The Unsaintly Monks of St Dogmael's

St Dogmael's Abbey, founded around 1114 by the Reformed Benedictines of Tiron in France, was one of the wealthiest and most successful monasteries in West Wales. It was endowed with much property scattered about in Pembrokeshire, Devon and even South-east Ireland. For almost three hundred years the monastery was renowned for its sanctity and good works, and the grey-robed brothers spent much of their time on building projects and on tilling their fields. But during the 1300's this remote outpost of saintliness was almost forgotten by the rest of the world, and things began to go wrong.

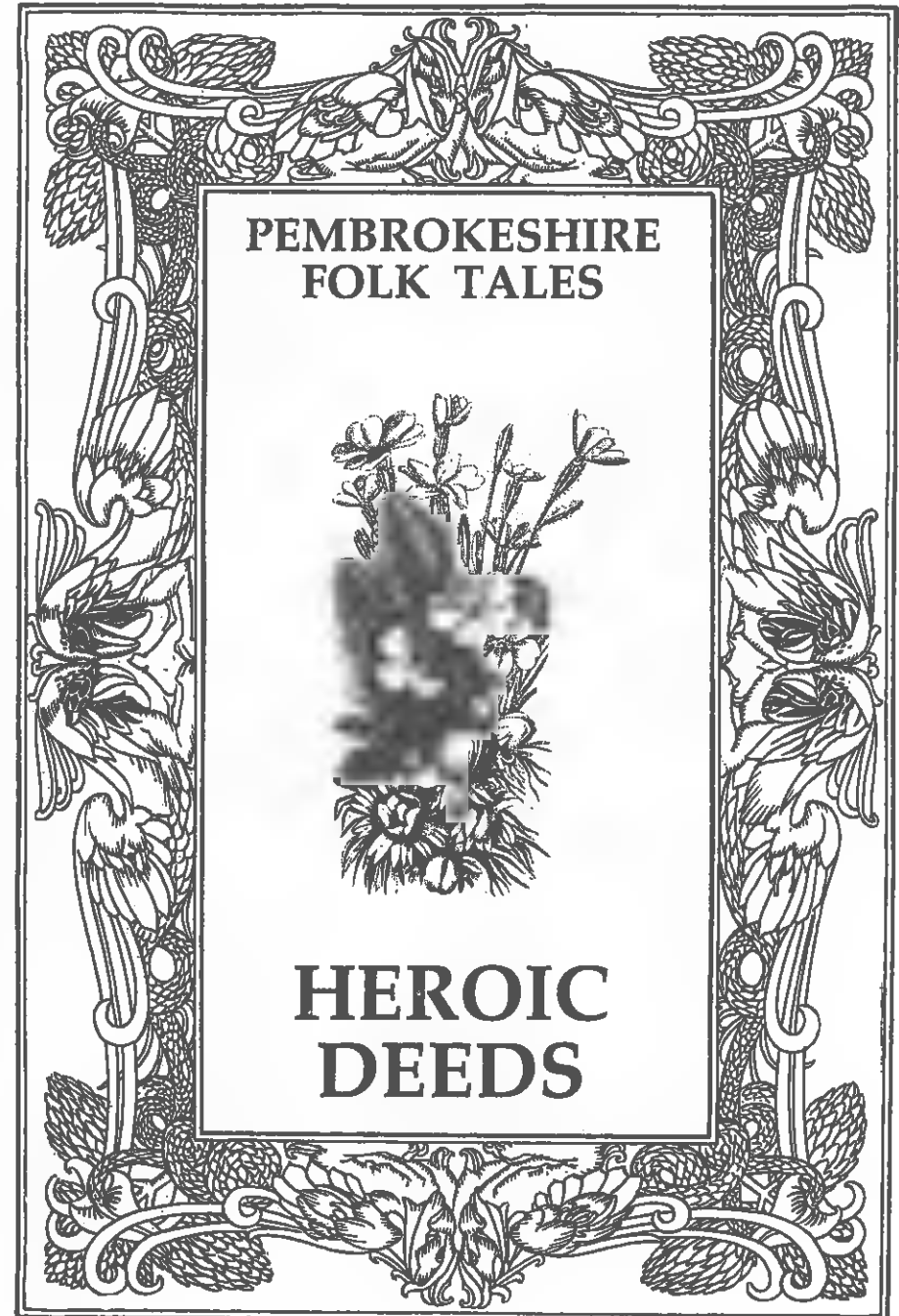
When Bishop Mone visited the Abbey in January 1402 he was appalled by what he found. In spite of its considerable income (or perhaps because of it!) the monks had slipped into a debauched lifestyle, and the Abbot had more or less lost control of the brothers. Only three monks lived by the ideals of the Order, and the rest lived a highly secular life-style, visiting taverns and other "evil places", drinking to excess, and indeed sharing their dormitory with various loose women from the village. One monk called Hywel Lange had become a heavy drinker of wine and mead made from fermented honey, and was hardly ever sober. He was so depraved that the Bishop had to make a special verdict against him, forbidding him to drink any alcoholic drink and forcing him to give his rations of wine and mead to the poor of the parish in the presence of the Abbot. He was also confined to the Abbey grounds, and could go outside into the village only in the company of the Abbot.

The other monks, too, were confined to quarters and were not allowed outside without special dispensation from the Abbot. Candles were rationed, and portions of wine were reduced. Guests (especially female ones) were banished from the Abbey. One brother, named David Lloyd, had left the Abbey completely, and the other brothers had to search around the local area in order to bring him back and chastise him. The local people who had become accustomed to wandering in and out of the abbey, eating in its refectory, and staying overnight were all banned forthwith. Every door and gate which opened onto the village was now kept locked, and outsiders were only let into the Abbey for holy worship.

We do not know whether these reforms had a lasting effect, or whether the monks of St Dogmael's were happier as a result of the Bishop's visit. However, we must be charitable and assume that saintliness returned to the hallowed cloisters and remained a characteristic of the place until the Abbey was finally dissolved in 1536.

Date: 1402

Source: Lewis p 11



2.1 The Strange Courtship of Pwyll and Rhiannon

Pwyll was the greatest prince of Dyfed, and Narberth was the chief place of all the seven regions. In Narberth there was a strange mound of which all men were afraid; for those who climbed to its summit were liable either to receive wounding blows or else to see strange wonders. One day there was a great feast in Narberth, to which Pwyll invited noblemen from all over Dyfed. After the first sitting Pwyll felt like stretching his legs, and he decided to climb to the top of the mound. "I am not afraid of receiving blows," he said. "And I would like to see a wonder."

As soon as he reached the summit of the mound Pwyll saw a beautiful and richly-clad lady riding towards him at a leisurely pace on a white horse. Pwyll was entranced, and asked whether anybody knew who she was. Nobody had ever seen her before. So the prince ordered one of his servants to walk down and inquire as to her name and destination. The servant followed her, at first walking and then running, but he could not approach her, although her horse never seemed to increase its pace. Pwyll was entranced with the lady's beauty, and next day as the feast continued he went again to the top of the mound and beheld the same wonder. Now he told the servant to take his fastest horse and to follow the lady again. But again he could not overtake her to inquire after her errand. All the nobles were mystified, but on the third day Pwyll took things in hand himself. As he climbed the mound he ordered his servants to make ready the fleetest horse in Dyfed, which he would ride himself. Once again the lady appeared, riding towards him on her white stallion. Pwyll mounted his horse, but already the lady had passed the mound; and no matter how hard he galloped he could not approach her, even though her horse never varied its leisurely walk.

By now Pwyll was getting angry, and as his horse began to tire he shouted after the lady "Maiden, for the love of he whom you love best, stop and wait for me." She stopped, and immediately replied "I will, gladly. And it would have been much better for your poor horse had you asked that long since." Then she drew back her veil so that Pwyll could see her face, and as he came closer he realised that he had never seen anyone more beautiful. Pwyll gave her a welcome. "Lady," he asked. "Where are you coming from, and where are you going?" She replied that she was on an errand. She explained that she was Rhiannon, the daughter of Hefeydd the Old, and that she was to be married against her will one year from that very day. She said that she loved only Pwyll, and that her errand was to see whether or not Pwyll would reject her. Pwyll was by now head over heels in love. "Between me and God," he remonstrated. "If I had to choose between all the ladies and maidens in the world, it is you I would choose!" "Very well," said Rhiannon. "Let us keep a tryst. Come to the court of Hefeydd a year from today, and you will find a feast made ready for you." Pwyll agreed, and they parted.

Pwyll said nothing of this conversation to any of his friends or servants, but true to his word he travelled to the court of Hefeydd with a hundred men on the appointed day, and there he met once again the Lady Rhiannon, amid feasting and music and joyous celebrations.

Date: 800 - 900 AD?

Sources: Jones and Jones p 12; Bowen p 19

2.2 Gallows for a Thieving Mouse

The land of Dyfed had been made desolate under a magic spell. Then Manawydan had lost his friends Pryderi and Rhiannon in a magic castle near the court of Gorsedd Arberth (Narberth), under very mysterious circumstances. And to make matters worse, even the magic castle had disappeared in a peal of thunder and a pall of mist. So Manawydan was left alone with Cigfa, Pryderi's wife. They could not remain in the blighted landscape of Dyfed, and so they travelled far and wide as they tried to find word of Pryderi and his mother Rhiannon.

Returning to Arberth with Cigfa, Manawydan determined to re-settle the desolate land. He sowed three crofts with corn, and at last it was time for the harvest. In the early morning he came to harvest the wheat from the first croft, but found that there was nothing left but the bare stalks in the ground. The same thing happened when he came to harvest the second croft, but when it was time to harvest the third croft he sat up all night, keeping watch over his field. About midnight a host of mice appeared, climbing up the stalks of the corn and devouring everything in sight. Manawydan was furious, and tried to chase them away. But then he decided to catch just one mouse, and after a frantic pursuit he succeeded.

Manawydan brought the captive mouse back to the court and told Cigfa that he intended to hang it. She said that it should be beneath his dignity, but he was determined to go ahead with his plan. And so he climbed up to the top of Gorsedd Arberth and started to build a miniature gallows out of two forks. As he worked, he saw a clerk coming towards him. On being asked what he was doing Manawydan explained that he was about to hang a thief. The clerk derided him for wanting to hang a mouse, and even offered him £1 to save the mouse's life. But Manawydan would not be deterred. Then, as he fixed the crossbeam on the gallows, along came a priest on horseback. After further explanations, the priest offered Manawydan £3 for the life of the mouse. But still Manawydan would not desist. Finally, as he was fixing the noose around the mouse's neck, along came a bishop with a great retinue. Now the bishop tried to bribe Manawydan to spare the life of the mouse -- first by offering £7, and then £24, and then all the horses on the plains of Dyfed together with all of his bishop's retinue. Still Manawydan would not give in, and in desperation the bishop asked him to name his price. This he did, by first asking for the freedom of his friends, and then for the removal of the curse upon Dyfed, and then for an explanation of the pestilence of mice, and then for a promise of no more pestilence in Dyfed, and then for a promise that there would be no vengeance upon Pryderi, Rhiannon or himself. All this was promised by the bishop, who turned out to be Llwyd ap Cilcoed, an ancient enemy of Pryderi and his father Pwyll. It further transpired that the mouse about to be hanged was his pregnant wife.

And so Pryderi and Rhiannon were restored to the court of Arberth, and Dyfed was restored to its former wealth and glory. Keeping his part of the bargain, Manawydan released the mouse, and it was immediately transformed into a beautiful young woman. Llwyd and his wife went on their way, leaving Manawydan and his friends to celebrate their reunion.

Date: c 1100 AD?

Source: Jones and Jones p 52

2.3 The Triumph of Henry Tudor

On the evening of 7th August 1485 Henry Tudor sailed into Milford Haven with a fleet of 15 French vessels and a mottley force of about 2,000 men. He had set off from Harfleur about a week earlier. Now he landed in Mill Bay, not far from Dale, and immediately marched on the village. The locals, whatever their inclinations might have been beforehand, gave the young pretender a warm welcome; and so started the march to Bosworth Field and the battle for the English crown.

Henry was of course a local boy, having been born in Pembroke Castle on 28 January 1457. His parents were the Lady Margaret, only fourteen years old at the time, and Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond. As soon as he was born the people of Wales saw in him the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy that one day a descendant of Cadwaladr, the last Welsh king of Britain, would return to regain the throne and cast off the English yoke. Then there were the prophecies of Merlin the Wizard, whose symbolic tale of the fighting dragons was widely known. According to Merlin the white dragon of the Saxons would be involved in a savage battle with the red dragon of Wales, with the red dragon emerging triumphant. Richard III was unpopular in Wales, and it was a stroke of genius, probably on the part of Henry's mother Margaret, to make the symbolic landing in the heartland of the Welsh Tewdwr dynasty and so close to Pembroke Castle.

Initially, Henry's "army" could not have hoped for success against Richard. To start with it consisted of French mercenaries (convicts taken straight out of prison, just like those who landed at Carregwastad in 1797) supported by Breton adventurers, Scottish archers and a group of English exiles. But as soon as news of the landing began to spread, the men of Pembrokeshire took up arms and joined the march. First, the towns of Haverfordwest and Pembroke gave their support. Then a number of key noblemen declared for Henry, rewarding months of quiet diplomacy by his agents in Wales. As Henry and his followers moved out of Dale the Tudor commanders began, for the first time, to feel more confident.

But there was one grave doubt in Henry's mind, and that concerned the loyalty of Sir Rhys ap Thomas, who was the most powerful nobleman in South Wales. Sir Rhys, from his residence at Carew Castle, controlled vast estates and had about 5,000 fully equipped horsemen at his disposal. It was common knowledge that he had sworn an oath of allegiance to Richard III to the effect that anyone wishing to challenge the crown would have to do it "over his belly"; if he remained true to his oath Henry's hopes of raising an army to defeat Richard would be slim indeed.

But then, as Henry and his troops reached Mullock Bridge, a force of mounted troops hove into view. Sir Rhys was riding at their head on his favourite charger, accompanied by the Bishop of St David's and a standard-bearer who carried the Red Dragon. The men met, and Henry offered Sir Rhys the post of Lieutenant of all Wales in return for his support. Then, according to legend, Sir Rhys lay down under Mullock Bridge while Henry Tudor crossed it on his horse. Since Henry had now passed "over his belly", Sir Rhys was free to throw in his lot with the young pretender. He invited the whole army to Carew for the night, and there, in the great hall, a detailed campaign strategy was drawn up for the defeat of Richard.

Next day the two armies split, each one under the banner of the Red

Dragon. Henry marched north towards Cardigan while Sir Rhys marched eastwards to Carmarthen and Brecon. The two armies, further increased in size by recruitment in Wales, met up again in Shrewsbury. Then, after declarations of loyalty by Lord Stanley and Sir William Stanley, Henry was strong enough to take on, and defeat, Richard III on the battlefield at Bosworth. The history books record the moment of Richard's death as the moment of Henry's triumph; but in Wales it is still believed that the real triumph was the winning of Sir Rhys ap Thomas's support at Mullock Bridge.

Date: 1485

Sources: Spurrell p 31; Miles, J. p 113

2.4 The Last Great Tournament

As a reward for his support of Henry Tudor in the Battle of Bosworth Field, and in other military campaigns, the new king eventually decided to make Sir Rhys ap Thomas a Knight of the Garter. He was actually given his knighthood on the battlefield at Blackheath in 1497, not before time. One chronicler wrote: "Well might he give him a garter by whose effectual help he had secured a crown." But Sir Rhys was grateful enough. Affairs of state prevented him from holding a decent party for ten years; but then, in 1507, he decided to celebrate his knighthood in style.

Between May 21 and May 25 Sir Rhys "kept high festival" at Carew Castle, and the event was the Last Great Medieval Tournament in the British Isles. Sir Rhys invited the most important noblemen from all over Wales, together with their ladies, their champions and their men-at-arms. The highest ranking guests were housed in the castle; the others were quartered in a tented village. On the first day, St George's Day, the company visited Lamphey to hear mass from the Bishop of St David's. Then five hundred of the ablest men were chosen to take part in the tournament. On the second day they were trained in jousting and other sports. Then, after a great feast in the banqueting hall, accompanied by entertainments from bards and harpists, the tournament began.

The contests included tilting, throwing the bar, tossing the pike, and wrestling. Sir Rhys was umpire, and he performed his task admirably, mounted during the contests on a fine steed, dressed in a suit of gilt armour, and attended by trumpeters and heralds. He made it clear to all that chivalry was the order of the day, and to emphasise the point he had installed over the main castle gateway a banner showing St George and St David in brotherly embrace. He took precautions lest the young knights in residence allowed ancient family rivalries to come to the surface; some contests were declared drawn, other were "fixed" in advance, and others were called in favour of the visitors. There were further visits to Lamphey Palace, including a chase in the Deer Park; and the final day was given over to feasting and carousing. At the end of it all the guests departed in great good humour. But the most noteworthy thing about the tournament, according to an ancient chronicler, was the fact that "although one thousand men had spent five days in company, not one quarrel, unkind word, or cross look had passed between them."

Date: 1507

Sources: Spurrell p 79; Miles 1984, p 170

2.5 The Pioneering Aviator

When Bleriot crossed the English Channel in 1909 in his little monoplane, the aviators of Britain began the search for the next great flying challenge. The Channel crossing had been only 22 miles, but now greater feats were planned. On top of the list of priorities was a successful flight of at least 60 miles from Britain to Ireland. Believing that such a long flight across water was now possible, several aviators others took up the challenge, including Damer Leslie Allen and Denys Corbett Wilson. Corbett Wilson was an English country gentleman who lived in Ireland. He learned to fly the Bleriot monoplane in France in 1911. Early in the next year he heard that Allen was planning a flight from London to Dublin, and he decided to try and beat Allen to the Irish coast. A challenge was issued and duly accepted.

Both Allen and Corbett Wilson took off from Hendon on 17 April 1912, planning to stop at Chester en route for Ireland. Mechanics and fuel supplies were arranged, but otherwise the planning of the race was rudimentary. The aeroplanes had a top speed of 65 mph, and were expected to reach Chester in about three hours. Allen got there on time, but Corbett Wilson, flying at a lower altitude, encountered difficult weather and lost his compass overboard. He flew on for a while but had to descend near Hereford to find out where he was. He sent a telegram to his mechanic and asked him to come to Hereford at full speed.

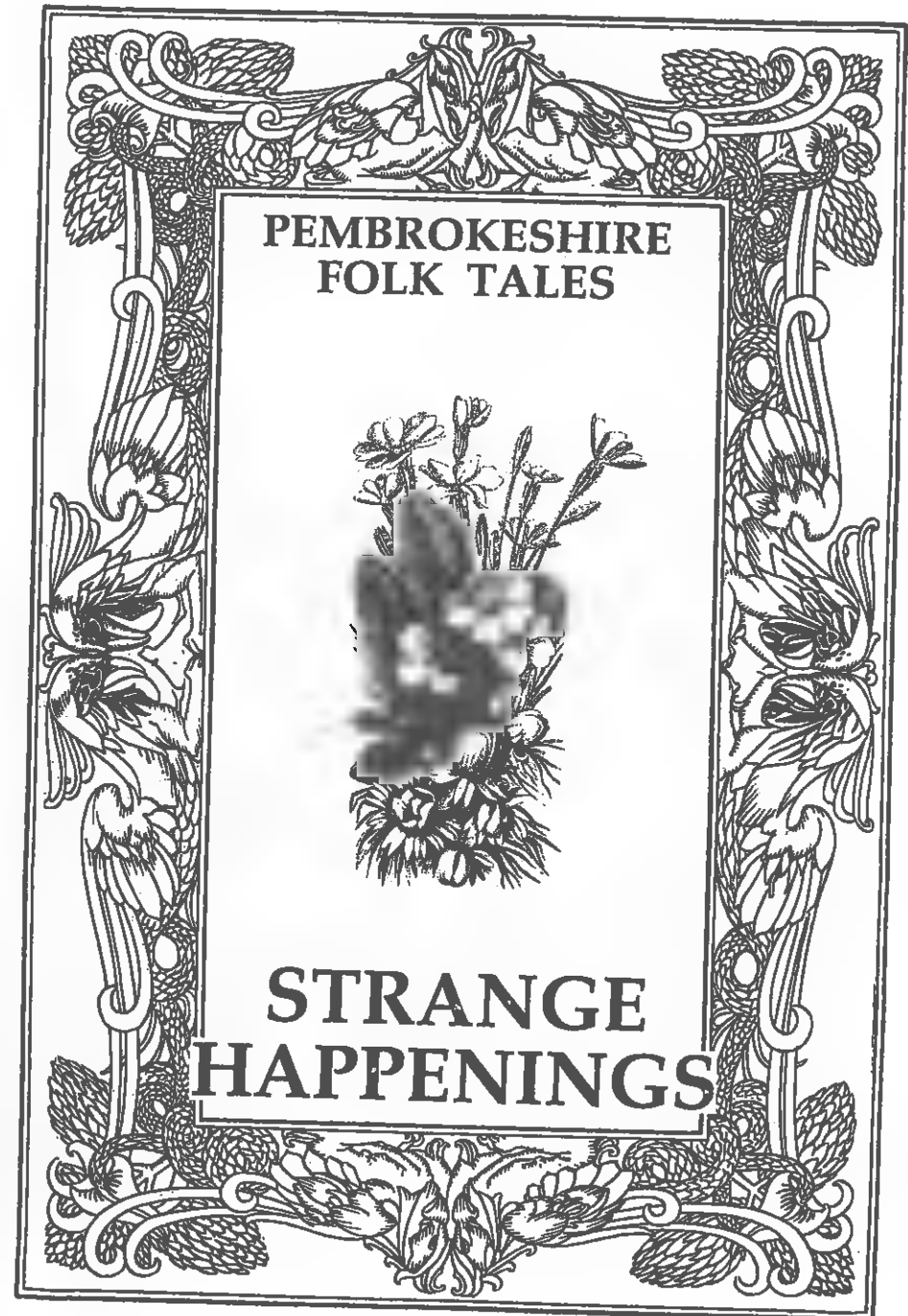
In Chester, Allen knew that his rival was delayed, and set off at 6 am next morning full of confidence that he would now win the race. He reached Holyhead in less than two hours, and flew straight overhead and out to sea, heading for Dublin. He was never seen again.

In Hereford Corbett Wilson was also up early, and went out to buy a compass and some fuel and castor oil. The mechanic arrived at about noon, by which time a telegram had come for Corbett Wilson informing him that Allen had been seen over Holyhead. Convinced that he had lost the race, Wilson nevertheless pressed ahead with his plans. At 4 pm he took off, heading for Chester. But immediately he encountered problems. He had bought the wrong grade of castor oil, and his engine started to mis-fire so badly that he had to make an emergency landing in the first available field, in the wilds of Radnorshire. He felt that he was lucky to be alive, and after summoning his faithful mechanic and requesting supplies of fuel and oil he lost three days while the engine was repaired.

Corbett Wilson now decided to make the Irish crossing from Fishguard instead. When he took off on 21st April, he headed west. Wisely, he decided that the aircraft would be refuelled and serviced in Fishguard before he flew over the open sea. He had an uneventful flight to Fishguard, and landed in a field above Harbour Village, Goodwick. The servicing and refuelling was completed the same day, and at 6 am on 22nd April he took off with the cheers of well-wishers ringing in his ears. On his crossing of St George's Channel he encountered strong winds, rain and fog. He found that his compass was behaving erratically, and his engine started misfiring. But at last, through the fog, he saw fields down below, and he managed to land near Enniscorthy. He had flown 65 miles, and his was the first successful flight from Great Britain to Ireland.

Date: 1912

Source: Williams P p 10



3.1 The Bluestone Expedition

The "matching" of the spotted dolerite or bluestone of Mynydd Presely with some of the stones found in the inner stone circle at Stonehenge has intrigued archaeologists for almost 80 years. In the early part of the century the scientific establishment did not consider it possible for erratic boulders to have been carried by ice from Pembrokeshire to the eastern shore of the Bristol Channel; and so an elaborate theory was evolved to explain the transport of the stones by human beings. The story of this "astonishing feat" has become one of the classic myths of Britain, and it goes something like this:

Around 2100 BC, at the dawn of the Bronze Age, a new culture was appearing in various parts of Britain. Its people made tools, weapons and ornaments out of bronze and gold. They also made pottery urns and drinking vessels, and for this reason they are referred to as "the Beaker People." They were religious people, and they may also have been skilled in reading the stars. One of their great trade routes ran from Ireland to Kent, with the Presely Hills and the plains of Wessex both lying on this route. Presely was known to the Beaker People as a mystical and sacred place, perhaps because of the awesome crags of Carn Meini. These crags were made of a dark blue stone with large white crystals, perhaps reminding both traders and priests of the starlit night sky. In the New Stone Age great slabs of this stone had been used in Pembrokeshire for the building of megalithic monuments, and it may be that various stone circles were already in existence in and around the Presely Hills.

Wessex was evolving as a prosperous farming area with powerful ruling families. Trade, religious ceremonial and communal building projects all featured in their way of life. For some reason it was decided to rebuild a derelict circular embankment temple at Stonehenge with something much more elaborate. The new temple would have a double circle of about 120 standing stones, and ambitious plans were set in motion for the transport of sacred bluestones from Pembrokeshire. According to some, a "bluestone quarry" was opened up at Carn Meini; according to others stone circles in Mynydd Presely were dismantled and transported, stone by stone, to Stonehenge. This would have involved a prodigious feat of organization.

How was it done? First, the chosen stones, weighing up to 4 tonnes, were roughly shaped. They were lifted with wedges and levers onto rough wooden frames; and these in turn were moved on rollers, pulled by teams of sweating labourers. At first the bluestones were taken down to the Eastern Cleddau River, probably somewhere near Canaston Bridge. There, in deep water, the stones were placed on rafts and floated downstream to Milford Haven by ancient mariners using punting poles, oars and sails. Then the bluestones started their voyage across the open sea, first around the tip of the Castlemartin Peninsula, then along the South Wales coast, across the Bristol Channel and up the Rivers Avon and Frome in Somerset. After completing a journey of 240 miles the stones were erected at Stonehenge in the double "bluestone circle"

Nobody knows how many stones were moved or how many "bluestone expeditions" there were. Also there is speculation about the possible loss of bluestones en route. Some experts with vivid imaginations believe that since the Altar Stone at Stonehenge is made of a soft sandstone from the

shores of Milford Haven, it must have been taken by the Bronze Age transport crew as a replacement for a bluestone lost in the Haven in a shipping accident. Indeed, so seriously has this theory been taken that divers have searched on the floor of Milford Haven for the "missing bluestone"; and even quite senior archaeologists have become very excited when igneous erratic boulders have now and then been found in the murky depths. Some people take their myths very seriously.....

Date: 1922

Sources: Atkinson p 105 ; Brinton and Worsley p 34

3.2 The Loss of the "Phoebe and Peggy"

The **Phoebe and Peggy** was a three-masted American vessel which carried cargo and passengers between Philadelphia, Newry and Liverpool. On January 8th 1773 she had crossed the Atlantic and was passing through St George's Channel when she encountered a terrible storm. Her captain had no option but to run before the wind, and soon the ship was driven into St Bride's Bay and towards Solva, which was well known in those days as a small trading port. The storm rose to a crescendo of ferocity, and the ship was forced onto the rocks just off the entrance of Solva Harbour.

In no time at all the ship was smashed to pieces. Horrified onlookers realised that there were many people on board, and four captains of Solva vessels went out in small boats to see if they could save at least some of them. They took 18 people off the wreck, but on the return journey to the safety of the harbour the boats were smashed against the Black Rock by a mountainous wave. Three of the brave captains, and those they had rescued, were drowned. There were hardly any survivors. In all, 60 people lost their lives. Afterwards, as bodies and bits and peices of cargo were washed ashore, the "rough people" of Solva got to work on the recovery and removal of any items of value. Corpses were stripped of their valuables, and in one particularly gruesome incident a dead lady called Madam Elliott had 500 guineas taken from her pocket by a pair of ruffians called Luke Davy and John Phillip. Then they tore the earrings off the corpse's ears, and cut off her fingers so that they could steal her rings. This incident caused local outrage, as did another involving a woman who lived in the Gwadn Valley. She found the corpses of a lady and her baby beneath the cliffs, and broke the lady's fingers to obtain her gold rings. The local woman was herself pregnant at the time, and she stripped the clothes off the dead baby so as to provide for her own child in due course. Eventually the time came for her to give birth, but retribution for her misdeeds came when both she and her child died in labour.

Shortly after the loss of the **Phoebe and Peggy** a simple ballad was written by a local person and was published in the county newspaper, recording for posterity the revulsion which many people felt about the behaviour of the "corpse robbers". The ballad contained the following words: "they stripped the ladies of their jewels.... They left them there like stinking fishes ..."

Date: 1773

Sources: Goddard p 65; Brinton and Worsley p 73

3.3 Tragedy at the Copper Mine

One of the most tragic events to have occurred in the St David's area during the late 1800's was the death of a mine worker in the little copper mine at Porth Taflod, not far from Treginnis. On Wednesday 2nd May 1883 there were five men working at the mine. This was an extremely primitive affair with a shaft about 30 feet deep, a tunnel running towards the older mine at Penmaenmelyn, and no pithead gear apart from a hand-operated winch and a pulley for hauling baskets up and down the shaft. The baskets were used for hauling up the loads of ore-bearing rock, and also for transporting the workmen up and down the shaft.

On the day of the tragedy, there were five men working at Porth Taflod. Two of them were working in the tunnel, making ready for blasting, while John Reynolds of Solva was occupied in filling the basket with rubble at the bottom of the shaft. When all was ready for blasting, John Reynolds shouted up to the two winchmen that he should be hauled up first in an empty basket. He was hauled up a few feet and then let down to the bottom again. Then he was hauled halfway up the shaft, at which point there was a sudden jerk on the rope, which tipped Reynolds out of the basket. He fell to the bottom of the shaft, and was seriously injured in the fall. His colleagues gave him first aid as best they could, and when the injured man and the others had been hauled to the surface one of the winchmen ran off to get help.

The others rigged up a makeshift stretcher and carried John Reynolds all the way to the City Hotel in St David's. It so happened that the hotel was owned by Mr George Owen Williams, who was also the owner of the mine. The local doctor was summoned, and he discovered that poor Reynolds had broken his neck. He was paralysed, but next day he managed to make a statement for the magistrate's clerk to the effect that the winchmen were fond of "larking about" at his expense. Further, he claimed that they had deliberately let the rope out on the winch, thereby causing him to fall. The two winchmen denied this and blamed the equipment, describing it as "rickety". Sadly, Reynolds died on the Friday morning, leaving a wife and two small children.

At the Inquest evidence was taken from all parties, and the Inspector of Mines described the machinery as old-fashioned but not in itself dangerous. After withdrawing, the jury returned the following verdict: "John Reynolds fell out of a certain tub in a certain copper mine at Treginnis, and so died from the injuries thereof." They also expressed in no uncertain terms their strong condemnation of the conduct of the other four miners, clearly believing that horseplay had been the cause of the accident.

After the Inquest, there was much speculation that the winchmen would be arrested and charged with murder. In the event they were charged with manslaughter, and remanded on bail to appear at Mathry Sessions on 8 June 1883. At the trial they were acquitted, but the incident made a profound impression upon all those involved, and Mr George Owen Williams never reopened the mine for working. On that sad note, the history of copper mining in the St David's area came to an end.

Date: 1883

Source: Davies p 6

3.4 The Golden Treasure of Trewern

Trewern is a fine old gentry house not far from Nevern. It was originally inhabited by the Warren family and later by the Lloyds of Coedmore. In the middle of the last century it was a part of the Coedmore estate, and was occupied by a succession of tenants. One of these tenants was lucky enough to become suddenly and surprisingly wealthy as a result of the discovery of "the golden treasure of Trewern". There are two stories about this treasure; the first is recounted in *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales* (page 63), and the second is as follows.

Around the year 1870 a minister of the Gospel was living in the house as a tenant. One cold winter night there was a terrible storm, and some damage was done to an ancient chimney-stack. There was nothing for it but to have a mason in to affect repairs, and so the minister sent for a craftsman from Newport to undertake the work. On arrival, the man decided that he would have to climb up inside the chimney from the kitchen fire-place in order to assess the damage. This he did, but in trying to return down the chimney again he got lost in the darkness and suddenly found himself not in the kitchen but in a small dark chamber lit only by a few cracks in the roofing. There was just enough light for the mason to realise that the roof was packed with treasure -- gold and silver plate and other valuables such as goblets and jewels. The mason at last descended to the kitchen and reported his find to the minister; and the two of them worked out that the little secret room was above the porch of the house, with no entrance other than via the chimney.

It was clear that nobody else knew of the existence of the secret room or the treasure, and the mason and the minister worked out that the hoard of family valuables must have been hidden for safe-keeping during the Civil War, well over 200 years earlier. The two men struck a deal. Neither of them would say a word to anybody, but the minister would quietly set off for London every now and then with a few pieces of the treasure and, having sold them, would return to divide the proceeds equally. As the years passed the two men became quite wealthy, and rumours started to circulate in the community about their increasingly affluent life-styles and about the minister's mysterious trips to London. At last there was actual talk of a golden treasure being sold off, and Squire Lloyd of Coedmore challenged his tenant and attempted to recover what he considered to be his by right. But it was too late. The squire could never prove what had happened, and the minister fiercely denied all his accusations.

When the treasure was all sold, the minister left Trewern and purchased a fine farm in the neighbourhood. At about the same time, the mason also bought a "snug farm" and moved out from his little cottage in Newport, confirming the suspicions of local people that something very strange had been going on behind closed doors and out of the public eye.....

Date: 1870

Source: Vaughan p 102

3.5 Duel at Fortune's Frolic

Fortune's Frolic is the name of a pleasant riverside walk along the bank of the Western Cleddau, just downstream from Haverfordwest. We don't know why it is called Fortune's Frolic, but the Fortune family was well known in Haverfordwest, and perhaps its members made a habit of frolicking there. Indeed, the walk has been used by courting couples from the town for many generations.

Until well into the 1800s duels were fought in Pembrokeshire in order to settle points of honour, and indeed following the infamous 1831 Parliamentary Election in Haverfordwest Charles Greville, the losing candidate, fought two duels with men who were said to have insulted him. When pistols were used in duels, honour was often satisfied when one or both of the duellists fired into the air. Often the duellists took great care not to hit each other when they fired, but but if one or other was driven by passion to murderous intent, serious injury or death might follow.

Young Samuel Fortune was deeply in love with a young lady who lived at Pansaeson, near Moylgrove. In 1799, much to the delight of both families, they were engaged to be married. Both of them were prominent members of Pembrokeshire society, and in September they attended a lavish hunt ball in Tenby. Unfortunately Samuel became involved in a quarrel over some trivial matter with John James, his fiancée's brother. Young James was a hot-blooded fellow who took the matter far more seriously than anybody could have anticipated; and as a result he challenged Samuel to a duel. Samuel would have lost face if he had not accepted the challenge, and so, much to the horror of his fiancée, he agreed to fight a duel with pistols with her brother.

On a fine sunny afternoon the two men with their attendants met at the appointed place (now called Fortune's Frolic) near the river bank south of Haverfordwest. Their seconds went through all the formalities. Weapons were loaded, and on the command to fire Samuel did the honourable thing and discharged his pistol into the air. John James, however, driven by some dark desire for revenge against the slight he had suffered at the Hunt Ball, took careful aim and fired straight at Samuel. The young lover fell to the ground with a mortal injury, and died shortly afterwards. He was buried in St Thomas' Churchyard, and his fiancée was so shocked by the killing that within a short time she too was dead. According to tradition, she died of a broken heart, and according to her wishes she was buried in the same grave as her beloved Samuel.

Such was the sense of outrage in the town, and indeed within his own family, that young John James could not possibly remain in Pembrokeshire. He fled to the continent to escape the wrath of his own kinsmen; but ironically he returned to Pembrokeshire ten years later, when things had quietened down, and found an outlet for his aggression by becoming a Colonel of the Pembrokeshire Militia.

Date: 1799

Source: Miles 1984, p 117



Opposite:

..... much to the delight of both families, they were engaged to be married.

3.6 The Mysterious Visitor to Walwyn's Castle

The Wogans of Wiston were a powerful and influential family in the English-speaking part of Pembrokeshire, and they played a leading role in the political and social life of the county from the thirteenth century onward. It is said that the family went into a decline following the Civil War, for Col Thomas Wogan was one of the judges who sat at the trial of King Charles I and who signed the warrant for his execution.

On the restoration of the monarchy the family estate was sequestered, and in 1664 the colonel was arrested and thrown into the Tower of London. Somehow he managed to escape, and it was rumoured that he had managed to reach the relative safety of Holland. However, years later a mysterious figure appeared in the neighbourhood of Walwyn's Castle. He appeared melancholy and dejected, and spoke to hardly anyone. He was dressed in ragged clothes, with a cloak and cowl and a great muffler to keep out the winter wind and rain. His haggard face told of terrible hardships and of an anguished soul. He haunted the area around the church, and was often seen in bad weather sheltering in the church porch. Those who tried to befriend him found it hard to make contact, and he seemed intent on bearing his burden of suffering all alone. He referred to himself as "Mr Drinkwater", but local people became convinced that he was of noble stock and that he was hiding a dark secret. Word got around that he was in fact Col Thomas Wogan; but nobody felt inclined to inform the authorities. At last, after a spell of harsh winter weather, the poor man was found dead in the church porch. There were no marks of identification on his body, and so he took the secret of his identity with him to the grave.

Date: c 1680

Sources: Fenton p 90; Miles 1984, p 122

3.7 The Voice from the Grave

John Jones (Ioan Tegid) was a poet and man of God, well known in Welsh druidic circles. He was vicar of Nevern between 1841 and 1852. He had a nice sense of humour, and he often used his uncanny skill as a ventriloquist to good effect. On one occasion Tegid was visiting a farmhouse in the parish when the conversation turned to the subject of the devil. He and the farmer and his family were sitting in the kitchen, not far from the great open fireplace or *simnai fawr*. The conversation grew more and more heated, and the farmer shouted out that the devil could not possibly exist. At this, a strange sepulchral voice was heard coming down the chimney, saying "So I don't exist? Just you wait a second, and I'll show you whether I exist or not!" And just to complete the joke, Tegid shook with fright and fled from the house together with the rest of the family.

On another occasion, the parish gravedigger was digging a fresh grave in Nevern Churchyard. Tegid had instructed the man where to dig the hole, but but for some reason he had gone to a different place with his shovel and was digging very close to another grave. Unknown to the gravedigger, Tegid came up from the vicarage and stood among the bleeding yew trees watching the excavations. Being a tactful man, he remained out of sight. But then the gravedigger was frightened out of his wits when a doleful voice came up out of the hole. "Oh, don't you come any closer," it said. "I don't want to be disturbed!" Tegid slipped away back to the vicarage. When he returned later in the day he found that the first hole had been filled in, and that the gravedigger had dug the grave in its appointed place.

Date: 1848

Sources: Lewis p 233; John p 94



3.8 The Bishop and the Lady of Ill Repute

In the Middle Ages the main fortified residence of the Bishop of St David's was at Llawhaden, about 20 miles away from the cathedral church but quite close to the main routeway between the Englishry and the other anglicised parts of South Wales. In the fourteenth century the castle was transformed under Bishop David Martin into a magnificent and well-defended structure with comfortable accommodation for visitors, and it became a great social centre for the local landowners and for the military and church establishment. Naturally enough, the lavish banquets and entertainments attracted some people of dubious reputation....

Tanglost was a "lady of easy virtue" who lived in the village in the time of Bishop Morgan. She was young and beautiful, and had a host of admirers who paid her frequent visits. For some reason she upset the Bishop, who promptly arrested her and threw her into the dungeon. But wicked Tanglost had friends in high places, and when Thomas Wyrriot of Orierton heard of her imprisonment he came rushing up to the castle with his mounted troops, took everybody by surprise, and released her. However, the young lady continued with her wicked ways, and so the Bishop imprisoned her again. This time Thomas Wyrriot, her protector, decided that diplomacy was wiser than force; and so he came to the Bishop to seek pardon for Tanglost and for himself. The Bishop, being a charitable soul, gave his pardon, but insisted that Tanglost should leave the area.

So Tanglost travelled to Bristol, where her services were in great demand. But she was not happy there, and longed to be back in Llawhaden. To make matters worse, she got into trouble with the law, and to avenge herself on the Bishop she hired a local witch to place a curse upon him by sticking pins into his waxen image. In spite of his high ecclesiastical position, the Bishop was by no means immune from this treatment, and he suffered greatly as a result. Word got back to him that his illness was being caused by Tanglost and the witch, and he did not obtain relief until he sent a message to the Mayor of Bristol asking him to intercede on his behalf. This the Mayor did, and it was only when Tanglost was offered total forgiveness for all her wicked ways that she called off the witch. We don't know the end of the story, but we can only assume that the Bishop was restored to health and that Tanglost became a virtuous Christian lady for the rest of her life....

Date: c 1550

Source: Miles 1984, p 123



3.9 Whisky on the Rocks

On the night of 30th January 1894 the **Loch Shiel**, a full-rigged iron trading ship, was passing the mouth of Milford Haven en route from Glasgow to Australia. A severe storm blew up, and the vessel was forced into the harbour entrance and onto the rocks of Thorn Island. The master of the ship, Captain Thomas Davies, tried the pumps and found that the stern was sinking rapidly. He ordered the boats out, and burned a mattress soaked in paraffin in order to attract the attention of the coast guard.

Luckily the Angle Lifeboat was based less than two miles away, and shortly after 11 pm it arrived to effect a brilliant rescue. First, six men including an invalid passenger were taken from the mizzen top, and then a further 27 crew and passengers were rescued from the base of the cliffs, where they had taken refuge. Three of the lifeboatmen had to go ashore on the island, and in the pitch darkness they climbed to a spot above the stranded passengers and hauled them up, one by one, from the rocks. By 6.30 am all of the crew and passengers had been landed at Angle, to be looked after by local people.

With the dawn of a new day, wreckage and cargo (including kegs of gunpowder) started to come ashore, and rumours began to spread that cases of very strong whisky were appearing on local beaches. Hordes of local people scoured the rocks and inlets, and although customs officials were soon on the scene to recover sixty cases, a great many more disappeared without trace. It was later testified to the local Coroner that there were about 100 people on the beach at West Angle, close to the scene of the wreck, drinking and carrying away cases of whisky. Bottles were hidden in cupboards, attics, and holes in the cliffs. Many bottles were buried in back gardens.

As the days went by, cases were washed up on shores both inside and outside the waterway. Some cases appeared at the foot of a cliff on Skomer and were quickly spirited away. One young man and his brother found a case on a beach west of Milford town, upon which they immediately started on a drinking spree and became very drunk. They managed to stagger up from the shore, but one of them fell unconscious at the roadside. His brother groped his way home and, after sobering up, simply assumed that his brother would have recovered and found his own way home. Two days later they found his lifeless body in the hedge. Some people went out to the wreck to recover what they could. A father and his two sons rowed out in rough weather and attempted to tow a keg of whisky back to the shore; but the boat capsized in heavy seas and two of them were swept away and drowned.

Occasionally bottles of **Loch Shiel** whisky are still discovered in and around Angle. In the 1950s two forgotten bottles were found during repair work in the roof of a house in the village, and no doubt there are more to come. The **Loch Shiel** incident has certainly entered local folk-lore; but it is not often realised by those who recall Angle's own "whisky galore" episode that the occasion was marked more by tragedy than good humour

Date: 1894

Source: *Goddard* p 61

3.10 Hard Drinking at the Polls

The Parliamentary elections which took place in Pembrokeshire in 1831 have become quite famous. The candidates were Sir John Owen of Orierton and the Hon Robert Fulke Greville, a member of the founding family of Milford. Prior to the passing of the Reform Act in 1832, most people were not entitled to vote; and so the elections were like private games played by the members of the gentry. Elections were disorderly and inefficient; bribery and corruption were rife; there were no secret votes; and candidates quite openly bought votes by providing lavish hospitality for those taking part in the election.

The voting gentry all had to come to Haverfordwest during a 15-day voting period in May. There were seven polling booths in the town, each one representing one of the Pembrokeshire "hundreds". Sir John, as the sitting member, represented the Tory (Orange) cause; and Greville, the challenger, represented the Whig (Blue) cause. Sir John set up his headquarters at the Castle Hotel and Charles Greville at the Mariners. But these inns were by no means the focal points of the campaign, for all the local innkeepers eagerly solicited the patronage of the two sides. Both candidates "opened" inns for their supporters, but while Sir John limited himself to a few, Greville instructed no less than 31 local hostelrys to provide refreshments for the voters. Sir John attempted to control his expenditures by issuing tickets to his supporters, but Greville spared no expense and invited all potential voters to drink (and eat) at his expense. It was rumoured that he had set aside £30,000 (a huge sum in those days) to meet the expenses of the campaign. Quite literally, no expense was spared.

Greville placed stewards in the inns to allocate ale, spirits and provisions to those who agreed to vote for him, but the system rapidly went out of control as both Whigs and Tories took advantage of his hospitality. Many voters demanded (and got) refreshments for their wives as well as themselves, and others had to be found accommodation in the town. Greville had to provide free stabling for the horses of those who had come into town from the outlying districts. The detailed accounts kept by Greville's stewards and by the innkeepers grew at an alarming rate, and there was disorder and rowdiness on a scale never before seen in an election campaign. There were violent altercations at the polling booths, impersonation was rife, and agents on both sides were guilty of obstruction and time-wasting; but the sheriffs were powerless to prevent these abuses.

In the event Sir John won the election with a majority of 99. But amid protests of corruption there was a confused and indecisive recount, and the election was declared null and void. A new election was held in October, but by then Greville had lost his stomach for the fight, and much of his family fortune. Sir John won with ease. With many of the bills for the first election still unpaid, Greville moved out of the area and left his creditors to sue his agents. Some of the bills were huge. For example, the bill from the Mariners Hotel alone totalled £1,878, including almost £1000 for drinks: 42 barrels of ale, 59 gallons of rum, 67 gallons of brandy, 1068 bottles of port, and 780 bottles of sherry. Never before, or since, was a Pembrokeshire election held in such an alcoholic haze.

Date: 1831

Sources: *Miles* p 138; *McKay* p 79

3.11 Premature Funeral at Mynachlogddu

Around the year 1890, shortly after the completion of the "Cardi Bach" railway from Crymych to Cardigan, Dr Rowland Jones was a country doctor based in Boncath. His practice covered a large area, including the eastern part of Mynydd Presely, and he was frequently called out to very remote farms and hamlets in the hills.

One day he had to attend a funeral in the remote and beautiful hamlet of Mynachlogddu, in the hollow between the hills of Foel-drych and Talfynydd. The old and cantankerous wife of a local farmer had died, and although she had not been one of his patients Dr Jones felt obliged to go along to the funeral as a mark of respect for the family. There was a good turn-out at the church, and at the completion of the funeral service the bearers lifted the coffin onto their shoulders and made their way with measured tread down the aisle towards the church door. All eyes followed them, and there was as usual complete silence. But then there was a great thud as the corner of the coffin hit the door-post on the way out; upon which the lid flew off and up sat the "deceased" farmer's wife, very much alive. She was none too amused when she discovered that she had missed out on several days and a number of important events, including her own funeral. And she she was most put out when she realised that she was sitting in a coffin heading for the bottom of a very deep hole in the ground.

The burial was abandoned forthwith, and the assembled company dispersed with much talk of miracles on the lips of all and sundry. The old lady went back to her sick bed, where she remained for several more weeks. She made her poor husband's life a misery, for she refused to believe that a mistake had been made, and could not accept that both her family and her family doctor had declared her well and truly dead prior to her funeral and miraculous resurrection. However, her health deteriorated again, and once more she died. This time, very great care was taken to make sure that she really was a deceased person, and the funeral was duly rearranged.

On the appointed day there was an even bigger congregation at the funeral, and many strangers turned up out of curiosity. The service went off without a hitch, and once more the bearers raised the coffin onto their shoulders. Down the aisle they went, with measured tread. There was complete silence, and there was a great corporate holding of breath. Suddenly there was a theatrical whisper from the front row of the church, where the old farmer was sitting. "Now then, boys bach," he said to the bearers. "take it nice and careful, and for God's sake mind the door-post!"

Date: c 1890

Source: Word of mouth



3.12 Sad Event at Pen-y-bryn

The little hamlet of Pen-y-bryn is located a mile or so from Cilgerran. In the early years of this century a very sad event occurred there, which has passed into the realm of folk-lore.

In the hamlet there was an old gentleman (let us call him Dai Jones), who lived all alone in a simple little cottage. At the bottom of his garden he had a fine modern *ty bach* (literally "little house" or outside loo) provided by the old Pembrokeshire County Council. This was a most impressive Mark Two structure, made of timber and corrugated iron sheets, and it was Dai's pride and joy. The design was much improved over the Mark One PCC *ty bach*, which had been too lightly built and too easy to tip over. In fact, young hooligans throughout the length and breadth of the county had derived great pleasure from heaving over one *ty bach* after another, preferably when there was somebody inside sitting on the throne. The Mark Two version was, according to the Public Health Department, quite immovable.

One day the neighbours noticed that they had not seen old Dai for 24 hours or more, and they mounted a search for him. The back door was unlocked, and the old man was nowhere to be found in the house. After searching around the garden somebody had the idea that he might be inside the *ty bach*. The door was locked, but when the neighbours looked through the gaps between the corrugated iron sheets they could see the poor old man sitting there, with his trousers around his ankles, doubled up but stone dead. It was known that he was a sufferer from constipation, and it was surmised that his soul had been transported off to Heaven while he had been hard at work. In order to get him out they tried to force the door open, and that was when they discovered that the Mark Two outside loo had one design fault. The door would only open inwards, and the average inmate, when sitting on the throne, would have his or her feet firmly wedged against the base of the door. And so it was with Mr Jones. Even if the door had not been locked they would not have been able to force it open, for after 24 hours or so the old man was stiff as a plank.

There was nothing for it, in the circumstances, but to dismantle the magnificent edifice sheet by sheet and timber by timber. The gentlemen of the hamlet set to work with their axes and saws while their wives averted their gaze and the children watched in wide-eyed amazement. Eventually the whole building was demolished, and the men managed to pull up the poor old man's trousers before carrying his body into the cottage to be laid out. It was none too easy to lay him out, either, since rigor mortis had set in while he had been in a very embarrassing position. The children joked that he would be the first local person to be buried in a square coffin.....

The burial went off normally enough in the end, since the local undertaker was an old hand at straightening out the dear departed. But it was a very quiet funeral. Afterwards the locals said that the circumstances of Dai Jones' death would not have been so bad if he had been a Methodist or a member of the Church in Wales, but as he had been a Baptist it was all really rather undignified and was best not spoken of. Nonetheless, according to local tradition, old Mr Jones was always referred to thereafter as "Dai Ty Bach"

Date: c 1915

Source: Williams p 109

3.13 Dark Deed in Honey Harfat

Around the year 1820 the people of Haverfordwest (Honey Harfat) were terrorised by a bully called Big John Hargust. He was six feet and six inches tall, weighed eighteen stone, and was aggressive and ill-tempered into the bargain. He lived in squalor in a small cottage in Shut Street, which is now called Dew Street.

Gradually his behaviour became so outrageous that local people were terrified whenever he set foot outside his cottage. In the 14 inns of Shut Street he demanded, and got, special attention from the publicans, and anybody who stood in his way was liable for a beating. He was also feared further afield. On one occasion when the landlord of the Angel Inn in Church Street refused to serve him he smashed the poor man's windows, threw him out onto the street, and helped himself to ale until he was rolling drunk. One Sunday he encountered the Mayor who was on his way to church in his open carriage. He took hold of the carriage, tipped the poor Mayor out, and dumped the vehicle upside down.

He openly scoffed at the constables and at authority generally, and the norms of civilised behaviour meant nothing to him. He abused the local women, and made crude advances on those whom he fancied; without exception they fled in terror. He was never prosecuted for assault or for any other crime, since nobody could be found to testify against him and since the constables (who were mostly elderly ex-servicemen) were afraid to charge him. When a number of local people who had suffered at Big John's hands went to an old lawyer called Stephen James to voice their complaints, news of this reached the bully, and he immediately smashed down the front door of his office.

At last, in the summer of 1822, frustration and anger reached such a pitch that a number of local businessmen decided to take matters in hand. A secret meeting was held behind locked doors in the Castle Hotel, as a result of which five "men of substance" volunteered to make a visit to Shut Street. They laid their plans carefully, and told nobody else.

Some nights later, as the chimes of St Mary's Church struck two o'clock, five cloaked and muffled figures assembled near the Mariners Hotel. They wore heavy hats, and their faces were hidden beneath woollen scarves. One of them carried a long stick; another had a coiled rope beneath his cloak; and a third struggled under the weight of something bulky and heavy. The five men nodded to one another, and then walked quietly up the hill towards the Grammar School and on to the miserable thatched hovels of Shut Street. There were no street lights in those days, and like shadows in the moonlight the five men moved in total silence up the middle of the street, taking care to avoid the piles of manure outside the front doors of the cottages.

At last they came to the place where Big John lived, in a wretched block of hovels known as Rat Island. There were no lights in the windows, and having satisfied themselves that the enemy was fast asleep they set about their work. One man systematically set about smashing the cottage windows with his stick, while another beat upon the door, making as much noise as possible. John Hargust woke with a start, and in response to all the commotion stumbled to the front door in a furious temper. He opened the door and rushed out, only to fall headlong over a trip-rope held by two

of the conspirators. As he lay on the ground, bellowing with fury, the last of the five men beat him over and again on the head with a bludgeon until he lost consciousness, bleeding profusely from his wounds.

A few minutes later, satisfied that the job was done, the five mysterious figures disappeared into the soft moonlit summer darkness, each one in a different direction. Up and down the street candles which had been lit as neighbours were awakened by all the noise were quietly extinguished again. Curtains rustled in the cottage windows. Not a single door opened. Afterwards, the constables were assured by those who lived up and down the street that nobody had heard anything or seen anything.....

Next morning the body of John Hargust, covered in blood, was found stiff and cold in the filthy dusty street in front of his cottage. The authorities were informed, and since their inquiries came to nothing they allowed the body to be taken away by a group of neighbours. It is still not known where Hargust was buried, but it was certainly not on consecrated ground, and no clergyman was present. When the news of the murder spread around the town there was a corporate sigh of relief, and gradually peace returned to the inns and streets of Honey Harfat. There was of course much speculation as to the identities of the five "avenging angels"; but nobody was ever prosecuted. According to legend, many years later Mr James Phillips, the popular deputy Mayor, confessed on his deathbed to his part in the crime, but the identities of the other four conspirators have never been revealed.

Date: 1822

Source: Sinnett p 139



..... a secret meeting was held behind locked doors in the Castle Hotel.

3.14 The Buckingham Palace Geranium

Once upon a time, not very long ago, a certain local hero from a small Pembrokeshire town was invited to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party. (The name of the town cannot be divulged for reasons of national security, but suffice to say that it is quite a long way from almost everywhere.) Having been duly decorated by the Queen our hero and his family spent a happy time in the Buckingham Palace garden, mingling in the vast crowd, drinking tea and enjoying a cucumber sandwich or two. Suddenly his attention was attracted in the flower borders by a most unusual geranium with abundant smallish blossoms of a delightful orange-red colour. He was overcome with the desire to own just a little of the wonderful geranium, and after sidling up to it and making sure that all the other guests were looking the other way he snipped off a little piece with his fingers and popped it into his pocket.

When the Garden Party was over he managed to escape without being searched, and on reaching his car he wrapped the cutting in a damp piece of newspaper for safekeeping. After the long drive home he dipped it into a little rooting hormone powder and put it in a pot to see if it would survive. And sure enough, the geranium created roots, and grew and grew into a thing of beauty. Before long the fame of "the Buckingham Palace Geranium" had spread far and wide throughout the town, and one person, and then another, and another, were presented with cuttings which they propagated and nurtured. Their geraniums bloomed beautifully, and so they presented yet more cuttings to yet more neighbours.....

And so it is that today, when you go into almost any house in this little town, and when you see a beautiful geranium in a place of honour in the front room, you must, according to tradition, say "What a beautiful geranium! What sort is it?" And, naturally enough, back will come the reply "Oh, THAT is the Buckingham Palace geranium"

Date: c 1988

Source: Word of mouth



Opposite:
The Knights excavated a tunnel from the Commandery to the shore of the river

3.15 The Secret Passage at Slebech

During the First Crusade (1099) against the infidels, the Knights of St John of Jerusalem won fame throughout Europe, partly for their military expertise and partly for their care of the wounded. They became known as the Hospitallers, and during the Twelfth Century, as they waged more or less continuous warfare against the Saracens in the Holy Land, gifts of land and property turned the organization into a great deal more than a club for fighting knights. The Knights Hospitallers became a great charity, a formidable military force, a landowning organisation on the grand scale, and an influential political power as well. All over Europe the Knights built hospitals for the sick, rest homes for the war wounded, retirement homes for aged knights, and recruitment centres for the Crusades. They also provided accommodation and hospitality for pilgrims. Through various bequests they became firmly established in Pembrokeshire, and by the year 1200 they had made a permanent headquarters at Slebech on the banks of the Eastern Cleddau River.

The Commandery built by the Knights has been lost without trace, but it is believed to have been on the same site as Slebech Hall, built in the 1770's. Near the Hall, the old church of St John can still be seen, albeit in ruins; and we can still make out the traces of the old causeway that connected the Commandery to the Hospitallers' farm on the opposite side of the river. Near the farm there was a "Sister's House", probably used by female pilgrims en route to or from the shrine of St David.

One of the rights granted to the Hospitallers was the Right of Sanctuary, and it is certain the Slebech was used for this purpose. The Knights excavated a secret tunnel from the Commandery to the shore of the river, where the exit can still be seen in a sturdy retaining wall just above high water mark. This tunnel was no doubt used by the Knights themselves in order to escape by boat at times of trouble with the Welsh princes, and fugitives were also allowed to use it having claimed sanctuary. It may also have been used during the Civil War. During World War II there was quite a stir when a group of military personnel stationed at Picton Castle (which was in use as a Military Hospital) discovered the tunnel entrance on the river bank and decided to explore it. Eventually they found themselves in Slebech Hall, where they were promptly arrested by some American troops who were occupying the building. They were accused of being spies, and were kept under strict arrest until an officer from their own Unit could be called. He turned up at the Hall, duly identified them, and they were released. After that, the tunnel was kept securely closed for fear of genuine enemy infiltration.....

Date: 1943

Sources: Miles 1984, p 165; Morris 1948, p 18



3.16 The Doctor and the Highwayman

During the eighteenth century there were very few decent roads in Pembrokeshire, and travellers were in constant danger of assault and robbery from vagabonds and highwaymen. There were no regular police to keep law and order, and in the country districts the part-time chief constables and sherriffs attempted to keep crime at bay with the aid of active or retired militiamen. Sometimes, just as in the Wild West in the days of cowboys and Indians, the sherriff would sign up a gang of local men to form a posse if a particularly violent criminal had to be apprehended. For those who were caught after involvement in petty crime, justice came quickly and brutally. There were few fair trials, and the death penalty was often suffered by those caught stealing money or other property.

In the remote and lonely Presely Hills there were many robbers, driven to crime by desperate poverty and hunger. One highwayman made frequent appearances on dark winter nights in the area around Puncteston, Tufton and Maenclochog. Most of his robberies took place on the old coaching road over the mountain between New Inn and Tafarn y Bwlch, where coach travellers and horsemen were at their most vulnerable. He would appear out of nowhere, dressed in cloak, three-cornered hat and mask, and riding on a small Welsh pony. Carrying a lantern and brandishing what looked like a pistol, he would cry "Stand and deliver!" in Welsh, and would proceed to relieve his victims of their money and valuables before riding off into the all-embracing darkness. Some victims would be left unconscious at the side of the road.

One dark evening a local doctor was approaching the New Inn on horseback. He was well muffled up against the winter weather, with his hat pulled down over his face and a thick woollen scarf around his neck, and he looked forward to the warmth of the New Inn fireside. Suddenly a shadowy mounted figure appeared beside him. "Stand and deliver!" came the command, and the doctor saw that a pistol was being brandished in his face. He realised that it was useless to resist or to try and escape, and so he dismounted, followed by the masked figure. Then, in the dim light of his lantern, the highwayman saw the doctor's battered bag and immediately demanded that it should be opened. The doctor obeyed, happy in the knowledge that it contained nothing more valuable than his potions and pills and medical instruments. He tipped the contents onto the ground in the darkness, and the highwayman bent down to see what rich pickings he could find. At that moment the doctor, who was not one to be intimidated by a common thief, grabbed his best scalpel and lunged at the stranger, cutting through his cloak and clothing and slicing into the skin on his back. Blood flowed freely, and with a great shout of pain and anger the man reeled back. Roaring a string of curses, he remounted his pony and galloped off into the darkness, leaving the doctor somewhat shocked but otherwise unharmed.

The doctor gathered up his belongings, stuffed them back into his bag, and rode on to the New Inn, where he spent the night. He stayed at the inn for the next day, treating various local people who came to him with their ailments. Towards the end of the afternoon a local farmer, who was well known to the doctor, appeared and asked whether he could receive some treatment for a nasty flesh wound on his back. He was reluctant to



Some victims would be left unconscious at the side of the road.

describe the wound, or to say how he had obtained it; but the doctor agreed to help, and told the man to take off his old tweed jacket and flannel shirt. He recognised the wound immediately he saw it as having been caused by a very sharp instrument such as a scalpel. He said nothing, but cleaned away the blood and stitched up the open wound. When he was ready the farmer thanked him profusely, and asked what the charge would be for his services. "No charge," said the doctor quietly. "I do not charge for closing up incisions which I myself have made."

A look of horror came over the farmer's face as he realised that he had been treated by his intended victim of the previous night. But the doctor said nothing more, and the poor man, covered with confusion, muttered his heartfelt thanks and beat a hasty retreat. The doctor, well practised in the arts of diplomacy, did not report the incident to the sheriff, believing that the farmer had probably learned a lesson quite painful enough to be going on with. And sure enough, the highwayman of Presely was never seen again on that lonely stretch of road.

Date: c 1760?

Source: Word of mouth

3.17 The Talking Stone of Llechlafar

According to Giraldus Cambrensis, there was a famous talking stone called Llechlafar in the parish of St David's. For very many years it served as a bridge over the River Alun, being located on the edge of the churchyard on its northern side, probably near the cathedral's west door. The stone was by all accounts a great slab of local volcanic rock, ten feet long, six feet wide, and one foot thick. In Giraldus' day it was used as a stone bridge for the transport of coffins into the churchyard for burial, and it had been used so many times by funeral processions and by the tread of thousands of shuffling feet that its surface was quite smooth.

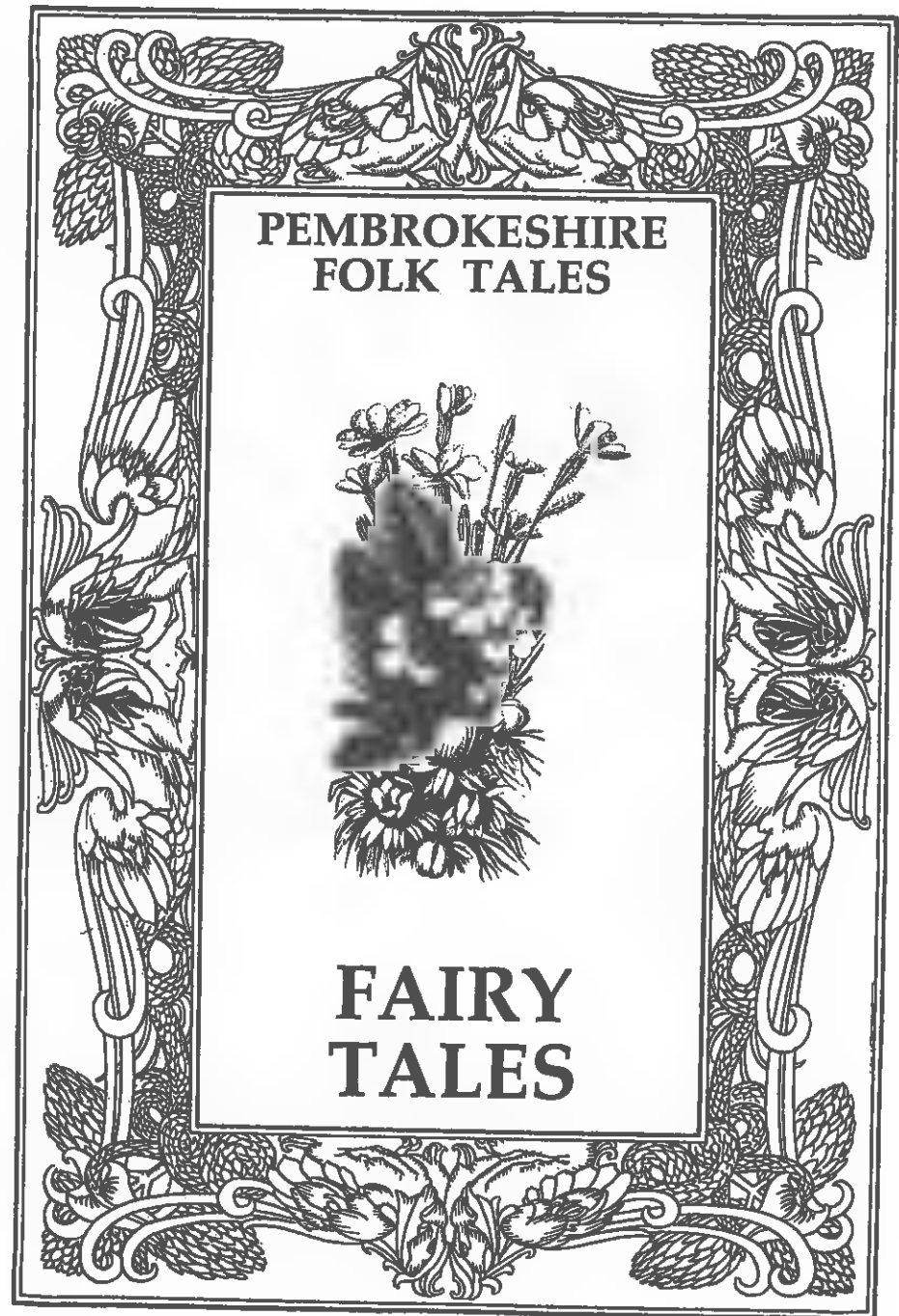
One day, long before the time of Giraldus, a corpse was being carried over the great slab into the churchyard when the stone suddenly burst into speech. It was not used to talking, and so great was the effort involved in this miracle that it cracked straight down the middle. Accordingly a "heathen superstition" developed as a result of this strange episode, and afterwards local people would not carry corpses over the stone, preferring to wade across the river instead. The stone itself was named "llechlafar" by local people, and legends associated with it spread far and wide.

One legend which was well known to the people of the town was connected with Merlin the Wizard, who prophesied that a king of England would conquer Ireland but would be wounded there by a man with a red hand, and then, on his return to St David's, would die as he walked across Llechlafar. It so happened that on Easter Monday in 1172 King Henry II returned from his expedition to Ireland. After landing at Porth Clais he made his way, dressed as a pilgrim, to the cathedral church of St David in order to pray and hear Mass. At the Porth Gwyn gate the king and his entourage were met by the church canons, who received him with due honour and reverence. But as they walked towards Llechlafar and the cathedral door, a Welsh woman ran out from the crowd and threw herself at the king's feet and complained bitterly about the behaviour of Bishop Bernard. The king was greatly embarrassed, and the woman was hustled away. But she refused to be silenced. Gesturing violently with her hands, she shouted "Revenge us today, Llechlafar! Revenge the whole Welsh people on this man!" The crowd urged her to be silent, but she shouted even louder, reminding the king of the terrible prophecy of Merlin and screaming that he would be struck dead if he should cross the fateful stone.

Now the king knew all about the prophecy. But he was a brave man, and when he reached Llechlafar he eyed it closely for a moment. Then, with the crowd looking on wide-eyed in anticipation and horror, he strode boldly across it. He reached the other side safely. Turning to the stone, he glared at it and said "Merlin is a liar! Who will trust him now?" But the king was not allowed to have the last word. A wit in the crowd pretended to take umbrage at the insult offered to the great Welsh wizard and prophet. "Merlin is no liar," he said. "You may be a king, but you are not a king who has conquered Ireland. Old Merlin was not talking about you at all! Merlin's prophecy has still not been fulfilled, for as we all know, no English king has ever managed properly to conquer that troubled Emerald Isle. As for Llechlafar, it was taken away and broken up in 1597.

Date: 1172

Sources: Giraldus p 166; Sikes p 364



4.1 How the North Pole was Discovered

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was firmly believed that the *Tylwyth Teg* (the fairies) could seize innocent people and enquire of them whether they wished to travel "above wind, mid wind, or below wind". If one chose above wind one was taken by a *Bwbach* on a terrible giddy journey high above the earth; if one chose below wind one was dragged through bushes and trees and hedges at full speed; but if one chose the middle way one's involuntary journey was a little more comfortable.

No doubt this belief was widespread in the seafaring and fishing village of St Dogmael's. Most people knew that the neighbourhood was greatly affected by fairies. Quite commonly local men would be "led astray" by the Little People and would go missing for a whole night, returning home at daybreak to discover that they had been far away across the fields in strange and unfamiliar places. (At least, that is what they told their wives.) Sometimes the reluctant travellers would tell of wonderful adventures, and it was often clear that they had no idea how long they had been away.

On one occasion a man who was spirited away happened to be carrying a number of hoop-rods with him, and as he travelled in the enchanting company of the fairies he had the presence of mind to drop the rods one by one. Next day, having returned home after his adventure, he and his friends set out to find the rods, and found them scattered over many miles of countryside. On another occasion an elderly and much respected cleric, well known for his serious and ascetic life-style, was suddenly caught up into a magic dance with the fairies, and continued to dance in a frenzy right through the night. And strange to relate, in spite of his advanced years, the excessive exercise appeared to do him no harm at all.

On another occasion a St Dogmael's fisherman was invited to a wedding in Moylgrove. When the celebrations had ended, the happy fisherman set out to wend his erratic way home in the pitch darkness. Afterwards he related that the fairies had led him astray, taking him to many exotic and exciting places which he did not recognize. Then, after a few hours, by great good fortune he happened to "discover the North Pole" in the company of his captors; and being a fine navigator he was then able to steer his course towards home, which he reached safely just as dawn was breaking. When pressed for more information about his expedition to foreign parts, the fisherman was not able to give precise details, but explained that the fairies had "put a cap of oblivion" upon his head.

Many who live today in St Dogmael's will tell you that certain local people are still led astray by the fairies every now and then, returning in due course to the everyday world with no idea how long they have been away, and relating most colourful and fascinating tales of what they have experienced. ...

Date: c 1820

Sources: Sikes p 69; Rhys p 170



4.2 Lost in the Fairy Circle

Once upon a time there was an old farmhouse on the banks of the Teifi, not far from Cardigan town. Some of the farm land used for grazing the cattle was on the marshy land now known as Pentood Marsh, and it was known that fairies were to be found there, dancing in the rising mist at daybreak on summer mornings.

The farm was large and prosperous, and a number of servants were employed to work on the land and in the farmhouse. One afternoon a cowman and a servant girl went down onto the marsh to call the cows home for the evening milking. Suddenly the man realised that the girl was nowhere to be seen, and no matter how hard he searched and how loud he shouted, no trace could be found of her. He took home the cows and informed his master of the strange disappearance, and more people joined in the search. At last they gave up and decided that the fairies must be involved. A servant was sent to fetch the *dyn hysbys* or wise man who lived in Cardigan, and after investigating the matter he informed them all that the girl was indeed with the fairies.

The wise man said that all was not lost, however; and he told them that she could be recovered if great care was used to follow his instructions. He told them that after a year and a day they should go to a certain spot at a certain time in order to find her with the fairies. They followed his instructions carefully, and to their great surprise they found the maiden in a fairy ring, singing and dancing with the fairies and "looking as happy as a fish in the water." One of the men managed to stretch into the ring and pull her out, and they took her home safely. She had no recollection of where she had been.

The story might have ended there; but the wise man warned the master of the farm that the girl was not to be touched by iron, or she would disappear again. The farmer was very careful to protect the girl. But one day, many months after, he was preparing to go to market with his horse and cart, and since he was rather late he asked the girl to assist him. This she did willingly, but as the farmer was bridling the horse the bit touched the girl on the arm and she disappeared instantly. After that the wise man could not help, and she was never seen again.

Date: c 1810

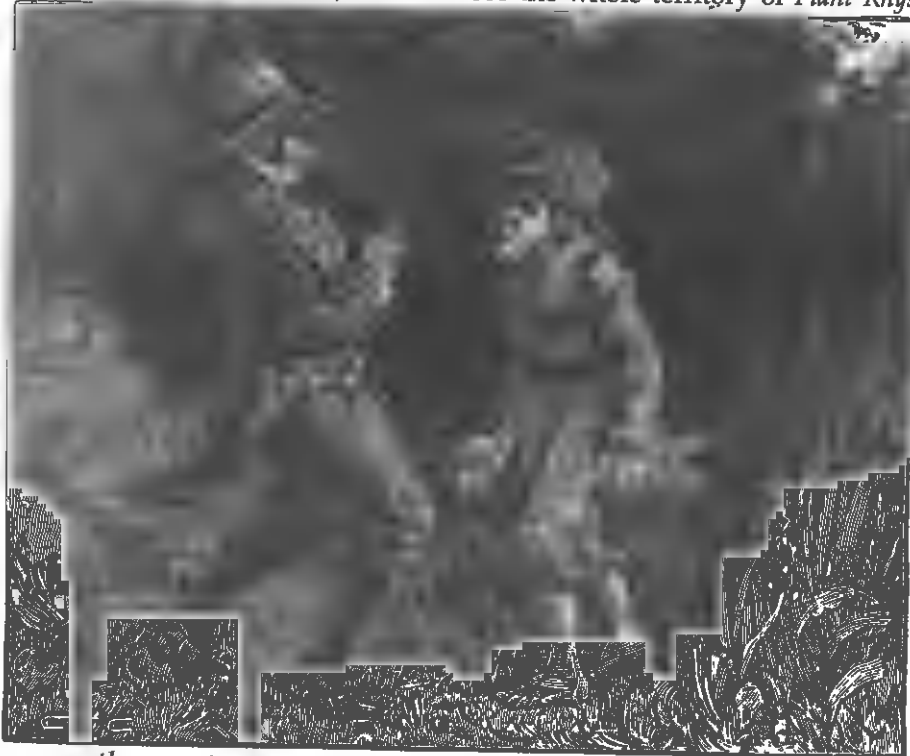
Source: Davies p 109



4.3 The Children of Rhys the Deep

In Welsh, the term *Plant Rhys Ddwfn* (the children of Rhys the Deep) is often used to describe the fairies or little people who inhabit the invisible islands out in Cardigan Bay - and indeed in other places off the Pembrokeshire coast. *Rhys Ddwfn* or Rhys the Deep was named originally because he inhabited the old kingdom of Cantre's Gwaelos now lost beneath the waves; but there is also another meaning to the name, for Rhys was said to be "deep" as a character as well, with a shrewdness or cunning much greater than that of other little people. So he became the patriarch of his people and taught them wisdom, and loyalty, and trust.

The little people were remarkably handsome, and that is why they are also called the *Tylwyth Teg* or Fair Folk. Their land out in Cardigan Bay was like ours in some respects; but it was more gentle and more fertile, and it rang with the sound of bird-song and rejoiced in the scent of flowered meadows. Certain strange herbs grew among the flowers, and these herbs made the country invisible to ordinary people. There is no record that these remarkable herbs grew in any other part of the world except in one part of Cernis. Here, if a man should stand on about one square yard of special turf, he could see the whole territory of *Plant Rhys*



..... they sent a messenger who invited him to their home country for a visit.

Ddwfn laid out before him; but the moment he moved he would lose sight of it altogether, and even his footsteps would disappear to prevent him from retracing his steps.

In spite of having such a fine country to live in, the little people were not great farmers, preferring rather to live in towns and to buy their food supplies on visits to Cardigan market. Nobody ever saw them coming or going, but the locals always knew when they were about because the prices of corn, salt, butter or other foodstuffs would go up sharply because the little people were never short of a silver shilling or two. They would never say a word to the stallholders, and always paid exactly the right money for their supplies, seeming to know the prices of every item on display. Sometimes they would buy up almost all the supplies in the market, and latecomers confronted with high prices and just a few remnants on the market stalls would nudge one another and say "Aha! I see that they have been here today!"

Naturally the farmers with corn to sell were delighted when the little people came to market, for they went home with pockets full of silver; but the poor people were not so happy, for they could ill afford the high prices being asked by the stallholders. A certain Gruffydd ab Einon was a great friend of the *Plant Rhys Ddwfn*, for they patronized his market stall above all others, and he sold them all the corn he could grow. One day, having found him to be an honest man, they sent a messenger who invited him to their home country for a visit. Once there, he was amazed at the treasures which they owned, and he discovered that they were great traders with countries across the oceans. When the time came for him to return to Cardigan he was loaded with wonderful presents of gold and silver, the like of which he had never seen before. Before taking his leave he asked their leader, who was a descendent of Rhys Ddwfn, how they protected all their treasures from thieves and traitors. "Oh, that is not a problem", replied the old man "There is no such thing as treachery in our country. Rhys, the father of our people, taught us that from generation to generation we must honour our parents and ancestors. We must love our wives without looking with desire on those of our neighbours. We must do our best for our children and grandchildren. And so we all keep faith with one another. And we keep faith with those who are good to us. Goodbye!"

When Gruffydd looked about him the old man had gone, and he could see no sign of the enchanted land of the little people. He found himself near his own home again, laden with gifts. After this Gruffydd continued to do good business with *Plant Rhys Ddwfn* for many years, visiting their land on many occasions and becoming very wealthy into the bargain.

But when at last Gruffydd died the little people had to buy their corn from other farmers, who became greedy and asked for higher and higher prices. At last, all of a sudden, they stopped going to Cardigan market. Where they did their shopping after this was a matter of some conjecture. Some said that they were to be seen at Haverfordwest or St David's. But it was most commonly believed in Cardigan that the little people did most of their shopping in Fishguard; and indeed this idea was confirmed by the fact that some very strange people were to be seen there on market days.....

Date · 1860

Source : Rhys p 159

4.4 The Mysterious Absence of Einon

Einon was a young man from Fishguard, of solid farming stock but the youngest of several brothers. He was good-looking, full of initiative, and an excellent musician. He owned a wonderful golden harp, which he would play on festive occasions to the delight of all who heard him. Soon he was renowned as the best harpist in Wales. When he was about twenty years old he fell in love and married a local girl named Elen, and great were the celebrations as the happy couple embarked upon their life together.

However, Einon and Elen could find nowhere to live and no land of their own to farm, and they began to fret at the lack of opportunity in the Fishguard area. At last they decided to move to the neighbourhood of Tregaron, in the upper Teifi valley, where Einon had some relatives. Sadly their friends and neighbours watched them go, taking with them their few possessions including the golden harp.

The couple were rented a little piece of land on the banks of the river, and with prodigious energy and enthusiasm they built their home and enclosed parts of the common. They cleared the fields, built banks and hedges, drained the land, and bought stock. They planted trees and made fine gardens, and as the years passed they became wealthy and respected members of the local community. Their estate grew, and their early simple house was replaced by a fine mansion called Ystrad Caron. They employed many servants, and built a bridge over the river for the convenience of the people of Tregaron. Einon continued to play his harp, and his fame spread throughout Cardiganshire and further afield. The couple, still greatly in love, enjoyed a glittering social life as members of the local gentry, and to all who met them it seemed that they had all that they wanted in life.

But Einon could not settle in the Tregaron area, and longed to be back among his family and friends in Fishguard. At last he became subject to fits of "melancholia", and he began to imagine that his mansion was haunted by an evil spirit. He became so ill that his wife and his doctor advised him to take a break away from the estate, and he agreed to go to Fishguard for a holiday. Off he went, leaving his old harp behind since it was too large to take in the carriage. Once in Pembrokeshire, he began to recover, and soon felt well enough to take a short sea voyage from Cwm out into Cardigan Bay. But something happened to him on that voyage, and nobody in Fishguard ever saw him again.....

Elen was distraught when she heard of her husband's disappearance, and as the years passed she at last concluded that he must be dead. Twenty years went by, and a young man from the Tregaron area asked her to marry him. She was still an attractive woman, and although she could not forget her beloved Einon her friends urged her to accept, since they were concerned that she should be happy. So she accepted, and with the young man's engagement ring upon her finger she started to make her plans for the wedding.

On the day before the wedding an old and emaciated man, white-haired and clothed in rags, came up to the back door of Ystrad Caron mansion. He knocked tentatively, for it was clear that there was some big social event in progress, with the sounds of laughter and music echoing around the house and with many coaches parked on the driveway. The door was

opened by a servant, who took him to be a tramp. She was a kind-hearted girl, and she immediately asked him in to warm himself by the kitchen fire and to have a bite to eat.

"We are very busy here today," she said. "Our mistress, who has been a widow for twenty years, is about to get married again, and the bridegroom and a party of invited guests are in the parlour. They thought they should have some musical entertainment, and they have there a fine old golden harp which used to belong to the master of the house who disappeared at sea many years ago. Unfortunately, none of the company can tune the instrument properly, and they seem to think it is too old, and should be thrown on the rubbish heap." At this, a shadow came over the old man's face, but then he brightened up, and said to the servant girl "Please ask them to allow me to try and tune the harp. I know a little bit about the instrument, and I think I can help." So the girl went to inform her mistress that there was an old tramp in the kitchen who knew how to tune a harp. Elen invited him to come into the parlour, and as the assembled guests watched with amusement the old man worked for some time with trembling fingers on the strings.

Then, when all was ready, he began to play, and the most beautiful harp music echoed around the room. Immediately Elen recognized an old favourite tune which Einon loved to play: "My house, and my harp, and my fire are mine." And as the old man played on, she remembered his little tricks of fingering on the strings, and his own nuances in the music. And she saw through the thick beard and the tangled white hair, and saw the gentle eyes of her beloved Einon. When the last notes of the tune had faded away, the old man sat with bowed head, holding his golden harp as the guests stood in silence. Then they saw that Elen was weeping. As they watched she turned to the young man whom she was engaged to marry next day, and she said to him: "My dear young friend, I thank you for your affection. But you may go now, for my beloved husband has come home to me once again."

And so the wedding was cancelled, and Einon was gradually nursed back to health by his wife. The happy couple spent many more happy years together, and there was much speculation as to Einon's "missing twenty years." Some said he had been captured by the French and held in prison in France; but others said he had been taken by the fairies to the Enchanted Isles in Cardigan Bay, where he had enjoyed many wonderful delights while oblivious to the passing of time.....

Date: c 1750

Source: Davies p 139



4.5 The First Fairies

About two hundred years ago Pembrokeshire people had many theories about the origin of fairies. Some said that they were descended from an ancient race of small people, driven away from their homes into woods and caves when the fierce and well-armed people of the Iron Age came into Wales. Some said that they were the ancient Druids, the keepers of an ancient wisdom which ordinary mortals had forgotten. And others believed that they were the souls of dead mortals not good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell. They were doomed to dwell in secret places, either incessantly toiling or incessantly playing, until the resurrection day, when they would be admitted to heaven.

In the Presely Hills area, and in eastern Pembrokeshire, the fairies were sometimes called *Bendith y Mamau* (mothers' blessing), perhaps because of an old story which used to circulate in the country districts. For example, in the Fishguard area this story was once widely known:

Once upon a time Jesus was travelling through Pembrokeshire when he became weary of his journey. He called at the house of a peasant to seek rest and refreshment. Now it so happened that the good wife had seventeen children, and when she saw Jesus at the door she became embarrassed at the size of her ill-behaved family and thought she had better hide some of them away. So she asked her oldest son to go out and play with nine of the children, and to keep well clear of the house until she called them home. So off went the ten children, and the wife opened the door and let Jesus in. The Lord sat down and enjoyed the family's humble fare of bread and water, in the company of the peasant and his wife and seven children only. When he felt refreshed, he thanked the family for their hospitality, blessed the seven children and went on his way. Afterwards the wife went out to call the other ten children, but they were nowhere to be found. They had disappeared, and were never found again. They were unblest by Jesus, and they became the first fairies. The distraught mother tried to bless the children herself, but it was too late, for by then they were already in *Gwlad y Tylwyth Teg* (fairyland).

Date: c 1800

Source: Rees, J R p 15

Opposite:

..... the brave girl sat some way from the river bank, looking very beautiful in the moonlight, and with her long hair falling about her in waves.



4.6 The Brynberian Afanc

Not far from Brynberian there is a most unusual burial chamber on the bleak moorland. It is a long, low gallery chamber which is said to have similarities with some of the Neolithic burial chambers of Ireland dating from about 2500 BC. There is no other burial chamber like it anywhere else in Wales. It is shaped like a wedge, and is about 35 feet long. It is called *Bedd-yr-Afanc*, which may be translated as "Monster's Grave". However, some authorities believe that the word *afanc* originally meant "dwarf", whereas in modern Welsh it means a beaver.

According to a very old legend there was once a terrible water monster which inhabited a deep pool in the stream near Brynberian bridge. It caused great fear in the hearts of local people, stealing sheep and other animals and laying waste the country round about. At last it was decided that the afanc must be slain, and so a plan was set in motion. It was known from ancient history that water monsters could not resist the sight of a fair maiden, so the fairest girl in the village agreed to be used as a bait. At dusk a powerful team of oxen was brought to the vicinity of the pool, while the men of the village set loops of strong iron chains along the river bank, with the chains connected to the oxen.

Later, when the full moon was high in the sky, the locals waited with baited breath for the afanc to appear, as it always did on the night of the full moon. The brave girl sat some way from the river bank, looking very beautiful in the moonlight, and with her long hair falling about her in waves. She felt extremely nervous, for she knew that long ago, according to legend, another afanc in North Wales had torn off the breast of a maiden such as she when it was captured. At last the monster emerged from the pool. Seeing the girl, it was immediately entranced, and lumbered towards her across the dewy grass of the river bank. She waited till the last possible moment, and then with a scream she fled. At the same time a great shout went up from the men who had been hiding nearby, and the oxen strained on the iron chains. The chain loops on the grass closed, and the afanc was caught around its legs. With a roar of fury it tried to return to the sanctuary of its pool, and as it thrashed about it temporarily reached the water. But the oxen were immensely strong, and as they were driven by their master there was no escape for the afanc. Bit by bit the chains were drawn tighter about its body, and bit by bit it was hauled out of the river and up the river bank. Then all the men attacked it, with whatever weapons they could muster -- axes, sickles, spades, scythes, forks and pointed spears.

At last, after a mighty battle, the bloodied monster lay dead on the grass. A rousing cheer echoed around the moonlit countryside, and as the news spread people came from near and far to see the dead beast. Nobody slept much that night; the ale flowed freely, and the celebrations went on until daybreak. Then, in the morning, the oxen hauled the dead monster up onto the moor. In a suitable place the chains were undone, and the creature was buried in a great tomb made of slabs of rock from the mountain. It was covered with stones and earth, and from that day to this the site has been called *Bedd-yr-Afanc*.

Date: c 1300?

Sources: Rhys p 689; Davies p 325

4.7 The Dragon at St Edren's

The deserted church of St Edren's, not far from Hayscastle, stands in the middle of a raised circular churchyard on a pre-Christian site. It is a wild and isolated place, seldom visited nowadays, although in the middle of the last century it supported a thriving community and had a sizeable church congregation.

There are a number of strange superstitions relating to the church and the churchyard. According to one, the old well in the churchyard used to be filled with holy water which had the capacity to cure rabies or madness. The well lost its power after a woman defiled it by washing clothes in it on a Sunday. Others said that the well ran dry after a local farmer allowed his mad dog to drink out of it. Strange to relate, the farmer promptly died while the dog recovered its health. After this, the healing powers of the old well were transferred to the grass (called *porfa'r cynddeirnog*) which grew around the base of the churchyard wall. People came from far and wide to seek a cure for "hydrophobia", and they became well again after eating the grass as a sandwich filling between two slices of bread.

The strangest tale of St Edren's concerns a beast called a *gwiber*. This was a sort of flying snake with wings and with hard scales all over its body. Nowadays we would call it a dragon. Long, long ago, before the present church was built, there was a smaller and simpler building on the same site. At that time there were snakes in the churchyard and in the countryside round about. Now it was well known among the peasantry that if a snake happened to drink the milk of a nursing mother and eat the bread consecrated for Holy Communion, it would grow to a huge size and would be transformed into a flying dragon. One Sunday a woman who lived in a cottage on the nearby moor went to Grinston well to fetch water. Now it so happened that she had recently given birth to a child, and when she got to the well her breasts were so full that they were giving her pain. So she expelled some of the milk onto the ground. Then, feeling more comfortable, she filled her buckets with water and went home. An adder came out of the bracken near the well and drank the milk, and later made its way to the churchyard. As it arrived the priest and his congregation were leaving the church, having just celebrated Holy Communion. It so happened that some of the crumbs of the consecrated bread had fallen onto the coat collar of one of the celebrants, and as he walked across the churchyard these crumbs dropped to the ground. Later, when all was quiet, the adder came upon these little morsels and ate them up.

And so, having both human mother's milk and consecrated bread in its stomach, the adder was immediately transformed, and became a dragon. It climbed to the top of the church tower and flew from there back to the moorland where it had tasted the mother's milk. Now it spends most of its time on the marshy ground near Grinston, coiled up at the bottom of the well at night and emerging only very rarely to hunt for beautiful virgins and golden treasure. But since such things are exceedingly rare in this day and age, the poor dragon has become very depressed, and is hardly ever seen.....

Date: c 1600?

Sources: Roberts p 11; Rhys p 690

4.8 The Fairy on the Anchor Chain

For well over a thousand years Pembrokeshire people have believed that far out in St Bride's Bay there are a number of mysterious islands inhabited by the *Tylwyth Teg* or Little People. Sometimes these enchanted islands were seen by sailors passing through St George's Channel and close to the Pembrokeshire coast. The pagan Celts in pre-Christian times believed that the Isles were a sort of paradise preserved for the souls of departed druids or heroes. People with special powers may see the islands, but most often they are hidden from the gaze of mere mortals. There are old traditions of sailors becalmed in the vicinity of Grassholm who saw the islands through the fog and who actually went ashore on them, meeting fairy folk into the bargain. But according to these old traditions these islands could disappear as quickly as they appeared, and nobody was ever capable of locating them again.

In 1896 an Ancient Mariner from Newport described how the people of Trefin believed that the Green Isles could be seen from Llanon or Eglwys Non in the village. And in Milford Haven it was widely believed that the Green Islands were off the entrance of the great waterway, "beautifully and tastefully arranged" and densely populated with fairies. People said that the fairies came to the town through a subterranean tunnel, and that they always patronised a certain butcher when doing their shopping. Sometimes they were visible and sometimes invisible, and they always paid for their meat with silver pennies.

According to some mariners, the "Green Meadows of Enchantment" actually lie not on enchanted islands but beneath the waves, and there are reports of becalmed seamen looking down through the clear waters near Grassholm and seeing a fine fertile land with meadows, hedgerows and copses of trees, meandering rivers and tidy villages and farms, with fish swimming above them just as the birds fly above our countryside today. Another old sea captain described how, on a fine summer day while sailing past Grassholm, he had seen a beautiful green meadow just a few feet beneath the sea surface, with the grass moving gently as the waves passed over it.

During the 1700's an old sailing ship captain told how he had been becalmed off the north Pembrokeshire coast, not far from Pwllgwaelod. He had decided to anchor for the night. Having ascertained that the water was quite shallow, he let down the anchor on its chain, and was leaning on the ship's rail enjoying the sunset when he was surprised by a little man climbing up the anchor chain out of the water. He clambered on board the ship and proved to be very angry indeed. In perfect Welsh, he protested to the captain that the anchor had crashed through his roof and into his dining room just as he had been settling down to enjoy his supper. What is more, the anchor had landed on his head, and he showed the captain the big lump just to prove it.....

Date: c 1896

Sources: Sikes p 9; Howells p 119, Rhys p 161

4.9 The Missing Treasure of Presely

There are a number of legends of missing treasure somewhere on the Presely Hills, possibly because the hills are so shrouded in mists and mysteries that there is bound to be a missing treasure somewhere...

One of the stories is about the Great Black Snake of Presely (see *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales* 4.9) which sank into the ground, taking its wonderful treasure with it, when it was disturbed by "a working man" many years ago. There is a tradition in Eglwysrwrw that beneath a certain flat stone on Carn Alw there is a hidden treasure, waiting to be discovered by anyone who is strong enough to lift the stone. Another tale refers to a leaden chest filled with gold and buried on the slopes of Freni Fawr. This treasure is said to be guarded by a "tremendous phantom with tempest in his train", which we can assume to be a dragon.

Giraldus Cambrensis told a very old story about a certain rich man who lived during the reign of King Henry I on the northern flank of the Presely Hills. He happened to live close to a sacred site dedicated to St Bernacus (St Brynach), where there was a healing spring or fountain. Probably this spring was near Penbedw, to the south of Carnedd Meibion Owen. The man dreamed on three successive nights that if he put his hand under the stone that capped the spring he would find there a magnificent treasure in the form of a golden torque. Unable to resist the message of the dream, the man went to the spring and put his hand under the stone, only to receive a deadly bite on his finger from a viper that happened to be hiding there. And so the rich man died, reminding Giraldus and his readers of the evils of greed..... The healing spring with its deadly guardian is now lost, as is the religious site associated with St Brynach.

One last clue to the whereabouts of the great Presely Treasure was given to a visitor to the area around Mynachlogddu in the middle of the last century. On enquiring as to why the people around Cwm Cerwyn and Glynsaethmaen were so poor, he was told that once upon a time they were all very wealthy. However, they became very jealous of their wealth, and being none too bright they convinced themselves that somebody might come and steal it from them. So they had a meeting and decided what to do. They waited until it was winter, and until they were convinced there were no strangers about. Then, in a frenzy, they put all their money, gold and silver ornaments, and family jewellery into a big mash tub (*cerwyn* in Welsh). At dead of night and afraid that somebody might see what they were up to, they crept out in the pitch darkness without torches, dragging the heavy mash tub after them. Then they buried it in a deep hole somewhere in the cwm.

Afterwards nobody could remember where the tub had been buried. Years later, they sent out search parties, and hunted all over the cwm for the mash tub. But they never found it, and that is why the people of Cwm Cerwyn have remained poor to this day.

Date: c 1750

Sources: Giraldus p 170; Miles 1984, p 34; Laws p 58



.... they sent out search parties, and hunted all over the cwm for the mash tub.

4.10 Incident in Cardigan

In the Cardigan area in the 1800s there were a number of tales in circulation concerning a strange animal referred to as the *ceffyl dwr*. It was sometimes in the form of a small and elegant pony which came from the sea and was likely to return to the sea, taking innocent victims with it. Farmers from outside the town said that it was in the form of a cart-horse or a Welsh cob which was mostly placid and sometimes violent; and it was well known that the animal could turn itself into other supernatural animals the likes of which had never been seen before. Some local people said that the *ceffyl dwr* could turn itself into a huge ferocious goat which terrorised the district at dead of night.

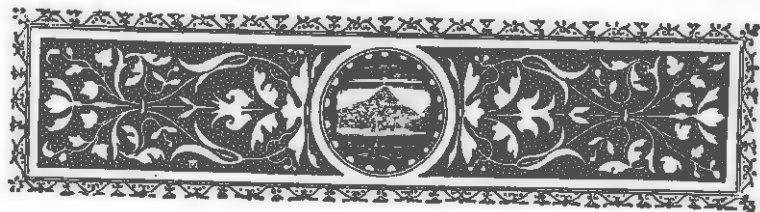
One encounter with the *ceffyl dwr* occurred in Cardigan around the year 1850. A well-known butter dealer who lived in the town was returning home late one night after visiting some friends. It was a dark stormy night with the new moon visible now and then as heavy clouds scudded across the sky. The man had just about enough light to find his way through the dim and shadowy cobbled streets. As he walked with his footsteps echoing around him he became aware that he was being followed. He began to feel frightened and walked more quickly, knowing that the sanctuary of his home was only a few minutes away.

But suddenly he felt a great weight pressing him against the wall, and he was able in the midst of his terror to make out the dim shape of a creature that was "part man and part goat." He felt the breath being pressed out of his lungs, and he knew that the terrible creature possessed a superhuman strength which was not of this world. Just as he was beginning to lose consciousness the creature disappeared, leaving him to tumble to the ground.

It took the butter merchant quite a while to recover his breath, and then he climbed painfully to his feet and staggered home. His wife was horrified to see the state he was in, and he remained in a state of shock for several hours before he finally fell asleep in his bed. In the morning the poor man's wife discovered that he had great black bruises all over his shoulders and arms, and these bruises took several weeks to heal. Some of the neighbours said afterwards that the merchant had been drinking too much and had taken a tumble on the way home; others claimed that he had been beaten up in the dark street by a gang of ruffians. But the man insisted to his dying day that he had had a very unpleasant encounter with the *ceffyl dwr*.

Date: c 1850

Source: Trevelyan p 63



4.11 The Stupid Giants of Presely

Long, long ago there were some very stupid giants who lived in the Presely Hills. Some of them lived on the north side of the hills and others on the south side. We can still find traces of these giants in the landscape; for example, one of them who was called Samson was responsible for flinging a great stone called Maengwyn Hir from the summit of Freni Fawr towards the tumulus of Castell y Blaidd. King Arthur must have been a giant, for he is credited with throwing the great capstone of the Pentre Ifan cromlech (also referred to as Coetan Arthur) all the way to its present position from a site five miles away on the south side of the mountain ridge. Arthur also placed in position a huge "rocking stone" which is perched precariously on the summit of Carn Arthur.

The Presely giants had a very bad habit of killing each other, which is why there are none of them left today. There are two legends which tell us what happened to the last of the giants.

On the north side of the mountains, the last giants were three brothers who were the sons of a mighty giant called Owain or Owen. He owned much land around Cilgwyn and Tycanol, and when he died he foolishly omitted to leave a will. The three sons, being none too bright, could not agree how to split up the land between them. They began to argue, and the argument became more and more fierce until it turned into a pitched battle. First one of them fell in the battle, then the second; but the last son did not live to enjoy his ill-gotten gains for he was so badly unjured that he too fell down and died. The three mighty brothers were turned into stone where they lay, and the great rocks called Carnedd Meibion Owen still dominate the hill summit above the oakwoods of Tycanol. The land was taken over by mere mortals, and they farm it well to this day.

The last of the giants on the south side of Presely lived on Foel Dyrch. There were three of them, one giant and two giantesses. Naturally enough, both giantesses were in love with this last giant; but he, being stupid, could not make his mind up as to which one he should marry. At last the situation became so tense that the two giantesses started quarrelling for the hand of the giant, and the quarrel turned into a fight, with each giantess hurling rocks and boulders at the other. As the battle continued, the whole of the hill summit became covered with great stones. At last each giantess picked up a particularly huge boulder and hurled it at the other in a last defiant gesture; and they were both struck on the head and killed at the same moment. The poor giant was greatly affected by this, since he was now left without a mate. He buried the two giantesses between the hills of Foel Dyrch and Crugiau Dwy and marked the spot with a rough cross with each arm about 17 yards long. Then he wasted away and died of grief, leaving the litter of boulders on the battlefield as a testimony to the very unwise behaviour of his female suitors.

And that was the end of the Presely giants, who might still be ruling the bleak hills to this day had they been a little less bad-tempered.....

Date: c 600 AD?

Source: Laws 1897

4.12 The Beautiful Shui Rhys

No good would come of it, said the neighbours, since she was far too beautiful for her own good. Shui was indeed very beautiful, only seventeen years old, tall and elegant, with skin like ivory. She had black curling hair which shone like Pembrokeshire anthracite, and those who knew her said her eyes were like dark velvet.

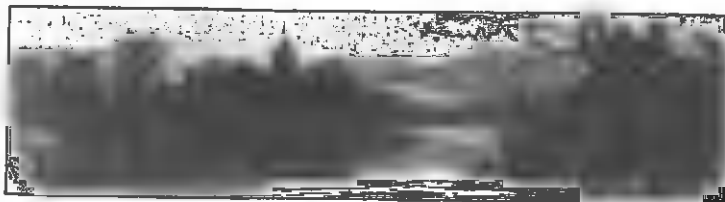
She lived with her widowed mother in a poor cottage in the Teifi valley, not far from Cilgerran. Every day she had the task of driving the family cows back and forth between their grazing meadow and the cowshed at milking times; but almost every day she angered her mother by loitering on the way, picking flowers, chasing butterflies, or sitting and watching rabbits in the fields. Some of the neighbours complained that Mrs Rhys chided the girl too much, and that her sharp tongue would lead to trouble.

One day Shui went to fetch the cows early in the morning and did not reappear until bed-time, having left her mother to deal with the animals all by herself. Naturally, the mother worried terribly all day about her daughter's whereabouts. When the girl came home she got a real telling-off from the old lady, to which Shui replied "I am sorry, mami, but I couldn't help it. I have been with the *Tylwyth Teg*." Mrs Rhys was aghast at this, but she knew that there were fairies in the woods between Cilgerran and Cardigan, and so she urged her daughter to tell her more. Reluctantly, Shui confessed that the fairies were little men in green coats, who danced around her and made music on their tiny harps. They spoke to her in a language too beautiful to be repeated; and although she could not understand the words she knew well enough what they meant.

After that Shui went missing on many occasions, but neither her mother nor the neighbours could bring themselves to chide her or to shut her into the house, for fear of offending the *Tylwyth Teg*. At last, one night Shui did not come home at all. In alarm her mother called out all the neighbours, and they searched the woods all the way to Cardigan town. But there was no sign of her, and she was never seen again. Her mother watched in the cow meadow on the *Teir-nos Ysprydion* (the three nights of the year when the goblins are said to be out and about); but her beautiful daughter never returned. Years later there was a wild rumour in the neighbourhood that she had been seen in some great city in a foreign land, but the general belief was that she had been carried off to fairyland and had decided to stay there in order to enjoy its constant delights and to escape the sharp tongue of her mother.

Date: c 1850

Source: Sikes p 67



4.13 The Farm-hand and the Fairy Dance

There were two farm servants called Rhys and Llewellyn, who worked on a farm not far from St Dogmael's. One fine evening they were returning home from the fields at twilight, when Rhys suddenly stopped in his tracks and said that he could hear fairy music. Llew could hear nothing, but Rhys insisted that it was a tune to which he had danced a hundred times before. "You go on home," he said to his friend. "I shall dance a bit, and I'll soon catch you up again." Llew shrugged his shoulders and continued on his way, assuming that his friend was off into Cardigan and would be back home, the worse for drink, early in the morning.

But the morning came, and there was no sign of Rhys. The farmer and the other farm servants searched high and low, but could find no trace of him. They made enquiries in Cardigan, but none of the innkeepers could remember seeing the young man. The days grew into months, and with no sign of Rhys suspicion at last grew that Llewellyn had murdered him and disposed of the body in the woods. So Llew was arrested by the constable and thrown into prison accused of murder. There he languished, protesting his innocence and swearing that Rhys had heard music and had said he was going off to dance.

Eventually an old farmer heard the sad story of Llewellyn, and being experienced in matters to do with the *Tylwyth Teg* he suggested that he should go with Llew and some of his neighbours to the spot where the two friends had parted. The constable reluctantly agreed, and Llew was released just for the old farmer's investigation. Off they all went to the spot where Rhys had last been seen, and as they searched around the woodland glade Llew suddenly said "Hush! I can hear music! I can hear the sweet music of the harps!" Nobody else could hear anything, but the old farmer noticed that the lad had his left foot on the edge of a fairy ring. Immediately he caught hold of Llew and placed his left foot on top of the lad's right foot. Then a neighbour placed his foot on top of the farmer's other foot, and so on until they had all made a sort of human chain. Now they could all hear the fairy music, and as they watched they saw little people dancing round in a circle. And there, weaving in and out in a frenzy, was Rhys, the missing farm servant.

Rhys whirled past Llew several times, but then, with the others hanging onto him for dear life, he grabbed his dancing friend and pulled him out of the circle. And with that they all fell in a great pile on the ground, and the circle and the dancing fairies disappeared, and the music stopped. Rhys was very excited, shouting out "Where are the horses? Where are the horses?" Llew was not at all amused, and snorted in reply "Horses indeed! Come on home, now, and forget about the horses." But Rhys wanted to continue dancing, and declared that he had only been there for five minutes. "Huh!" said Llew. "You've been there more than five minutes, my friend. Almost long enough to get me hanged, anyhow!"

And with that they all dragged Rhys home, protesting violently that he must continue dancing. They put him to bed and gradually he settled down. But before many days had passed he sank into a deep state of melancholy. Not long after that, he died.

Date: c 1850

Source: Sikes p 70

4.14 The Eagle, the Owl and the Wren

There are many old tales about birds in the Pembrokeshire folk-lore tradition, and this charming one used to be told in the Solva area. It concerns a contest among the birds for the one that should be king.

All the birds of the air which lived in Dewisland thought that they should elect a king. So they held a conference in a great oak tree in Solva, and it was decided that the bird which could fly highest would become undisputed ruler. Naturally enough, everybody expected that the eagle would win the contest, for he was a truly majestic bird, and all had seen him gliding so high on the thermals that he appeared no larger than a speck in the high blue heavens. On the appointed day up they all went into the sky, with one bird after another giving up the contest. At last only the eagle was left, and when he had flown so high that he had not an ounce of strength remaining, he proclaimed (as loudly as he could, considering that he was exhausted) that he was undisputed king. But then a little voice said "No, No, not yet, my friend", and a wren which had been hiding in the eagle's back feathers flitted up a few yards higher. "Come up here if you can", said the wren. But the eagle had no strength left, and so the wren became King of all the Birds of Dewisland.

When the birds assembled again in the great oak tree after the competition, they were sad and sorrowful that they had acquired a scruffy little wren as a king, and they all cried bitter tears. Afterwards, when the wren was away on royal business, they met in solemn conclave, and they decided to drown the king in their tears, which they though would be suitably symbolic. So the thieving magpie went off and stole a pan, and then they all wept into it and filled it with tears. The last one to make a contribution was the clumsy old owl, and he hopped up onto the edge of the pan with his big eyes full of tears, and in doing so tipped it over and spilled the contents onto the ground below. The other birds were enraged at this, and swore vengeance against the owl. But before they could catch him he flew away.

Since that day the owl has not dared to show himself during daylight hours for fear of being caught by the other birds. So he has to seek his food at night, when all the other birds are asleep. The little wren is King of the Birds of Dewisland to this day. And as for the once-mighty eagle, he was so embarrassed by the outcome of the competition that he flew away from Dewisland, and has never been seen there since

Date: c 1300?

Sources: Davies p 224; Parry-Jones 1988, p 154



..... everybody expected that the eagle would win the contest, for he was a truly majestic bird.



4.15 The Last Dragon

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, there was a terrible dragon that lived in the Teifi Valley. Sometimes it was described as a *gwiber* or flying serpent, but if we had seen it we would certainly have called it a dragon, for it had great wings and breathed flames and had a hard scaly skin. It was mostly seen in the Cenarth - Newcastle Emlyn area, and people feared that it would take their animals or destroy their houses.

One hot summer's day around the year 1763 the town of Newcastle Emlyn was crowded with people, for there was a fair in progress. There was music and dancing, and the streets were alive with animated conversations as the townspeople mingled with farmers and labourers from the surrounding countryside. The inns were filled to overflowing, for it was a thirsty sort of day. Suddenly somebody looked up, and pointed into the sky. More and more people looked up too, and the men gasped and the women screamed, for there, high above them, was the terrible dragon, gliding down and coming closer and closer. In horror, they watched as it alighted on the topmost battlement of the castle ruins.

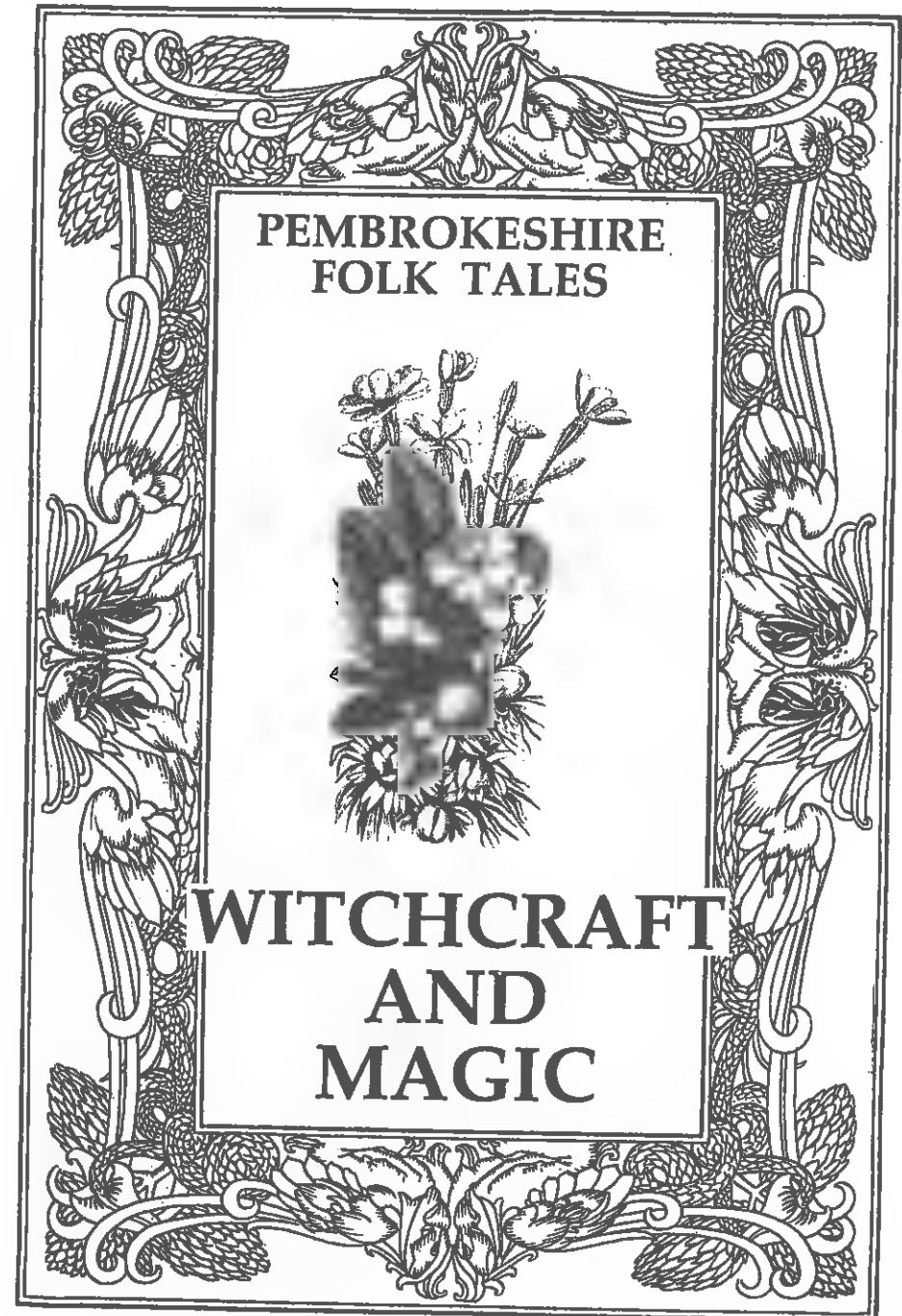
The people were in a panic, and some thought that they should try to kill the monster before it killed them. But covered as it was with hard scales, it seemed indestructible, and so long as it breathed flames and fumes, nobody dared to get too close to it. But there was one young man in the crowd who was a valiant soldier, recently returned from fighting the French on land and sea. As he looked up at the dragon he noticed that it had one vulnerable part -- its soft underbelly. This had not mattered so much in the days of swords and spears; but this, thought the soldier, was the Age of Firearms. So he rushed back to his lodgings to fetch his gun, and then came as close to the castle as he dared. He saw that the best view of the dragon on its battlement was from the river down below; so he took off his boots and his shirt and waded into the river, carrying his gun in one hand and a rolled-up red flannel cloth in the other. He got as close as he dared, and then, when he had the best possible view of the dragon's navel, he took careful aim with his musket and fired.

As the dragon was hit it let out a mighty roar of pain and fury, and saw the soldier in the river below. It leaped from the battlement and swooped down to the water to attack the young man, as the watching crowds screamed a warning to him. But in an instant he unrolled the red flannel cloth and spread it on the surface. Then he dived and swam away underwater as fast as he could. Frantically he struck out for the far bank as the dragon attacked the red cloth and ripped it to pieces. The soldier soon had to come up for air, but as he did so he saw that the river was running red with dragon's blood. The great beast was mortally wounded, and as the crowd watched in horrified silence its fury abated and its roars subsided and the flames from its nostrils faded away. And there, in the River Teifi beneath the walls of the castle, the last dragon in Wales died a sad and pathetic death.

Of course, the young soldier immediately became a local hero, and the celebrations in the town went on far into the night. But with the killing of the last dragon, Wales was never quite the same again.....

Date: c 1763

Source: Davies p 228



5.1 The Cunning Man of Pentregethin

Once upon a time there was a strange old man who lived in a house called Pentregethin or Pentregethen. He was believed to be a Wizard, and was referred to in Welsh as a *dyn hysbys* or "knowing one". Nowadays he would perhaps be referred to as a diviner, spiritualist or seer. His reputation locally was much greater than that of parsons or conventional doctors, and there are still vague memories in Pembrokeshire of his "wonderful actions" in ascertaining the state of health of absent friends and performing deeds which ordinary people were quite incapable of explaining.

The Cunning Man was most famous for his ability to control the weather, and he was able to sell either fair winds or foul winds to his clients. Sailors often came to him before embarking on a voyage in order to buy favourable winds, but unfortunately he seemed to prefer to sell foul winds to those who wished harm to come upon either sailors or local sailing vessels. For this reason he was assumed to be more closely in touch with evil spirits than with the good spirits or fairies.

It may be assumed that The Cunning Man practised his strange and deadly craft in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century. Maybe he had something to do with the terrible wreck of the *Phoebe and Peggy* in 1773, or the disaster linked with the plunder at Druidston of the wreck of the *Increase* in 1791? Other vessels sunk in St Bride's Bay in the same period were the *John and Michael* (1794) and the *Rose* (1795). The *Mary and Susanna* was lost on the Smalls in 1753, and at the other end of the bay we know of the wreck of the *Morva* in 1793 off St David's Head, and the full-rigged ship *Providence* near the North Bishop Rock in 1797. But most of these vessels were sailing neither to nor from Pembrokeshire ports.

We may suppose that The Cunning Man worked mostly on the fate of local small trading ships or fishing boats sailing out of Porth Clais, Solva, Fishguard or Abercastle. Many of these were lost with all hands and without trace, victims of the cruel stormy seas around the Pembrokeshire coast. And many of these losses were never even recorded in the port books of the day, giving rise to strange and dark tales of intervention by the man who lived at Pentregethin.....

Date: c 1750

Sources: Howells p 86; Trevelyan p 117

Maybe he had something to do with the terrible wreck of the "Phoebe and Peggy" in 1773.



5.2 The Passing of Old Dr Harries

Early in the month of May, 1839, a man living near Nevern saw a most unusual death-light or *canwyll gorff* as he walked home one evening. This one was glowing with a light green colour as distinct from the death-lights normally reported from the parish, which were light blue in colour. The man knew that this must be the death light of somebody special. Accordingly he kept his ears open for news of a death in the neighbourhood. But then he heard that on 11th May "Old Dr Harries" of Caio, near Pumpsaint, had died, and then he knew why the death light had been something special. For Dr Harries himself had been a very special man.

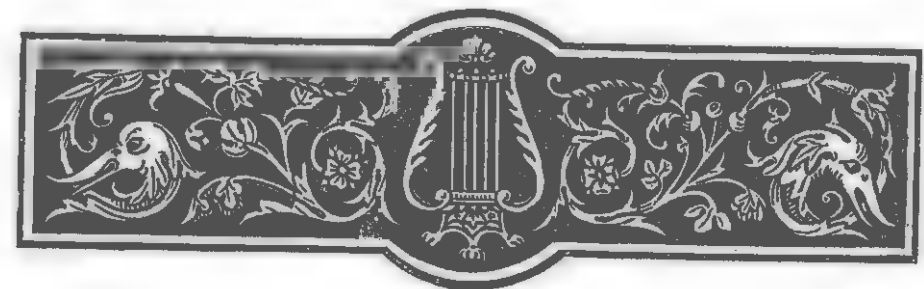
There are many records of Wise Men or Wizards who worked in West Wales, and we can include among them "Old Dr Harries" of Pant-Cou or Cwrt-y-Cadno, and his son "Young Dr Harries" who died in 1862. Both John Harries (the father) and Henry Harries (the son) were trained doctors and brilliant surgeons. Old Dr Harries was a pioneer in the use of hypnosis, which he used with great success in the treatment of depressed and nervous patients. He was also remarkably clever in the performance of autopsies, and one of his hobbies was researching into the phenomena of extra-sensory perception. Perhaps not surprisingly in view of these activities, many local people came to see the good doctor as a magician or *dyn hysbys*, assuming that he had second sight and that he was in close touch with the powers of darkness. Whatever the truth of the matter, there are certainly many strange stories about Dr Harries and his son.

These two wizards were respected and feared throughout the region, for they were astrologers, healers, detectives, psychologists and a great deal besides. According to many hundreds of people who beat a pathway to their door, they could both cast spells and remove the effects of spells cast by others. They could identify those who had "The Evil Eye", and they could explain the inexplicable and name those who had been guilty of theft or other offences even without visiting the scenes of crimes committed.

When the old doctor died, it is said that all his books on witchcraft had to be burned in order to free his house (Pant-Cou) from evil spirits. And it is said that the route followed by the funeral procession on its way to the church yard is still cold and ghostly, even on the warmest of summer days.....

Date: 1839

Sources: Evans Wentz p 155; Pugh p 51



5.3 Old Levi Salmon of Cilgwyn

Around 1880 an old man called Levi Salmon was well known in the Newport (Pemb) area as a *dyn hysbys* or magician. He was also referred to as "Dr Cwac". He lived in the house called Plas y Ffynnon, not far from Temple Bar. He had the power to make hares appear and disappear at will, and like others in his family he had a special ability to communicate with animals. He was reputed to be able to call up good and bad spirits, but preferred to deal with those of a kindly disposition since they were less dangerous. He would only call up the bad spirits if he had to, and then he would insist that another person kept him company since for him it was a terrible ordeal.

If he was required to help some person by calling up demons he would first consult his magic books, and then he would draw a circle on the ground. He would then call upon the spirits, and bulls, serpents, and other animals would appear within the circle to answer his questions. It was not safe to approach them too closely, and in order to keep them under control and within the circle old Levi would hold a whip in his hand, and use it if necessary. He would never let the creatures cross the circle. When he was satisfied that he had obtained the information he needed, he would ask the spirits to go away; but first he had to call down the chief spirit and throw something into the circle. When all the spirits had departed, and all was quiet again, old Levi would be quite exhausted, and would take some time to recover. Then, later on, he would go to his client and reveal the secret he had obtained.

One day a neighbour from Cilgwyn, who happened to have some fine plum trees in his garden, called in a state of some agitation to see Old Levi. It was a fine warm September, and there was a heavy crop of plums on the trees, but the neighbour complained that somebody was getting into the garden and stealing the plums whenever he was out in the fields. He had a pretty good idea who the culprit was - a young man called Tom who lived nearby and who had a reputation for thieving. But he had no proof, and now he called on Levi to give him some help. "Just leave it to me," said the old man mysteriously. "You won't be troubled any more."

Next day Levi's neighbour was out in the field working on the corn harvest when he heard a terrible commotion coming from the direction of his garden. Somebody was shouting and screaming as if in mortal danger, and the neighbour immediately ran back to see what was going on. As he arrived home, he caught a glimpse of young Tom rushing off down the lane, screaming that he was being attacked by adders. When he got home he was in a state of shock, and admitted to his parents that he had gone into the garden to pinch a few plums, only to find when he got there that he was surrounded by a writhing mass of adders. He had not been bitten, but the shock was enough to put the lad off stealing for the rest of his life.

After this, there were no more thefts of plump plums from the neighbour's garden, and he could not help reflecting on the fact that he never saw an adder in his garden before, or after, that fine day in September.

Date: c 1880

Source: Evans Wentz p 15

5.4 Apples can Ruin your Health

Once upon a time (around the year 1810) there was an old witch who lived in a small village in the Welsh-speaking part of Pembrokeshire. Let us say that the village was Maenclochog. The old lady was known at the time as a *gwraig hyspys*, and she was credited with many remarkable feats involving second sight, spells, and magic.

One hot day in the month of September a young man passed her garden and saw that her wonderful apple trees were laden down with ripe juicy apples. He was greatly tempted, and decided that nobody would miss a few apples since there was such a prolific crop. So he hopped over the hedge when nobody was looking, took off his shirt to turn it into a sort of makeshift bag, and filled it with apples. Then he hurried off home, quite sure that nobody had seen him.

Next day he fell mysteriously ill, and although his mother fed him plenty of ripe apples to make him better, he got worse and worse.

The doctor could not decide what the cause of the illness was, nor could he give it a name. For several weeks the young man remained in bed, with his family becoming more and more worried. At last the young thief admitted to his mother that he had pinched the apples from the old lady down the road, and it immediately became clear to her that the old witch had placed the "evil eye" on her son.

Without further ado, the mother gathered up all the apples that were left, and took them in a bag back to the old witch. She apologised profusely for her son's wickedness, and as soon as the apples had been returned the young man was restored to perfect good health. After that, he stole no more apples from the old lady's garden, and neither did anybody else in the village, since news of such things as the mystery illness travels fast in a small community.

Date: c 1810

Source: Howells p 89



5.5 A Merry Dance for the Squire

Once upon a time there was an old lady called Nansi who lived in a rented cottage between Cardigan and Cilgerran. She had something of a reputation as a *gwrach* or witch, but she was friendly enough, and lived with her little grand-daughter whose name was Bethan.

Nearby there was a big mansion house, occupied by a squire who was well known in sporting circles as a huntsman. He owned the old lady's home, and many other cottages in the neighbourhood, but he charged high rents and made life difficult for his tenants. He was an arrogant man, not well liked in the community, and old Nansi found it hard to pay the rent with hardly any money coming in from week to week. One day he had a furious row with the old lady, and threatened to throw her and young Bethan out onto the street unless they kept up their rent payments. There was not much that Nansi could do, but one day she told her grand-daughter that she would teach the squire a lesson he would not forget in a hurry.

Not long after, old Nansi looked down towards the big house and saw that the squire was setting off towards the big fields with his dogs on a hare-coursing expedition. "Now then, Bethan bach," said Nansi, "we will give them a bit of a chase." And before the girl knew what was happening her grandmother had disappeared. She looked all over the cottage and then noticed a big hare near the front door. She opened the door, and the



Old Nansi found it hard to pay the rent with hardly any money coming in from week to week.

hare bounded off towards the fields. Then the squire saw the hare. He had one particularly fine black hound which was walking to heel, and he pointed at the hare with the command "Now, black dog!" Away sprang the hound towards the hare, and Bethan watched with horror as it came ever closer to its quarry.

Then Bethan shouted at the top of her voice "Now, grandma!", and watched with fascination as the hare took off across the field with the black hound in pursuit. Far into the distance they went, with the black dog after the hare, and the squire (who was somewhat overweight) puffing along after the dog. There was an almighty commotion, with the squire yelling and the other dogs barking. All the time Bethan saw that the hare kept just far enough ahead of the dog to keep the chase going, so that both the dog and the squire believed that it would soon be caught. Through hedges and over ditches they went, with the dog getting more and more exhausted and the squire more and more muddled and covered with thorns and thistles as he slipped and fell over and over again. With a feeling of wonderment Bethan noticed that the hare did not seem to tire at all, rushing around with boundless energy across one field after another, and tempting and teasing both the dog and its master.

When this had gone on for a while various neighbours, attracted by all the noise, turned up to watch the performance, and soon their laughter echoed around the big fields and along the country lanes. With every twist and turn of the chase they cheered the hare on, while the squire became more and more furious with his predicament. At last he collapsed from sheer exhaustion, and so did his black dog. Watched by the ecstatic neighbours, the hare pranced around them a few times, as if to taunt them, and then loped off towards Nansi's cottage. On the way it passed Bethan, who had been standing on the hedge watching the entertainment from beginning to end. It hopped into the little garden, over the doorstep and in through the front door. Bethan ran inside after the hare, and when she got to the kitchen there was old Nansi again, sitting by the fire with a cheerful rosy glow on her face. Bethan said nothing, and neither did her grandmother, but they were both delighted about a job well done.

The news of the squire's adventure with the cheeky hare travelled fast through the area, and there was loud laughter in the local inns as the tale was told and re-told many times over. The poor man was quite poorly for several weeks as a result of his exertions in the chase, and indeed as a result of the indignity he had suffered. He became the butt of many jokes among the poor tenants on his estate and also among the local gentry. His reputation as a great sportsman was damaged beyond repair.

But strange to relate, the squire became a better man as a result of the episode with the hare, and he never again treated his tenants with arrogance and disdain. He had a suspicion that the whole thing had something to do with old Nansi, although he could of course never prove it. Anyway, for the rest of her life the old lady was treated with courtesy and respect by her landlord, and life for young Bethan became a little more bearable as a result. Bethan never forgot the events of that exciting day, and many years afterwards she told the story to a young man who wrote it down for future generations to enjoy.

Date: c 1770?

Source: Howells p 89

5.6 Abe Biddle and the Stolen Painting

The best-known soothsayer or *dyn hysbys* in Pembrokeshire in the early years of the nineteenth century was Dr Joseph Harries of Werndew, near Dinas. He was always known as Abe Biddle. Some people believed that he was in league with the devil, but there are no tales of him doing evil and indeed he seems to have had a substantial reputation for righting wrongs and assisting in the recovery of lost animals from local farms.

Stolen property seems to have been a particular speciality as far as Abe Biddle was concerned. One day a wealthy woman came up the track to Werndew in her carriage and reported to the soothsayer that a very valuable painting which had hung in her house had disappeared. There were no signs of a burglar entering the house, and no damage had been done. On hearing the story from his client, Abe at once suspected an "inside job." So he got out his magic mirror, and said to the lady "Now let's see what we can do!"

The two of them sat in the living room and watched the mirror. After a time, an image appeared in the mirror and the lady exclaimed that she recognized a very good friend of the family. She could hardly believe that such a person could have been guilty of the theft, but she confirmed to Abe that the family was in financial difficulties and that her friend might have been driven by desperation to the theft of the painting. No doubt she hoped to travel to London with it and to sell it there.

Having asked his client for the name of the culprit, Abe wrote it onto a piece of paper, and pierced it with a needle. He then turned to the lady and said "Your friend will now start to feel ill, and she will know that if she does not return the painting immediately she will be eaten up with a strange disease. I suggest, Madam, that you go home and await developments." The lady was somewhat taken aback by this turn of events, but she agreed to do as Abe Biddle suggested. She took her leave of the good doctor, returned to her coach and clattered off down the track towards Dinas. She lived a fair distance away, and by the time she arrived home half an hour had passed. As she alighted from her coach she was met by one of her servants, who handed to her a large flat parcel wrapped up in brown paper. He said that a strange horseman with a great scarf over his face had ridden up to the house at high speed just a few minutes before, and had left the parcel without saying a word before galloping off again. Naturally enough, when the lady opened the parcel, she found her precious painting inside.

A week later the lady and her guilty friend met socially, and the lady asked after her health. "Oh, I feel much better, thank you," came the reply. "I had been planning a trip to London, but a week ago I suddenly came over feeling very ill, and had to cancel my plans. But I have been getting better gradually, and now I feel quite well again."

Date: c 1810

Source: Davies p 263



5.7 Magic Signs at Cresswell

Cresswell Quay is a beautiful spot at the inner end of the Cresswell River, one of the tidal creeks of the Milford Haven waterway. Now it is a sleepy place, but once there was hectic activity here with every high tide, as small vessels tied at the quay to take on cargoes of coal.

Not far from the Quay, on Cresswell Hill, there is a little valley called Cottage Dingle, in which there is a well. This well is associated in local legend with a number of ghostly figures who were referred to as "The White Ladies". We do not know how long ago these ghosts were in residence, but the locals were considerably frightened by them. Some time in the 1700s the mysterious spirits were banished from the vicinity by a local magician. He adopted the unusual technique of carving pentacles (five-pointed stars used as charms or occult symbols) into the bark of a number of beech trees alongside the road on Cresswell Hill. No doubt he also went through some form of exorcism at the same time. About a hundred years ago one of these pentacles could still be seen on the trunk of one of these beeches, about 15 feet above the ground.

Around 1890 a Pembrokeshire gentleman passed by a remote house in the vicinity of Cresswell which was occupied by an old Magician. He saw a number of pentacles cut into the bark of oak trees near the house, and asked the old man a few questions concerning the meaning of the strange signs. However, all he got in response was the following remark, short and to the point: "They be signs."

Date: c 1790

Source: Davies p 285

5.8 The Bewitched Cattle

Once upon a time there was a celebrated witch who lived near Mathry. She had something of a reputation for bewitching farm animals, and was thought quite capable of causing trouble if she had a grudge against one or other of the local farmers. Local people also believed that she sometimes cast spells to order, for an appropriate fee.

One summers morning, bright and early, the servant-girl of a farm in the neighbourhood went down to the meadow to fetch the cows back to the farm for milking. When she got there she found all the cows sitting on their haunches like cats before a fire; and no matter how much she pushed them and shouted at them they refused to move. She went back to the farm and reported the problem to her master. He was involved in some dispute with the old witch, and immediately suspected that she had cast a spell. So he went off angrily to her cottage and told her off in no uncertain manner. Maybe he also came to some agreement over the dispute; but at any rate the old lady then followed him down to the meadow where the cows were still squatting. She told the farmer that there was nothing at all wrong with the cattle, and she went round the herd touching each animal lightly on the back. Immediately, the cows got back onto their feet and started to head for the cow-shed where they were to be milked.

Date: c 1800?

Source: Davies p 236

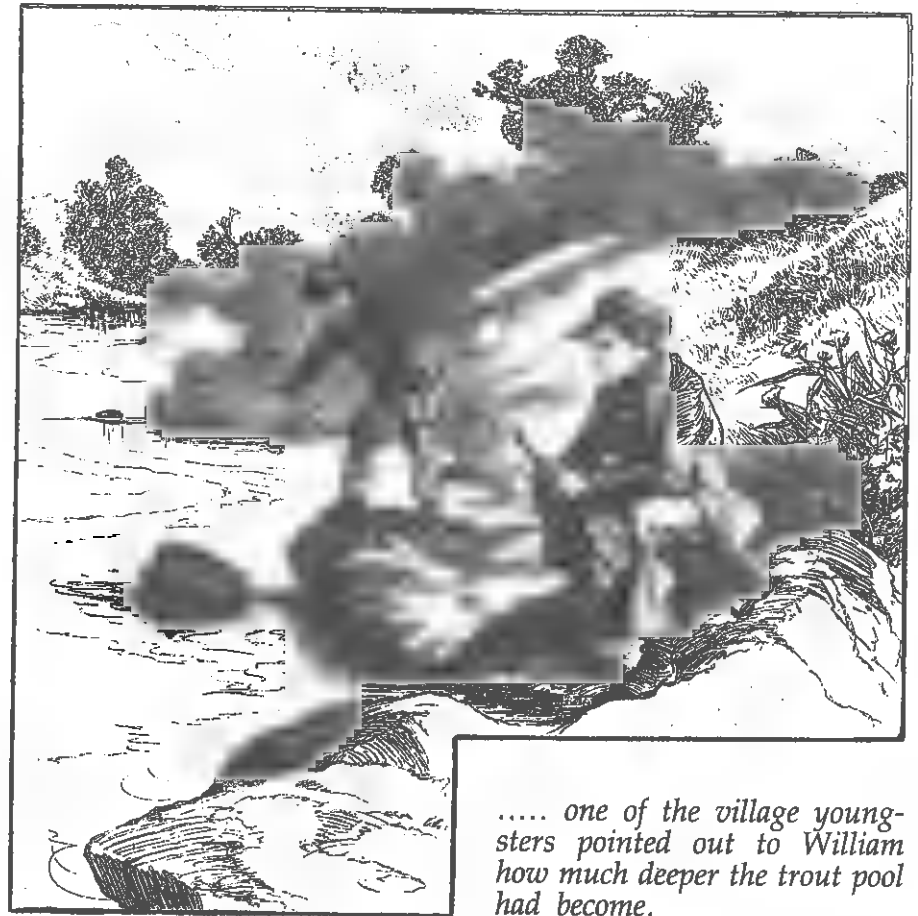
5.9 William Gwyn and his Magic Book

There have been many wise men or sorcerers in Pembrokeshire over the centuries, ranging from Merlin the Wizard in the Dark ages to a number of "quack doctors" in the early part of the present century. Sometimes they were called "conjurers", magicians or enchanters because of their ability to perform what appeared to be magic tricks. However, because they were gifted with second sight they are better described as diviners or seers. The Welsh term *dyn hysbys* (literally "the knowing one") was used in the Welsh-speaking parts of Pembrokeshire, and this gives a good clue to the role of such men in the community. They very seldom did mischief, but were used by members of the public for removing curses or spells and for solving problems or curing mysterious ailments.

Among the best known Wise Men practising in Pembrokeshire within the last 200 years were Wil Tiriet of Caerfarchell (around 1840); John Jenkin of Nevern (around 1790); Joseph Harries, otherwise known as Abe Biddle, of Werndew, Dinas (around 1810); William Gwyn of Little Newcastle (around 1800); Levi Salmon of Cilgwyn, Newport (around 1880); and Dr John Harries (the father) and Dr Henry Harries (the son) of Pant-cou in Carmarthenshire, both of whom did much work in Pembrokeshire around 1820 - 1850.

In the old days many of the Wise Men had a good knowledge of herbal medicine and alchemy, and perhaps it was inevitable that in the superstitious mind they should be accused of witchcraft and even of working on behalf of the devil. It was commonly said that they practised "the Black Art", and that they used the devil in the form of various familiar spirits for doing their work. Bulls, donkeys, black dogs, geese, cats, black calves and many other animals appear in the old stories as doing the bidding of various Wise Men. Sometimes the spirits would be in the form of balls of fire, or stones, or even wooden bowls. It was important that these spirits should be summoned in the correct way and dismissed in the correct way, or great harm could come to the Sorcerer. The old story of the Sorcerer's Apprentice shows just how easy it is for things to go wrong. People believed that many of the important instructions for dealing with evil spirits were contained in ancient books which were normally kept under lock and key. It was said that old Dr Harries of Pant-Cou took his great book out for consultation only once a year, and that he only consulted it when on the inside of a magic circle. And according to legend this annual event would always cause a great thunderstorm in the vicinity of Pant-Cou.

We know remarkably little about William Gwyn apart from the fact that as a young man he was not too skilled in his craft. He lived at a place called Olmws or Holmus near Little Newcastle. Not far away was the River Afon Anghof, which ran down from the Presely Hills. One fine day he was sitting on the bank of the river consulting his magic book, and he decided that he would try to summon up a familiar spirit. He followed the instructions carefully, and suddenly a terrible demon appeared out of thin air. In a thunderous voice it demanded to know what task it should undertake. William was at first greatly taken aback, but he knew that evil spirits had to be set to work as soon as they appeared, and he also knew that they would always obey instructions. He was quick-witted enough to



..... one of the village youngsters pointed out to William how much deeper the trout pool had become.

say to the demon "Go back to my house and fetch the riddle from my coalshed! And then come back here and empty the river with it!" So the demon rushed off and returned with the riddle, and set to work with ferocious energy in trying to empty the river. Water flew in all directions, and the demon managed only to deepen one pool in the river.

William had not read so far in his book that he knew how to get rid of demons, but while the demon continued with its futile task he was able to find the correct instructions. These he gave to the demon in a loud voice, and it promptly disappeared. William was greatly relieved, and after that he was very cautious indeed in the matter of summoning up spirits. Later on, one of the village youngsters pointed out to William how much deeper the trout pool had become, but William simply smiled a mysterious smile.

Date: c 1800

Source: Davies p 246

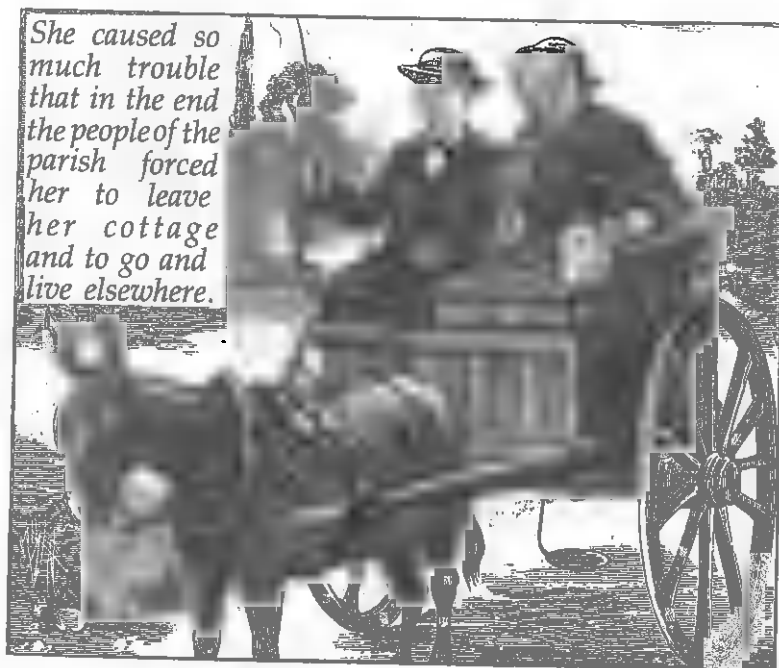
5.10 The Old Witch at Jordanston

In the early nineteenth century there was a tradition in the Fishguard area that the only way of undoing the evil spell of a witch was to take out the heart of a bewitched animal and to burn it after filling it with iron objects such as pins and nails. On the completion of this gruesome business, it was further believed that the smoke from the burning heart would drift towards the witches house, regardless of the direction of the wind.

Around 1880 the Rev J.W. Evans, whose father was Rector of Jordanston, was told by an old woman of that parish that when she was young there was an old witch who lived nearby. She was suspected of bewitching the cattle of a poor farmer who was a near neighbour. She caused so much trouble that in the end the people of the parish forced her to leave her cottage and to go and live elsewhere. However, no sooner had she left than the poor farmer's best cow died, and several of his suckling calves also became ill. It was immediately realised that the angry and resentful old woman had placed a curse upon the farm. Someone who knew about witchcraft suggested that the only thing to do in the circumstances was to take the dead cow's heart and burn it in a big fire. This was done, and next day the old woman returned, as if drawn by some irresistible force, and healed the calves before going away again. After that, the poor farmer's animals enjoyed the best of health.

Date: c 1830

Source: Davies p 239



5.11 The Witch and the Baker's Wife

There was once an old witch in Fishguard who caused a great deal of trouble among the householders and shop-keepers. She would come knocking at people's doors and would ask for food and clothing, and said that she would cast a spell on anybody who refused to help her. So people used to do her bidding, afraid lest they offended her.

One of the shops regularly visited by the old witch was a bakery owned by Mr Rees. His wife eventually became fed up with all the calls on her charity, since times were not all that good for her own family, with children to feed and bills to be paid. So she determined to make a stand next time the old woman called, and asked among her friends about the most effective ways of finding protection against evil spells. She was advised to obtain a large iron nail from the blacksmith's shop, and this she did. Next time the old witch called, Mrs Rees opened the door, taking care to have the nail under her foot on the floor. She listened to the usual begging and threatening, but replied "Get away from my door! I am not afraid of you any longer, for I have my foot on a nail!" In a great rage, the old witch shuffled off down the street, muttering to herself. But Mrs Rees kept her foot firmly on the nail until she went round the corner, and in doing so protected herself from the spells cast in her direction. After that, Mrs Rees was not bothered again by the old woman.

Date: c 1840

Source: Davies p 239

5.12 Witchcraft at Honey Harfat

During the eighteenth century every self-respecting community in Pembrokeshire had its share of witches, and quite often innocent people with eccentric mannerisms were falsely accused of witchcraft. But one witch of whom people were genuinely afraid lived near Haverfordwest, which was known by the locals as Honey Harfat

We do not know precisely where this old witch lived, but she terrorised the local farmers and peasantry for many years. She had the gift of second sight, and would inform neighbours (quite accurately) about events which would happen in their lives in the future. She had the ability to find lost objects, and helped in the recovery of many items which had been stolen. But her darker side predominated, and she seemed to rejoice in doing mischief and in casting spells on innocent victims. Those whom she disliked would be subjected to wicked pranks, causing "everything to go upside down with them". It was said that she could transform herself into a black cat, which would haunt the houses of those she disliked.

There were rumours in the community that the old witch would consort with fellow witches on summer evenings in a dark wooded glen near the town, where strange dances and magic ceremonies took place. Some people even said that the old woman had sold her soul to "the prince of the air", and could therefore fly about in the sky on the proverbial broomstick... ..

Date: c 1780

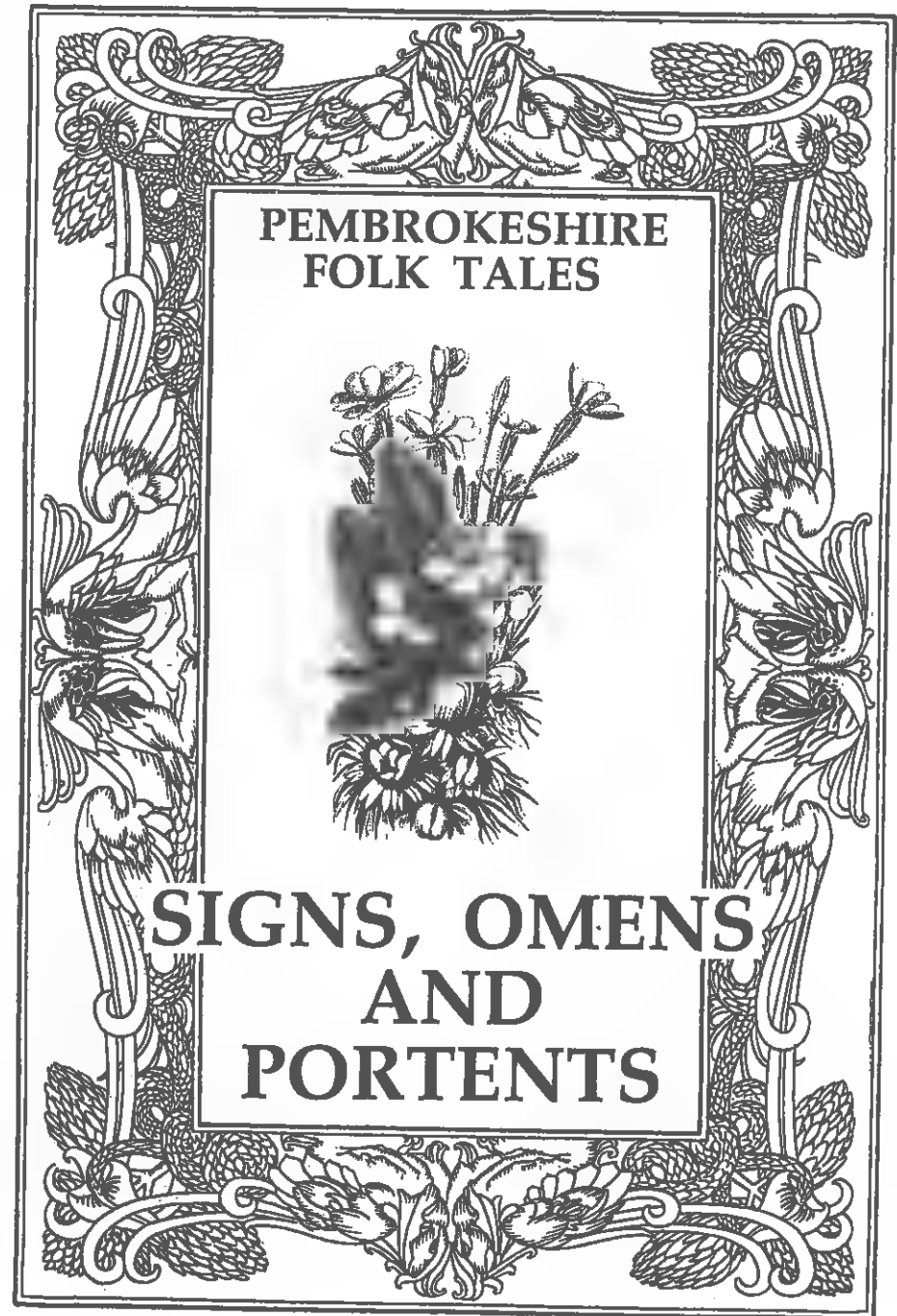
Source: Howells p 89

5.13 The Hare and the Squire's Hounds

The Squire of Llanstinan, not far from Trecwn, was a great sportsman who enjoyed hare coursing. But he was constantly frustrated by a certain hare, which used to lead his hounds a merry dance. The hare would always escape from them, leaving both he and his hounds quite exhausted. Day after day and mile after mile he and the dogs would follow the animal, but it would always disappear in the same general area above the deep wooded valley of Nant-y-Bugail. At last people began to suspect that the hare must really have been a witch having some fun at the squire's expense; and the gentleman was advised that he would only succeed in catching the hare if he went out with a horse and a dog of exactly the same colour. So he went to great trouble to find a horse which matched the colour of his best dog, and next time he went out hunting he felt he was well prepared. Sure enough, the mysterious hare appeared in his big field, and off it went with the hounds and rider in hot pursuit. Now, for the first time, the hound and the horse managed to make up ground on the clever hare, and the squire became convinced that he would catch it at last. But then they came upon a remote cottage, and just before the dogs got to it the hare bolted through a little hole in the front door. The squire saw this as he came galloping up, so he dismounted and knocked on the door. It was opened by a rather breathless old woman who was well known to the squire. He said "Oh! It's just you, Mary!", and that was that. However, everybody in the neighbourhood became quite convinced that old Mary was indeed a witch. As for the mysterious hare, having had a bit of a shock, it was never seen again.

Date: c 1825

Source: Davies p 243



6.1 The Strange Prophecy of L'Orient

Around the year 1770 a lead tablet was found in a well at Pill Priory near Milford. It had a Latin inscription on it, which was translated as follows: "When the highest part of the East is elevated in the House of God a great town shall be built, to which, with every wind and every tide, merchants from every clime shall come like bees to the flowers." The message was not well understood at the time, but in the 1780s and 1790s, as the new town of Milford began to take shape, local people began to look on the strange old message as a sort of prophecy.

In 1798 it so happened that the French warship *L'Orient* (The East) was sunk by Lord Nelson in the Battle of the Nile. One of the interesting relics brought home from the battle was the truck (masthead fitting) of the ill-fated warship. The truck was given by Nelson to his mistress Emma, Lady Hamilton, and she in turn gave it to St Katherine's Church, possibly on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone in the year 1802.

When the church was completed in 1808 it was planned that the truck should be placed adjacent to a porphyry urn of Egyptian origin, which was to be used as the baptismal font. Charles Greville, the builder of Milford, planned to place a suitably patriotic commemorative tablet, extolling the virtues of Lord Nelson, beneath the urn. But the whole plan was vetoed by the Bishop, who would not accept the use of a pagan urn as a baptismal font, and who found the glorification of Nelson's involvement in blood and carnage extremely distasteful. He suggested that the truck and the urn should instead be placed in the entrance to the chapel, and Greville had to agree.

We do not know whether Greville was aware of the old prophecy found in the well. But the truck was prominently displayed in the church until the 1830's, when it mysteriously disappeared. Some believe it was sent to the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall, but it is more likely that it remained in the church, in a dusty and neglected state, among a pile of timbers in the church belfry. Later, when St Katherine's was renovated in time for its centenary, it was restored to its place of honour as the first object seen on entering the church. And then, in the 1920's, the truck really was removed to London, to be replaced by a copy made by a local craftsman.

All in all, neither the church congregation nor the townspeople of Milford have shown a great deal of respect for the truck; and therein, according to some, lies the explanation for the great hardship suffered by the town for most of its life. Maybe the strange prophecy of prosperity based upon thriving trade never will be fulfilled until the real truck is back in its rightful place, duly respected and properly cared for.....

Date: 1808

Sources: Miles 1983, p 73; McKay p 55



6.2 The Commissioner's Tomb

In the year 1848 Mr John Pavin Phillips returned home to Milford Haven after a long absence. A few days after his arrival, he took a walk in the graveyard of St Katherine's Church, partly to enjoy the peace and quiet and the magnificent view over the Haven, and partly to see if any of his old friends and acquaintances had passed away during his absence and had been buried there. His eye was attracted by a fine new altar-tomb enclosed within an iron railing. He went up and read the inscription on the tomb, which informed him that a certain retired Colonel was buried there. He recalled that during his absence he had read of the sudden death of this gentleman, who had been the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for South Wales. Apparently he had been seized with apoplexy while visiting the local Workhouse, and had died within a few hours. Mr Phillips had not known the Commissioner personally.

On returning home after his walk, Mr Phillips was asked by his old father where he had been. He replied that he had been up to the churchyard, where he had seen the tomb of the Commissioner who had died while visiting the Workhouse. "That is quite impossible," replied the old man. "There is no tomb erected over the Commissioner's grave." Mr Phillips objected, saying "My dear father, are you trying to persuade me that I cannot read? I was not aware that the Colonel had been buried in the churchyard until today, and I only discovered that fact when I read the inscription on the tomb."

After further argument, Mr Phillips decided to go back and have another look. So after supper he walked up to the churchyard again. This time he failed to find any trace of the mysterious tomb. So he knocked on the door of an old lady who lived near the churchyard gate, and asked her to show him where the Commissioner had been buried. She accompanied him back into the churchyard, and showed him an unmarked green mound in precisely the place where he had earlier seen the phantom tomb. Quite mystified, Mr Phillips returned home.

Two years later, the surviving relatives of the Colonel erected an altar-tomb, with a railing around it, over the grave. On hearing of this, Mr Phillips went along to have a look. The hairs rose on the back of his neck when he discovered that it was identical in every detail to the tomb which he had seen during his original visit to the site.

Date: 1848

Source: Davies p 201





Rev. Davies woke up feeling quite convinced that the dream had been a sort of omen.

6.3 A Dream of Kensington Hall

One night in January 1910, Rev J. Ceredig Davies dreamt that he was walking near Kensington Hall, the country seat of Lord and Lady Kensington near St Bride's. In the dream, he met Lord Kensington, who said to him "Go into the house. Lady Kensington is at home, and I'll join you in a few minutes." Rev Davies went to the front door, rang the bell, and was shown inside by the butler. He was asked to wait in the drawing room. There he waited for some considerable time, and was beginning to feel concerned when all the household servants came into the room, dressed in their holiday attire. They all looked concerned, and explained that Lady Kensington was not at home at all, but had got lost somewhere. They said that the Baron was hunting for her high and low, and was desperately worried because she seemed to have disappeared without trace.

Rev Davies woke up feeling quite convinced that the dream had been a sort of omen, and that something had happened to Lady Kensington, who was a close family friend. A few days later the reverend gentleman read in his daily paper that the Dowager Lady Kensington had died in Calcutta in India. He discovered that her death had occurred on the very day of his dream, and that at the time of her death Lord Kensington was at sea, en route for India, frantic with worry, having been warned by cable-gram that she was seriously ill.

Date: 1910

Source: Davies p 277

6.4 The Grim Reaper in Llanerch Woods

On the northern side of the Cwm Gwaun there is an ancient footpath which has been used for centuries by local people on their way back and forth between the valley and the town of Newport. The footpath climbs up steeply from the farm of Llanerch, on the valley bottom, to the farm of Penrhiw, on the lower slopes of Mynydd Carningli; and on the valley side it runs through a dense woodland of tall dark trees. In the old days people said the woods were haunted, and indeed many lonely walkers saw strange shadows and heard eerie sounds among the massive tree-trunks of oak, ash and beech.

Once upon a time there was a strange old farm worker called Tom Jenkins, who worked at Dolrannog Uchaf, not far from the top end of the woodland path. One dark winters night, following a visit to the farm at Llanerch, he was walking home alone through the woods. There was a cold northerly wind moving the treetops, and there was just enough moonlight for him to make out the path ahead. All of a sudden Tom began to experience a sense of unease, and as he hurried on he became convinced that he was being followed. At last he could resist no longer, and he swung around to see if there was anybody there. His blood froze as he saw a tall figure dressed in a black coat, with black gaiters and boots, a black cloak over his shoulders, and a tall black hat upon his head. The figure stood perfectly still, about twenty yards away, staring at him.

Old Tom thought he must be dreaming, so he swung on his heel and hurried off again up the track between the shadowy tree-trunks. But he felt that he was still being followed, and eventually he turned sharply again to look behind him. And there was the same ominous figure, standing perfectly still, and still twenty yards behind him on the path. Now the old man began to feel very scared indeed, and he started to run up the track, gasping for breath on the steep slippery slope. As he neared the edge of the wood he had to stop for a breather, and he looked behind him for the third time. The tall man in black was still there, staring at him, and still only twenty yards away.

With great relief old Tom reached the edge of the woods and the open farmland beyond, and he stumbled home in the moonlight without daring to look back again. But after this terrible experience he became quite convinced that he had met "The Grim Reaper" in the woods, and that the encounter with the stranger in black could only mean one thing. Within a few days he had taken to his bed. The doctor could not discover what was wrong with him, and a few days later he was dead.

Date: c 1954

Source: Word of mouth



6.5 Phantom Funeral at Glandwr

In the early years of the last century there was a well-known parson in the Glandwr area called Rev John Griffiths. He was greatly respected in literary circles for his poetry in the Welsh language. He took a strict line in matters religious, and went out of his way on numerous occasions to speak out against the "primitive" beliefs and superstitions of the country folk who lived in the area. In particular, he preached from many pulpits in the chapels of the eastern part of Pembrokeshire against the prevailing belief in the *canwyll gorff* or corpse candle and the *toili* or phantom funeral.

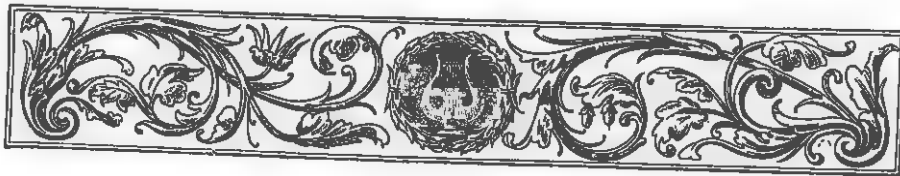
One night he was involved in a "remarkable circumstance". It was a pitch black night, and he was returning home on horseback along a dark and narrow lane. Suddenly his mare reared up, as if frightened by something in her path. Rev Griffiths could neither see nor sense anything, and urged his horse on. But the mare went once more to the side of the lane and would not continue. So the minister spurred the horse and took his whip to her; but immediately she leaped straight over the hedge and into a field. The reverend gentleman then dismounted and led the mare back to the lane, by now feeling somewhat nervous himself.

He strained his ears so as to discover what had frightened the horse, and gradually he became aware that he could hear heavy footsteps coming towards him. Closer and closer they came, and he realised that this was the sound of a great procession involving many people. As they went past he managed to keep his horse under control; and then, feeling inquisitive and having also got his nerves under control, he determined to follow the phantom procession. This he did, and after a while he realised that this was a *toili* on its way to his own chapel graveyard in Glandwr. The procession went into the graveyard and stopped in a part where there were previously no graves. After much shuffling of feet on the grass, the sounds disappeared. During all this time the minister saw nothing, but heard only the sounds of the phantom funeral procession.

Within a few days of this experience, one of the chapel congregation died. The large funeral procession, with the Rev Griffiths at its head, passed along the same lane as the *toili* had done, and stopped in exactly the same place in the graveyard, where a fresh grave had been dug for receiving the body in its coffin. After this, the minister was never again heard to ridicule the local belief in phantom funerals and other supernatural things, and it was clear that he had been profoundly affected by his strange experience

Date: c 1810

Source: Howells p 63



6.6 The Foolish Blacksmith of Llanboidy

Once upon a time there was a Llanboidy blacksmith called William John. He had his smithy in the village but lived a couple of miles away. Blacksmithing was hard and thirsty work, and after a long day in the forge William normally enjoyed a few jars of ale in his favourite local inn before going home on horseback. One dark winter's night, having had a few too many in the inn, he was heading for home feeling very merry indeed. He was hardly capable of steering his horse home, but that did not matter since the old animal knew the way in any case, having made the journey many hundreds of times before.

Suddenly William saw a small white light in the roadway in front of him, and although somewhat inebriated he realised that he was looking at a *canwyll gorff*. Normally he would have been frightened by such an encounter, but on this particular night he felt brave enough to challenge all the ghosts and demons of the world, so he pressed on regardless and determined to block the passage of the light. He pulled up his horse in the middle of the road and waited to see what would happen. As the light approached he saw that it was held between the forefingers of a corpse upon a bier, and what is more he recognized the corpse as that of a woman who lived nearby. As he watched, in mounting fear, the corpse grinned at him horribly. Then he was struck from his horse with great force, and lost consciousness as he hit the ground.

William did not recover consciousness for several hours, but found that his faithful steed was standing quietly nearby, and with his help he managed to make his painful way home. There he took to his bed, and was ill for several weeks afterwards. Needless to say, the woman whose spectral corpse William had seen grinning at him in the road died a few days later, and her funeral passed along the same road on the way to the graveyard, where the burial took place.

Date: c 1850

Source: Sikes p 242



Blacksmithing was hard and thirsty work, and after a long day in the forge William normally enjoyed a few jars of ale.....

6.7 St David and the Signs of Heaven

According to ancient tradition, Dewi Sant or St David was a great and good man, capable of performing prodigious feats and miracles during his ministry in the area around his monastic settlement and further afield in Wales. But he had a special love of the countryside in which he was born, and which later came to be known as Dewisland. As he laboured to convert the people of Dewisland from their heathen ways he met with great success, and many thousands turned to God as a result of his powerful preaching and his humble and holy manner.

But no matter how many people were baptised and joined the church, Dewi continued to worry greatly about his flock, for in his view the people thought far too little about their own mortality and about the life to come. He urged them constantly to think about heaven and to prepare themselves for it, but was disappointed when they continued in their worldly ways -- working in the fields, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and living for the day rather than the morrow. Perhaps Dewi's expectations were too high, for poor families with mouths to feed could not afford to imitate Dewi's monks by spending much of their time in prayer and contemplation. So Dewi prayed long and hard for a solution, asking God to give his people a sign of the immortality of the soul and of the life to come. He received an assurance that his flock would be given "a presage of death" which would come a few days before death, and which would enable them to make peace with their maker and to prepare for the after-life.

And so it is that the people of Wales in general, and St David's diocese in particular, were given by God not one but a whole host of special insights or signs when a death is near. And it is said that those who have the eye to see or the ear to hear can still encounter strange phenomena including the corpse candle or *canwyll gorff*, the corpse bird or *aderyn y gorff*, the phantom funeral or *toili*, the death omen or *tolaeth*, and the falling light or *tanwedd*. And as if these signs and portents were not enough, the Good Lord arranged that under certain circumstances the terrible screaming banshee called *gwrach y rhybyn* would appear, or the dreadful groaning and moaning *cyhyraeth*.

The good St David may have lived to regret the abundance with which his prayer was answered, for these "death omens" have, over the centuries, signally failed to bring a sense of peace to the sick and dying. On the contrary, they have almost without exception scared the living daylight out of those who have encountered them. . . .

Date: c 560 AD



Sources: Jones p 206; Sikes p 246



6.8 The Llanboidy Cromlech

When the American consul Wirt Sikes was collecting strange tales in West Wales around 1870, he was told about the "singular events" connected with the demolition of the Pensarn cromlech, not far from Login and in Llanboidy parish. The source of his information was an old man called John Jones, who lived in the village of Llanboidy.

Apparently the old cromlech (known locally as Carreg Samson) was located in a field called Parc-y-Bigwrn, which means literally "field of the pinnacle". The farmer who owned the field wanted to get rid of the cromlech, which prevented him from ploughing his field properly, so he employed ten men to undertake the task. They brought in six horses to help them, and then set about their work with a degree of apprehension since the site was popularly supposed to be haunted by supernatural beings. Things started to go wrong immediately. Whenever the men touched the huge stones they "became filled with awe" and found it very difficult to pull them down. The capstone was tied up with heavy chains and the six horses were set to work in dragging it away; but as soon as the straining beasts reached the road with the huge stone the road "was suddenly rent asunder in a supernatural manner." A waggon used for taking away the smaller stones broke down, and the men heard strange and awesome noises which convinced them that they had incurred the displeasure of the goblin guardians of the cromlech. Then the sky became black and there was a fierce storm, with terrible winds, a deluge of huge hailstones, and violent thunder and lightning.

By now the men had had enough, and they abandoned the project and vowed never to return to the site, no matter how well they were paid. The great stones were left where they were, scattered about in the field, and there they remain to this day.

Date: c 1810

Sources: Sikes p 382; E.T. Lewis 1975, p 27

6.9 The Great Lord and the Old Blind Beggar

One of the most beautiful legends which has been told in Pembrokeshire for many centuries concerns a message given to a great and powerful lord by the *tolaeth* or death omen.

The lord ruled over a vast territory, and he was rich in houses and other buildings, with many servants and peasants under him. He had an abundance of worldly riches, including gold, jewels, fine chalices and magnificent clothes made of the most delicate and precious cloth. He was greatly envied but also respected, for he was a good lord and master. But as he grew older he began to fear for the future, and one night he was greatly troubled by a visit from the *tolaeth*. As he lay in his bed in the darkness before dawn, he heard a loud and baleful voice say the following words: "The greatest and richest man of this parish shall die tonight." A shiver went down his spine and his grey hair stood on end. And as he listened the message was given a second time. And then again, for a third time...

The great lord could sleep no longer, and as the thin light of dawn began to spread across the sky he became convinced that he had heard a premonition of his own death. He knew that there was nobody so great and rich as he in the parish, and so he prepared to die. In the morning he summoned the physicians to examine him, but they confirmed that he was, so far as they could see, in perfect health. Then, in the afternoon, he summoned the priests and made peace with his God, saddened by his lack of charity and burdened by his wealth. With horror he looked back over his life of wealth and comfort, and as evening fell he prayed on his knees for forgiveness, until at last he fell asleep.

When day broke the great lord woke up, and he was quite surprised to find that he was still alive. He rejoiced greatly, and began to think of a hearty breakfast. But then, as the sun began to rise over the eastern horizon, the church bell began to toll. Someone had died in the night, and the lord sent one of his servants in haste to find out who it might have been. When the servant returned he reported that an old blind beggar man had died; and the great lord realised that it must have been the very same old man who had been refused alms at his gate a few days before. Then the truth dawned on the rich man. The *tolaeth* had been referring not to him but to the old blind beggar, who was great in his humility and who had his treasures and his wealth in Heaven.

The noble lord was transformed by this experience, and following the burial of the old beggar he devoted his life to good works. He gave away much of his wealth, endowed religious houses, and brought relief to all in his lordship who were in poverty. And when at last he lay dying on his bed, the voices of angels were heard to sing a beautiful hymn of welcome. The great lord was buried, as he had wished, in the same grave as the old blind beggar.

Date: c 1300?

Source: Sikes p 231



As the thin light of dawn began to spread across the sky he became convinced that he had heard a premonition of his own death.

6.10 Phantom Funeral in Cwm Cych

Once upon a time a carpenter named Rhys Thomas lived in Capel Iwan. He was a good carpenter and a thoughtful and sensible sort of man. One night he was walking home along a country lane not far from Capel Iwan, in the valley of Cwm Cych. He had just crossed over the bridge of Pont Wedwst, and after passing the chapel near the river he was climbing up the hill through the woods towards the village. It was a dark night, and although the lane was overhung by tall trees Rhys could just about see where he was going.

Then he became aware of voices, and made out the sounds of shuffling feet coming towards him. The voices grew louder and louder, but Rhys could see no lanterns in the darkness, nor could he make out any human figures in the dim light. He pressed on, and at last felt that he was in the midst of a throng of people, although he could still see nothing. He realised that he was encountering a *toili* or phantom funeral. He did not feel particularly afraid, and concluded that he was among people he knew. Then he felt an unseen hand upon his shoulder, and a female voice said to him "Good day to you, Rhys bach, how are you?" Then the invisible procession passed him by and continued towards the chapel.

Rhys said nothing of his encounter and awaited developments. A month later, on a winter's afternoon when it was still daylight, Rhys was walking the same way home, up the hill of Rhiw Edwst, when he met a funeral procession coming down the hill towards him. The sounds were exactly those he had heard before. He recognized many of those in the procession, and he took off his cap and acknowledged them as they passed. As the main part of the throng passed him in the narrow lane a woman whom he knew put her hand upon his shoulder. "Good day to you, Rhys bach," she said. "How are you?" And the procession went on its way.

Date: c 1850

Source: Sikes p 231



He was a good carpenter and a thoughtful and sensible sort of man.

6.11 Message from the Prophet Jones

The Rev Edmund Jones was a dissenting minister who was well known in various parts of Wales in the early years of the nineteenth century. He travelled widely, and he must have visited Pembrokeshire for he was the man who first wrote down a number of local tales, including the story of Mr Walter and the Phantom Dog. Rev Jones was a firm believer in fairies, ghosts, death omens, and many other things relating to the "spirit world", and he saw no problems in equating these beliefs with his Christian ministry. Indeed, he was scathing in his criticism of those intellectuals and members of the gentry who professed to have a rational explanation for everything, and accused these sceptics of being "estranged from God and spiritual things." Our friend had a number of strange experiences himself, and attempted a classification of supernatural phenomena.

The redoubtable minister was universally referred to as "The Prophet Jones" because he had the remarkable gift of prophecy. On one occasion, for example, he was invited to preach at a quarterly meeting several months ahead, but he declined the invitation, saying "I cannot, on that day -- the rain will descend in torrents, and there will be no congregation." And so it turned out. On another occasion, he gave his last penny to a poor person in his parish, and said to his worried wife "Don't worry -- God will send a messenger with food and raiment at nine o'clock tomorrow morning." And so it was.

The Prophet Jones wrote two books which together provide much of our information concerning the folk tales in circulation in Wales in the 1700s. The second of these, a brief tome published in 1813, was notable for its magnificent title, namely: **A Relation of Apparitions of Spirits in the County of Monmouth and the Principality of Wales, with other notable Relations from England, together with Observations about them, and Instructions from them, designed to confute and to prevent the Infidelity of denying the Being and Apparition of Spirits, which tends towards Irreligion and Atheism.**

One of the messages given by the Prophet to his readers concerned the reality of angel visitations. To prove his point, he related how a certain David Thomas, who lived not far from Laugharne, was praying one night in a room in one of his out-buildings. He had no light in the room apart from a flickering candle. Suddenly a great light appeared, which made the light of the candle invisible. In the heavenly light there appeared a band of angels, like beautiful children dressed in bright clothing. They sang the following words most melodiously in Welsh: "How long? How long? Return ye sons of Adam! How long? How long will ye persecute these godly Christians?" After a time they departed, but then reappeared and sang again before finally disappearing. Eventually the bright light faded, and David Thomas was able to see the light of his candle again.

Another story told by the Prophet concerned Mr Rhys David, a good Christian gentleman who lived near Whitland. When he lay on his death bed, both he and a number of visitors who were in his room heard the singing of angels draw nearer and nearer. When he died peacefully the singing reached a crescendo, and then gradually faded away.

Date: c 1790

Source: Sikes p 104, p 208

6.12 Wake Night at Bridell

According to some old records, a very strange funeral custom was practised in parts of Pembrokeshire in past centuries. It was called *hirwen-gwd* (literally "long white bag" or shroud), and it was connected with the *gwynnos* or Wake Night. It was apparently quite common in some remote areas (such as the Gwaun Valley, Pencaer and the Bridell-Cilgerran area) as recently as 1750, although it was greatly frowned upon by the church and by the civil authorities.

Following the death of a person, the corpse would be laid out in its coffin in the front room of the dwelling house, and would be watched over by friends and relatives throughout the Wake Night before the funeral. Sometimes prayers would be said throughout the night on behalf of the dear departed. Often there would be a lighted candle at the head and the foot of the coffin, and young men would take it in turn (two or three at a time) to sit in the room watching over the corpse while the rest of the party



On the fateful night most of the family of the deceased had gathered in the kitchen.

chatted and partook of refreshments in the kitchen. As the centuries passed, what may have been originally a pagan ceremony (designed to prevent evil spirits from stealing the soul of the deceased) turned into a Christian ceremony and eventually into a macabre social occasion. In the early 1700s church elders were sometimes greatly disturbed by the horse-play which went on and by the amount of beer consumed during the long hours of darkness by the coffin watchers, although the Welsh Wake Nights seldom became as exuberant as those in Ireland.

The *hirwen-gwd* originated in a primitive belief that the soul of the deceased person must be given some help in leaving the body, and indeed in leaving the house where the death occurred. In most parts of Wales windows and doors would be left open during the Wake Night so that the soul could escape. But in Pembrokeshire there was an elaborate ceremony which involved the removal of the corpse from the coffin in its white shroud. First the fire in the hearth would be extinguished. Then some of the young men present would go outside, and with the aid of a ladder climb up via the roof of the house to the top of the chimney. There they would throw a rope down into the fireplace, and this rope would then be attached to the upper part of the corpse's body. Then they would haul on the rope, pulling the corpse right up the *simnai fawr* to the chimney top. There, it was supposed, the soul could escape to heaven, thus eliminating any chance of the house becoming haunted by an unhappy ghost in the future. This having been achieved, the corpse would be let down again and replaced gently in the coffin.

This ceremony was abruptly abandoned around the year 1760 following a strange and terrible happening at a Wake Night at a house called Pantycnwch, in the parish of Bridell. The story was told to J. Ceredig Davies by a Mrs Mary Thomas of Bengal, near Fishguard; and she had heard it from her old mother. On the fateful night most of the family of the deceased had gathered in the kitchen. Next door a jolly group of young men, having had too much to drink, were going through the motions of the *hirwen-gwd*. But in addition to the custom of pulling the corpse up the chimney it had become the custom in parts of Pembrokeshire for one of the group (presumably he who was most drunk or he who was bravest) to lie in the coffin while the corpse was absent. This was said to be necessary in order to prevent the devil from taking over the empty coffin. Accordingly, after the removal of the corpse, one young man lay down in the coffin and made himself comfortable while the lid was replaced loosely. Amid great jollification the corpse was hauled up the chimney and let down again, and after untying the ropes the rest of the party carried the corpse back to the coffin. They took off the lid in order to let their friend out, and were horrified to find that he was dead.....

News of this terrifying event spread like wildfire throughout the community. Some said that the young man had suffocated; others said he had drunk too much alcohol; and some said that he had died from shock, having encountered the devil in the coffin. But whatever the truth of the matter, Pembrokeshire people were given a severe fright, and the custom of the *hirwen-gwd* was never again allowed as part of the Wake Night ceremonial.

Date: 1760

Sources: Jones p 213; Davies p 42

6.13 Birdsong in Nevern Church

One of the great literary figures of Pembrokeshire was the Rev John Jones of Nevern, also known by his bardic name of Tegid. He was a learned and poetic man who was a graduate of Jesus College, Oxford, and also chaplain of Christ Church. While in Oxford, he was one of the team of academics who helped Lady Charlotte Guest in her translation of *The Mabinogion*. He transcribed *The Red Book of Hergest*, from which some of the most important stories came, and indeed some authorities now believe that he, rather than Lady Charlotte, should have had his name on the cover of the famous book when it was first published in English.

Following his Oxford career Rev Jones was given the living of Nevern in 1842, and in the eleven years until his death in 1852 he was very active in the eisteddfod movement and in promoting Welsh culture generally. He wrote many poems himself, and was universally referred to as Tegid in North Pembrokeshire intellectual circles. But he was also a good and conscientious minister, greatly loved and respected by his congregation. He was a short, dark-haired man with a somewhat severe countenance; but he had a great reputation as a humorist, and he was also a skilled ventriloquist. On his tomb in Nevern churchyard he is simply referred to as "Priest, Bard, Scholar." At the foot of his tomb-stone there is a carved thrush.

According to legend, Tegid died on a Sunday morning. As he lay on his death-bed, a colleague from an adjoining parish was taking his service for him in Nevern Church. Half-way through the bible reading his voice was suddenly drowned by the most beautiful song of a thrush. The whole church was filled with the song of the bird, and the congregation listened spellbound to its soaring and joyful notes. The minister stopped his reading and listened too. There was no bird in the church, and yet the sound echoed everywhere, along the nave, to the roof timbers, and around the altar. At last the birdsong faded away, and the church service continued.

After the service was over, the congregation heard the news that Tegid had died in the vicarage on the other side of the stream, just a stone's throw from the church. It was discovered that the song of the thrush in the church had occurred at exactly the moment of his death. A few days later, at the vicar's funeral, a thrush was again heard singing sweetly at the moment of burial. And stranger still, when the monumental mason came about twenty years later to install a tombstone commissioned by Tegid's admirers, he found a dead thrush lying on top of the great man's grave.

Date: 1852

Sources: Davies p 208; Miles 1984, p 55



6.14 Phantom Funeral at Llanycefn

Llanycefn is a small hamlet in one of the tributary valleys of the Eastern Cleddau. The countryside round about has deep valleys and much woodland. There is a bellcote church, rebuilt around 1904.

An old man named John Salmon was going about his business one day, in broad daylight, when he was surprised to see a funeral procession going along the road towards the church. He was not aware that any of his neighbours had died, so he suspected that he was watching a phantom funeral or *toili*. He looked closely at the line of mourners, and recognised most of those present. However, he was surprised to see that there was no vicar at the head of the procession.

Unknown to Mr Salmon, the vicar of Llanycefn had been called away to his home town to deal with some family crisis, and did not return until a couple of weeks had passed. So it was that when a neighbour died a few days later the funeral procession passed along the same roadway, exactly as foreseen by Mr Salmon. All the neighbours were there, including Mr Salmon himself, walking in exactly the order foreseen. And there was no vicar at the head of the procession, since a minister from another parish had agreed to conduct the funeral service.

Date: c 1850

Source: Davies p 200

6.15 Phantom Sermon at Rhydwylym

At Rhydwylym, just over the Carmarthenshire border, there is one of the most important chapels in West Wales. The imposing Baptist Chapel now to be seen was built in 1761, but the roots of nonconformity go back much further, and the first congregation at Rhydwylym organized themselves in 1668 under their first dissenting minister, the Rev William Jones. The church grew in strength, and it is still known as the "mother church" of the Baptist movement in Dyfed.

In the nineteenth century it was the custom for chapel deacons to take services, preach sermons and even conduct funeral services. Around 1905 the Rev J. Ceredig Davies was told a strange tale about Rhydwylym Chapel by a Mr John Llewelyn, who lived at Rhos-y-Gwydr. Apparently he was passing by the chapel one evening when he heard the lusty singing of a chapel congregation coming from inside. He was somewhat taken aback by this, for it was not a Sunday and he knew that there was no service in progress. As a faithful member of the congregation, he would certainly have known of any prayer meetings or other events. Cautiously he went up to the door of the chapel, where he found that the sound of singing had stopped. But then he was even more amazed to hear his own voice, preaching what sounded like a funeral oration. He listened for a while, then opened the chapel door. As expected, he found the chapel empty.

A few days later one of the congregation died. There was a big funeral service with lusty hymn singing -- and John Llewelyn was the man invited to preach the funeral sermon.

Date: c 1860?

Source: Davies p 200

6.16 How to Choose a Husband

The custom of *rhamanta* or romantic divination, by which young people of marrying age seek to discover who their future husbands or wives might be, was widespread in Pembrokeshire well into the present century. During the 1800's there was one trick which was supposed to be particularly effective. This was called the "Maid's Trick", and it could only be used by a virgin.

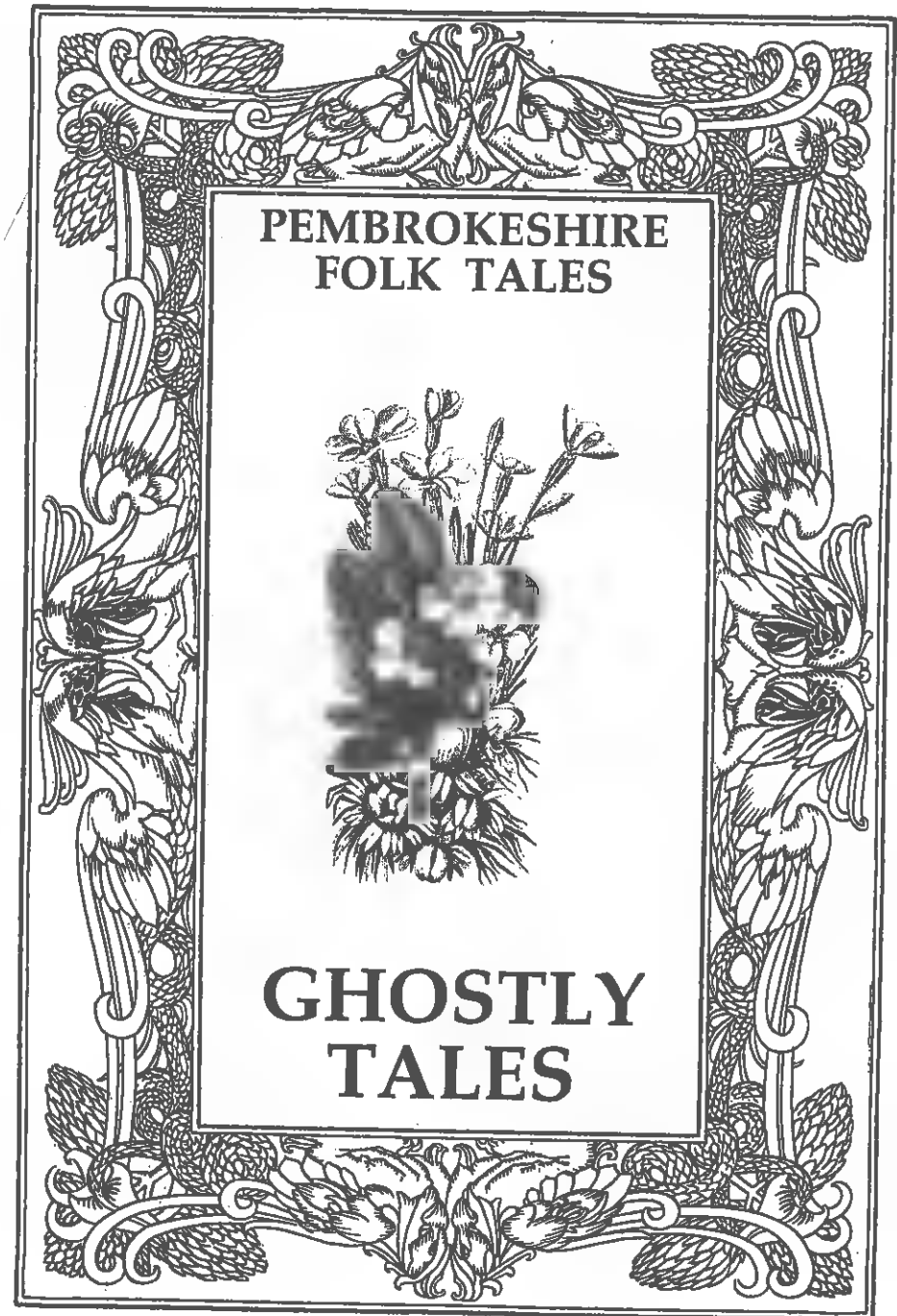
On Christmas Eve, or on one of the three "Spirit Nights" (*Teir-nos Ysprydion* in Welsh) which fell on All Hallows Eve, May-day Eve and Midsummers Eve, the inquisitive young lady would creep downstairs after the old folk were fast asleep. Then she would put a good pile of coal or logs on the fire, lay a clean cloth on the table, and lay out as fine a feast of food and drink as she could find in the larder. For some reason, a hot toasted cheese sandwich was supposed to be particularly efficacious for this trick. Then, with the feast prepared and the fire blazing merrily, the girl would take off her clothes, piece by piece, while standing before the fire. Finally she would stand naked on the hearth, no doubt wishing that her future husband would somehow see her in his dreams. Her last and closest item of clothing would then be washed in a pail of clear spring water on the hearth, and would be spread to dry on a chair-back turned towards the fire. Finally she would go to bed, listening intently for her future husband, whose apparition was confidently expected to come to eat the prepared feast. On the arrival of the beloved spirit, the young lady was allowed to peep through the keyhole or through some crack in the bedroom door so as to identify the feasting guest.

It was claimed that this piece of divination worked well, and that many Pembrokeshire lasses had glimpsed their current lovers (or even some unexpected apparition) after performing the correct ceremonial. Further, it was guaranteed that after the appearance of the apparition, a happy marriage would occur within twelve months. But not all those who used the trick were pleased, and it was said in Pembrokeshire that on more than one occasion the expectant young lady, after going through all the motions of the ceremony, was horrified to see through the bedroom keyhole a terrible black-furred monster with fiery eyes and a long tail, gorging itself on the prepared feast with its whiskers dripping gravy. Naturally, young ladies who saw such a sight were doomed to a life of spinsterhood.....

In the parts of Pembrokeshire where the Flemings settled in the Early Middle Ages, another trick was practised. A young lady keen to discover the identity of her future husband would place the shoulder-blade of a sheep, with nine holes drilled in it, under her pillow at night. She would also place her shoes, in the shape of a letter T, at the foot of the bed. In one well authenticated instance a girl from the Milford Haven area followed the correct procedure when she was about 15 years old. In the middle of the night she woke up and saw the spirit of a young man whom she did not recognise, walking across the bedroom floor and standing at the foot of her bed. Several years later she met and recognized the man; they fell in love, started courting, and were soon married. The marriage was a very successful one, and the couple raised a family of healthy and happy children.

Date: c 1855

Sources: Sikes p 302; Davies p 9





7.1 Invisible Spirits at Marros

At Marros, close to the border between Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, there is a little church, said to have been built originally in the 13th Century but substantially rebuilt in 1844. Outside the church there is a First World War memorial designed to look like a cromlech. There is nothing much left of the settlement of Marros, which should probably be referred to as a "lost village"

There is an ancient legend concerning a field to the west of the present church. There were once two local giants living in Marros but who terrorised a vast area of countryside round about. When they died the local people were greatly relieved, and the giants were both buried in the field. The field was called Church Park, probably because of some long-lost folk memory of a burial ground or religious site there. In the thirteenth century, when the Lord of the Manor decided to build his first church, he decided, naturally enough, on Church Park as the site. Accordingly the ground was made ready, and piles of building materials including stones and mortar were transported to the site. Planks and wooden scaffolding were brought in, and the masons and other workmen were told that work would start on the morrow

But strange to relate, when the Lord of the Manor and the workmen turned up early next morning they found that the ground in Church Park was quite untouched, and that all the building materials had been transported by invisible spirits further east, to the spot where St Lawrence's Church now stands. So that is where the church was built, with its surrounding graveyard. According to local tradition, the two giants were determined not to have any mortal bedfellows in Church Park

Date: c 1250

Source: Davies p 177

7.2 The Fearsome Phantoms of Pont Clegyr

Pont Clegyr is a lonely spot in a dark valley on the road between Solva and St Davids, overlooked by a craggy rock. Around 1820 it was widely believed that the place was haunted, for the corpse candle (*canwyll gorff*) was often seen there, and travellers occasionally reported seeing shadowy phantoms carrying phantom coffins along the road. Not surprisingly, very few people had the courage to pass Pont Clegyr after dark.

One moonlit night two farmers from the St David's area were returning home after a good night out in Solva. One of them was too drunk to walk without assistance, but he made slow progress with the help of his friend and his stout staff. Singing merrily, they were making their unsteady way down the hill towards Pont Clegyr when they saw a *canwyll gorff* gleaming brightly in the roadway ahead of them. The light moved inexorably towards them, which encouraged the farmer who was only slightly drunk to dump his friend unceremoniously in the middle of the road and to flee as fast as his legs would carry him. The inebriated farmer staggered to his feet, and saw that the light was coming ever closer. He was incapable of running away, and so he decided that he would have to stand his ground and meet the supernatural face to face.

When the light was within a few yards of him he saw that it was gleaming on the lid of a large coffin, which was carried by two dark faceless figures dressed in shrouds. The poor farmer was petrified with fear. But then he suddenly felt sober, and thought to himself: "If thou art a spirit, thou wilt not molest me, on account of my brother, who is a clergyman. If thou art a devil, thou hast no business with me at present, since I am thine all in good time. And if thou art a man, why, Heaven help thee!" By this time the ghostly figures and the coffin were gliding past him, only an arm's length away. The farmer picked up his staff and took an almighty swing at the phantom funeral, and was surprised when it hit something quite solid. There was a cry of agony from one of the phantoms, and it fell to the ground. Then the coffin also crashed to the ground, extinguishing the corpse candle. The other phantom ran off, yelling, along the road. Now the farmer warmed to his task, and continued to beat the first phantom furiously until it lay quite still at his feet.

At last he became exhausted, and was able, by the light of the moon, to survey the scene of his triumph over the supernatural. He lifted the shroud from the head of the unconscious figure on the road and immediately recognised the features of a notorious criminal who had been terrorising the district for some years. Then he examined the coffin, which had lost its lid as it crashed to the ground; and inside it he found two of his own sheep, with their throats cut but with his own markings quite visible. He had lost many sheep from his fields over the past months, as had other farmers from the neighbourhood.

Needless to say, after this strange encounter the battered criminal left the area, never to return. There were no further episodes of sheep stealing, and corpse candles and phantom funerals were never again seen at Pont Clegyr by passing travellers.

Date: c 1820

Source: S.C. and A.M. Hall, p 324

7.3 Visitation at Milford

In 1859 there was great excitement in the town of Milford, for the new railway was almost complete. Gangs of navvies were working on the line, and many of them were billeted out in local farms and cottages. Many of the workers were Irish. They worked hard and drank hard, and they remained happy so long as ale was in plentiful supply at the end of a long day's toil.

A number of the Irish navvies had their lodgings in a farmhouse close to the route of the line, in the hamlet of Thornton. One evening they were enjoying a *noson lawen* (merry night) with their Welsh hosts and with a number of their friends from other lodging houses. The ale was flowing generously. Welsh and Irish tales were told, and many a fine old song was sung. When the merriment was at its height, the dogs in the yard suddenly began to bark and howl for no apparent reason. A hush fell over the company in the farmhouse as the dogs' howls subsided to frightened whimpers. Then everybody heard a shuffling noise at the front door, followed by a furious knocking. This was unusual, since the front door of the farmhouse was kept locked while all the daily comings and goings were through the back door. At first nobody moved, but then one of the Irishmen leapt to his feet and said "Who would be after knocking at your front door at this time of night? I will go and see who it is." But the farmer felt that all was not well, and replied "No, no, Eamonn bach, stay here. Bide awhile, and let us listen." So Eamonn returned to his chair.

Then there was the sound of shuffling feet going slowly along the front passage. The parlour door was heard to open, and there was more shuffling of feet. Then something heavy was set on the parlour table with a thump. The heavy footsteps were heard going back down the passage to the front door; and then everything became quiet again. The farmer and his family and guests were all frightened by this strange episode, but Eamonn, having had a few too many, was keen to investigate, and after picking up a rushlight he went into the parlour, followed by two of his friends. They could see no sign of the phantom visitors, and everything in the parlour was just as normal. There were no footprints, and the front door was locked and bolted, just as usual. Everybody was mystified, and there was much speculation as to the meaning of the strange visitation; but now the spirit had gone out of the party, so the guests went home and the residents went to bed.

Next morning there was an accident down on the railway line. Eamonn the Irishman was killed, and since the farmhouse was so close to the line his workmates carried his body on an old door up the hill from the railway cutting. On reaching the farm they knocked frantically on the front door. When it was opened they shuffled slowly inside, along the passage and into the parlour. And there, with difficulty, they lifted Eamonn's battered body on its makeshift stretcher onto the table. Then they trudged out again, with bowed heads, into the daylight. As they went, the farmer's hair stood on end, for he realised that all the sounds made by the men were exactly the same as those of the phantom visitation the previous night.

Date: 1859

Source: Pugh 1986, p 59

7.4 The Ghost in the Quarry

Tom lived with his parents and his brothers and sisters on a small farm not far from the Glogue slate quarry. When he was twelve years old he was asked by his father to take the mare to to be shod by the blacksmith at Llanfyrnach, about two miles away. It was October, and the days were getting shorter. After a long wait in the village the horse was dealt with, and Tom got mounted and set off for home in the gathering gloom. As he climbed up the hill towards the dark and forbidding quarry he began to feel worried, and he became convinced that he was about to encounter something unpleasant.

Perhaps the reason for Tom's apprehension lay in a frightening experience which he had had a month or so before. He had been helping his father with the harvest when somebody ran up from the quarry shouting that there had been an accident. They all ran back and found that a new rock face had collapsed, trapping a quarryman beneath a great pile of slate debris. Frantically they all dug into the rubble with their bare hands, but when they reached the poor man he was dead, covered with blood and with wide open, staring eyes. For several nights afterwards Tom had been afflicted with nightmares, and in his vivid boyhood imagination he convinced himself that the quarry would for ever more be haunted by the ghost of the dead man.

Now, as he passed the quarry on the mare's back, he hardly dared look at it, but out of the corner of his eye he caught movement in the gathering darkness. He looked again, and saw something white moving slowly along on the rock ledge where the accident had occurred. Terrified, he urged the old mare into a slow gallop until he reached the farm gate. When he arrived home he was in a state of shock, and his mother found it very difficult to calm him down. He insisted that he had seen the ghost of the dead quarryman, and nothing would shift him from this belief. At supper he told the rest of the family what had happened, and afterwards he was challenged by his two brothers, aged sixteen and eleven, to return to the quarry to find the ghost. Of course, Tom had to accept the challenge.

The three brave lads armed themselves with stout sticks, just in case. As they approached the quarry, with their eyes straining in the darkness, they became more and more fearful, and their legs felt weaker and weaker. Suddenly they saw the ghost. It was in the same place, on the rock ledge, but as they watched it slowly divided itself into three parts and then merged into one again. The boys were petrified, and were just trying to pluck up the courage to move a little closer when the ghost let out a wild, harsh, piercing cry which echoed around the slate terraces and spoil heaps. Now convinced that they were dealing not only with a ghost but with the Hounds of Hell as well, the boys turned and fled, with further terrible supernatural cries coming from the quarry behind them.....

Later it transpired that three white geese had gone missing from a nearby field, and had turned up again the next day having spent the night somewhere else. But although Tom's mind now had an explanation for the frightening experience in the quarry, he still felt a profound sense of unease whenever he passed the place in the years that followed.

Date: c 1890

Source: Parry-Jones 1973, p 111

7.5 The Dancing Stones of Stackpole

According to a very old legend, there are three standing stones near the village of Stackpole which occasionally become fed up of standing around and take to dancing instead. The stones are more or less in a line, with the westernmost stone almost two miles away from the easternmost.

Closest to the coast is the Devil's Quoit, located on Stackpole Warren, and not far from the eastern arm of the Bosherton Lily Pools. This is a barren area of sand dunes once occupied by Bronze Age settlers; beneath the standing stone archaeologists have found the burnt remains of a wooden hut and also cremated human remains. The second or middle "dancing stone", called the Harold Stone, is on a stone tumulus in a field called Horestone Park belonging to Stackpole Home Farm. And the third, also called the Devil's Quoit, is still further towards the west, near Sampson Farm and Sampson Cross. On a certain night each year the three lonely stones come down to Sais's Ford (Saxon's Ford) to "dance the hay" together. This night is normally on Midsummer's Eve in June, at the end of the hay harvest. If anybody is lucky enough to witness this event, it will lead to exceptional good fortune.

On other occasions, when the stones were firmly rooted in their standing positions in days gone by, witches would hold their revels around them; and it was said that occasionally the devil himself would appear, dancing around with his cohorts and playing a wild tune on his flute.

Date: c 1750?

Sources: Sikes p 375; Miles 1984, p 187



..... it was said that occasionally the devil himself would appear, dancing around with his cohorts.....

7.6 Tragedy at Prendergast Place

In the old days Prendergast, on the outskirts of Haverfordwest, was a distinct village with its own strong sense of community. Near the river there was a fine mansion called Prendergast Place, inhabited by the Stepney family. Like many of the Pembrokeshire gentry, the Stepney family sided with the King during the Civil War. The course of the war in Pembrokeshire was very complicated, and allegiances changed as the Parliamentary tide ebbed and flowed. But the Stepneys remained resolute in their support of the king, and one day a son of the family set off to fight for the Royalist cause, leaving his young wife and children behind.

Accompanied by a small troop of soldiers, he made good progress across Pembrokeshire, sometimes travelling through hostile territory controlled by the enemy. But at last, far from home, he was ambushed by a band of Roundheads. A fierce fight ensued, and among the casualties was young Stepney, dead on the ground in a pool of blood. His body was never returned, and although a message eventually reached Prendergast Place to the effect that the young man had fallen in battle, his wife refused to accept that she would never see him again. She waited, day after day, for his return; and she maintained her vigil until she died a sad and lonely death.

Now her ghost haunts the place where Prendergast Place once stood, and she has been seen many times in the grassy lane which is called "Ghyll" or "Ghyle" by local people. She is called "The White Lady of the Ghyll" by the older people of Prendergast, having been seen on moonlit nights gliding through the green sward at the side of the road. She has about her an air of utter desolation, and sometimes she is heard moaning softly. Sometimes she is accompanied by a small child. She does not stay to haunt people for long, but after a few minutes subsides into the grey mists which swirl about the damp meadows of the Western Cleddau valley.....

Date: c 1645

Source: Richards p 115



She waited, day after day, for his return.....



7.7 The Spectral Monk of Priory Ruins

The Augustinian Priory of Haverfordwest was founded around the year 1200, and it flourished as the most important monastery in Pembrokeshire until it was closed down by Thomas Cromwell in the reign of King Henry VIII. The ivy-covered ruins by the bank of the Western Cleddau have been a day-time playground for children for many generations, and although recent archaeological investigations have removed something of the nocturnal "aura" of the place it is still held in some dread by local people.

The reputation of Priory Ruins as a spooky place goes back several centuries, and to this day there are occasional reports of sightings of a mysterious shadowy figure referred to as the "spectral Monk". This account was given to local author and historian Charles Sinnett, probably around 1950

It was before six o'clock on a dark cold winter's morning as two local women named Martha and Edith made their way down Union Hill towards their place of work in the lower part of the town. They were well dressed for the weather, with thick winter coats, scarves and mittens. As they walked, frost crystals sparkled on the grass at the roadside, and the branches over their heads were weighed down with white rime ice. Their footsteps echoed about them in the narrow lane, and their warm breath condensed into clouds of steam around their heads. They could just make out the lights of the town ahead of them, making an orange glow in the sky. As they approached the entrance to Priory Ruins they quickened their steps, as they always did, for they did not like the feel of this place. Through the hedge they caught occasional glimpses in the half-light of the sombre crumbling walls of the old Priory, thickly clad in ivy. They walked in silence, and although they could just see where they were going Martha regretted that she had forgotten her torch when she set out for work.

Suddenly Edith grabbed Martha's hand and stopped dead in her tracks. "Look!" she whispered, with a touch of panic in her voice. "What's that in the road by the gate?" And as they stared ahead they could make out a strange glowing light. They watched for a moment, and the glow seemed to materialise into the figure of a monk dressed in a long habit and cowl. With mounting horror they saw that he was moving slowly towards them, with a clawed finger beckoning. Then the black hood fell back, revealing a man's face with dark eyes. The spectral monk came even closer, still making the beckoning motion. The women could bear it no longer. Poor Edith fainted on the spot with terror, and Martha screamed at the top of her voice and fled off up the hill towards home.

Later, regaining her composure, Martha returned to collect her friend, finding that she had recovered consciousness and that the ghostly figure had disappeared. Badly shaken, the two of them returned home in the early light of dawn. They remained in a state of shock for some hours, and refused to go to work that day. When they related their story to their family and friends, nobody would believe them; but after that they both refused to go to work past Priory Ruins, preferring the longer walk across St Thomas Green and down High Street instead.

Date: c 1950

Source: Sinnett p 146

7.8 The Ghost of Newport Castle

In the little town of Newport (Trefdraeth) on the north Pembrokeshire coast there is a fine castle which was built by the Normans around the year 1195. At first the castle was a simple motte and bailey structure with stockaded defences, but after being destroyed by the Welsh princes on two occasions in the 13th Century it was rebuilt in stone. In the 1700's the castle was in ruins, but in 1859 the gatehouse was converted into a residence, and what was left of the old stone structure was restored to some degree. The gatehouse is still used as a private residence, and the castle as a whole is still owned by the Lady Marcher of Cemaes.

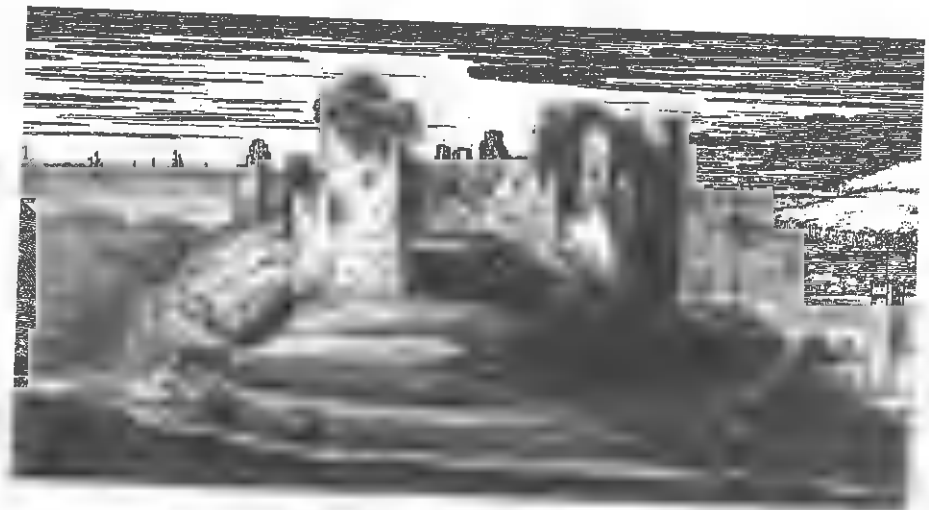
Naturally a castle of this antiquity has its resident ghost -- in this case a "white lady" who is seen most often on the banks outside the castle walls. She is said to walk up and down the grassy slope leading to the upper end of Castle Street, and it is interesting to relate that this is precisely where the old castle driveway was located before the present drive was built in Victorian times. If one looks carefully one can just make out the depression in the lawn where the old track once ran.

In one of the most recent sightings, a "lady wearing a long white gown" was seen wandering at dead of night in the centre of the town, making a considerable noise, and was reported to have knocked on the door of an ancient cottage not far from the castle mound.

Presumably the White Lady is the ghost of some sad soul who lived in the castle in the centuries before it fell into ruin, since she seems determined on her nocturnal expeditions not to use the "modern" entrance to the castle to the west of the Hunter's Tower.

Date: c 1987?

Source: Word of mouth



..... naturally a castle of this antiquity has its resident ghost.

7.9 The Seven Gold Coins

About three hundred years ago a teenage girl was engaged as a servant by a farmer's wife who lived on a small farm somewhere in Pembrokeshire. She seemed happy enough, but after some months it was obvious that something was worrying her, and at last she went to her mistress and asked for her release.

On being asked the cause of her concern, she explained that whenever she went alone along a certain lane near the farm on overcast dark nights, she met a strange shadowy figure of a man. If she changed her route, the figure did the same. The man never appeared in bright moonlight. When this reached the farmer's ears, he advised the girl to confront the stranger if she was followed again, and to ask him what he wanted. Somewhat against her better judgement, the girl agreed. Next time she was followed she asked the shadowy figure why he kept on frightening her, upon which he beckoned for her to follow. This she did, and she was led to a small field not far from the farmhouse. The man seemed harmless but sad, and he asked her to come to the same place next night with a shovel. "But, my dear," he added, "You must not say a word of this to anybody."

The girl said nothing to the farmer and his wife, and next night went to the field with a shovel. The ghostly stranger was there, and he led her to a spot in the corner of the field. "Now you must dig," he said, "right here where I am pointing." The girl obeyed, and eventually discovered a pot full of gold coins. Then the shadowy figure told her that the coins were hers, but that she should always keep seven of them and hand them down to posterity. So long as she kept this trust, her family would enjoy good fortune and prosperity. At last, looking relieved that he had fulfilled his mission, the ghost took his leave and disappeared.

Shortly after this the farmer's wife died. After a period of mourning, he asked the servant girl to marry him, and she agreed. A year later they were man and wife. Then one dark night, the stranger appeared to the girl for the last time. He directed her always to be careful in handing the seven coins down, always from father to son, or from mother to daughter, from generation to generation. If this was done, he said, the farm would always remain in the family and would prosper. If, on the other hand, she or any of her descendants lost or spent any of the seven gold coins, or gave them away, the estate would lose property and land in proportion to the number of missing coins. She listened intently, and said that she understood. And so, with his work complete, the ghost gave a faint smile, and disappeared, never to be seen again.

The girl now shared her secret with her new husband, and they agreed to keep faith with the mysterious figure who had bestowed upon them this ghostly blessing. The coins were handed down, as instructed, from generation to generation, and none of them has been spent, or lost, or given away to this day. The farm has grown into a large and wealthy estate with hundreds of acres of land and many tenant farmers. Each new generation of the family has been told the story and each one has kept the family secret; as a result the estate is still intact, and the family is now the wealthiest in the whole of Pembrokeshire.

Date: c 1700

Source: Trevelyan p 146

7.10 Ghostly Messenger at Narberth

A gentleman who lived in the neighbourhood of Narberth was greatly troubled by a ghost. He was so haunted and tormented that his life became a burden to him, and he did not know what to do. Every night he feared to go to bed; and when he did at last get off to sleep he would be woken by the ghost, which always called him by name. He would have to leave his bedroom and try to get some sleep elsewhere, but even then the ghost pursued him. He could both hear the ghost and see its shadowy form.

At last the squire decided that he would have to obtain some protection from the ghost, and he got two of his farm lads to sleep on either side of him. But at a certain time each night he would be woken by the ghost, although the farm lads remained fast asleep. And each night he would have to rise and leave his room, quaking with fear. When he could stand it no longer he asked a local Wise Man to call and see him. In a state of despair, with his head buried in his hands, he cursed his tormentor. But the Wise Man explained that the ghost was probably trying to lead him to some place which was causing it anguish. The Wise Man also said that ghosts must be confronted and interrogated, and he advised the squire to do just that.



In a state of despair, with his head buried in his hands, he cursed his tormentor.

So next night, when the ghost appeared, the frightened squire plucked up the courage to ask the ghost what it wanted. At once the ghost beckoned for him to follow. He got up from his bed, followed the ghost downstairs and outside into a neighbouring field. There something happened which has never been revealed, but the locals assumed that the squire must have been told to dig at a certain place, where he discovered a treasure of gold and silver. At any rate, having disposed of its secret, the ghost faded away, and never troubled the gentleman again.

Date: c 1840?

Source: Hall and Hall p 466

7.11 The Incompetent Ghost of Crymych

Around the year 1830 a young lad of nineteen, William Howells by name, was investigating ghost stories in various parts of Wales. He came across one strange tale in Pembrokeshire about a particularly incompetent ghost. We do not know where precisely this ghost did his incompetent haunting, but we can assume that it was in the Crymych area, since this appears to be the area William Howells knew best. We have only the barest facts on which to base our story, but maybe it went something like this.

Once upon a time a family moved into an old house near Crymych, and found that it had a resident ghost. The ghost, whose name was Gwilym, appeared to be that of an old man, and he would turn up quite irregularly in the house, making strange noises, pushing over chairs, walking through closed doors and doing various other ghostly things. However, he was not a very good ghost since he was obviously quite harmless and since he appeared far too frequently for his own good; so the family started to take him for granted, and even the children laughed at him instead of screaming with terror as children are supposed to do. This made the poor ghost quite miserable, and he began to waste away until he was but a shadow of his former self.

At last the family became so worried about Gwilym that they decided to take the matter in hand. So next time he appeared the father said to him "Now then, Gwilym, we are getting very worried about you. Come in and sit down here in the living room and we will have a little chat." The old ghost looked surprised at this invitation, but reluctantly agreed, and then came in and sat on the old sofa. The mother looked him in the eye and told him that he wasn't being taken seriously enough, and that he would make a far better job of being a ghost if he did his haunting occasionally rather than all the time. Then young Dafydd piped up and said "Why don't you just come back and haunt us every seven years? Then, when you knock things over and walk through the wall or something we will all have forgotten about you and we will be quite scared! And you will feel really pleased with yourself, just like a proper ghost."

The family all thought this an excellent idea, and after giving the matter some thought Gwilym had to admit it was worth trying; so there and then they all made a deal. Gwilym would appear and do a good haunting every seventh year, and then when they had all recovered from the shock they would sit down for a chat and re-negotiate a new deal. Then Gwilym, true to his word, disappeared through the closed door with a final moan, and did not reappear for seven whole years.

When he came again he popped up through the floor quite unexpectedly and did a splendid haunting, which gave all the members of the family a thoroughly good fright. Afterwards they all sat down and agreed that things had gone very smoothly indeed, and Gwilym and the family renewed the agreement by mutual consent. And so it was that old Gwilym appeared quite regularly, every seventh year, as long as the family and their descendants occupied the house. So far as we know the arrangement is still working well after almost 200 years, and we may imagine that the old ghost is now enjoying life to the full, and looking far better for it.

Date: c 1800

Source. Howells p 15

7.12 The Mysterious Mr Noe

Once upon a time, in the vicinity of Letterston, there was a lonely inn much used by travellers. Normally they were on their way from South Pembrokeshire, having passed through the Treffgarne Gorge on their way to Fishguard and the north coast.

Most travellers who arrived at dusk were happy to stop the night in the inn rather than continue their journey, for the roads were not good and in the darkness and the wind and rain there were dangers for those who did not know the terrain. And there was another problem for the unwary traveller: a particularly sad and lonely female ghost which haunted the road nearby, wailing and crying out "The days are long and the nights are cold, waiting for Noe." Neither the innkeeper nor the other local people knew whose ghost it was, and nobody had ever heard of Mr Noe.

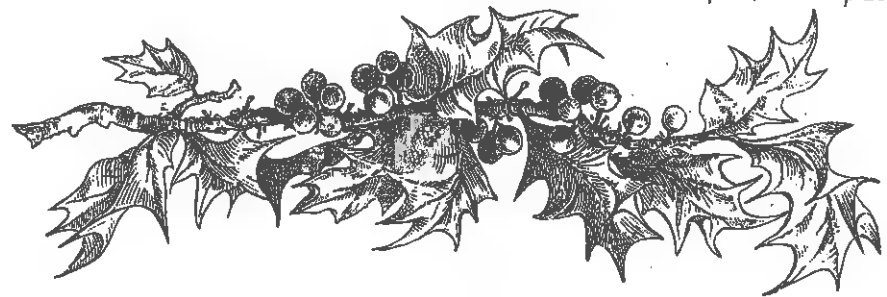
Then, one dark winter night, when the wind was howling around the inn and the rain beating relentlessly on the roof, there was an urgent knocking on the door. The innkeeper opened up, and in came a dishevelled young man, soaked to the skin. He was a complete stranger, never before seen in the area. He took off his rainclothes and bowed stiffly to the assembled company. Then he gradually dried himself out in front of the blazing log fire, but he said not a word to anybody. At last he called for a drink and a meal, and the innkeeper and his regular customers watched as he ate in silence. His hands shook as he finished his meal, and all those present noticed the strange faraway look in his eyes.

At last the stranger rose to his feet, paid for his meal, and said that he must be on his way. The landlord was astonished. "But it is a terrible night outside," he said. "And the dark woods in the valley make it a fearsome place for travellers. Besides, there is a female ghost that haunts the road, who wails and cries that she waits for a man called Noe." The young stranger looked the innkeeper in the eye as he pulled on his heavy coat. "I am the man that the ghost must meet," he said. And with that he rushed out into the wild storm.

The mysterious Mr Noe was never seen again. But strange to relate, neither was the sad ghost. Some of the locals thought that Mr Noe had deceived a young lady, who had died of a broken heart. Others said that Noe was a murderer unable to live with his terrible secret. But all agreed that justice had in the end been done, leaving the lonely road for other travellers to pass in peace.

Date: c 1760

Source: Howells p 30; Davies p 160



7.13 The White Lady of St Dogmael's

In St Dogmael's Abbey there was a famous inscribed stone called the Sagraus Stone, probably dating from the 6th Century AD. It now stands at the west end of the nave in the old abbey church, rebuilt in 1847 as the parish church of St Thomas. After the suppression of the monastery in 1536 the abbey buildings fell into a ruinous state and were indeed used as quarries for the building of many of the houses in the neighbourhood. The Sagraus Stone, together with various other old inscribed stones, were moved on a number of occasions. Some of the carved stones ended up being set into the garden wall of the vicarage, but for many years the Sagraus Stone was used as a bridge over the brook in the abbey grounds. Luckily it was laid over the brook face down, so the inscriptions were not badly damaged while generations of local people tramped over it.

But in the days when the stone lay over the brook it had a fearsome reputation. Many people saw a mysterious ghostly figure (referred to as "the white lady") gliding over the stone bridge at the witching hour of midnight. No local person could be induced to walk over the stone when it was dark, even though it was used regularly in the daytime. And the stone's supernatural reputation prevented it from being smashed up and used as building material in the 1700s.

When the Sagraus Stone was re-erected it became famous throughout the Celtic world, for its Latin and Ogam inscriptions provided the clues for the deciphering of the Ogam alphabet in 1848. Maybe the White Lady of St Dogmael's knew the destiny of the stone, and took on herself the task, over a period of 300 years or so, of protecting it from desecration.

Date: 1830

Sources: Sikes p 375; W J Lewis p 12

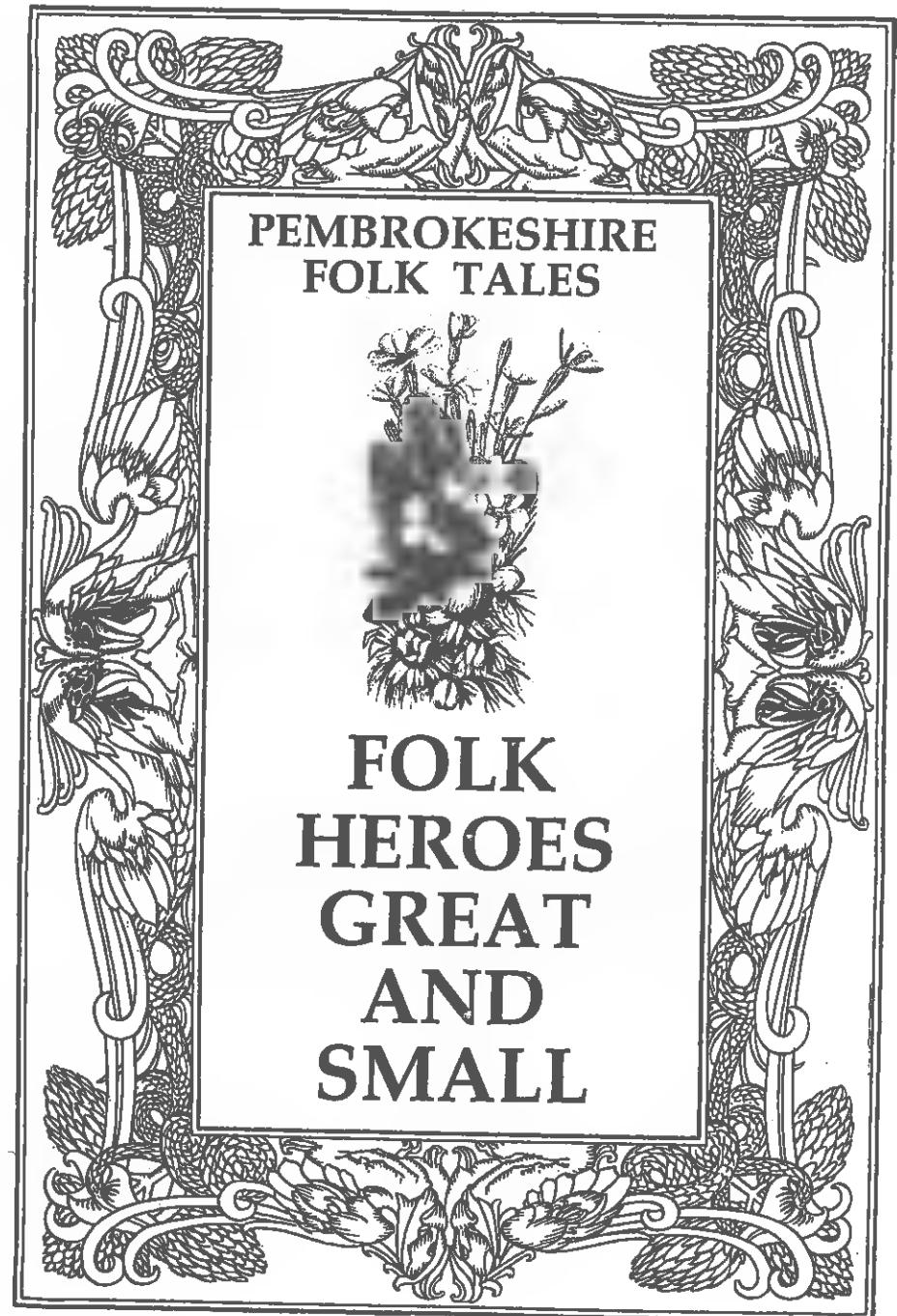
7.14 The Old Devil at Eglwysrwr

At the end of the last century it was widely believed by elderly people in Eglwysrwr that the Evil One was to be seen occasionally in the district. One of the favourite haunting spots was a place called Yet Wen. Sometimes the devil would be seen as a "white lady" or white cat.

Just to make matters confusing, there was another place called Yet Wen near Penrallt Farm, not far from Llantood. One dark night a woman from the village of Eglwysrwr was on her way along the road to Croft. She had passed the old church at Llantood and was walking near Yet Wen when she felt that she was being followed by something very unpleasant. She speeded up her footsteps, but as she hurried along she still felt that she was in the presence of evil. She felt cold, and the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. Although she strained her eyes in the darkness, she could see nothing and hear nothing; but she knew instinctively that something was there. At last she could restrain herself no longer, and she shouted out at the top of her voice "Come out, you old devil!" And immediately a white cat appeared in front of her. It did her no harm, but she knew that it was really the Evil One, up to his usual tricks.

Date: c 1850

Source: Davies p 181



8.1 Gerald's Revenge

Gerald of Windsor was one of the most famous personalities of the Norman conquest of Little England Beyond Wales, and but for his heroism during the siege of Pembroke Castle in 1094 the Anglo-Norman campaign may have lost its momentum in the face of determined assaults by the Welsh princes. (The tale of this siege is related in *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales*, 8.1.)

But Gerald's life was by no means filled with glory, and although he became an inspiring military leader and a veteran of many campaigns against the Welsh, one episode from his personal life haunted him until the day of his death. In the year 1100 he married Princess Nest, the ravishingly beautiful daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, one of the leading Welsh princes. The marriage was partly political, for it forged a symbolic union between the nobility of the Norman and Welsh sides. But Nest, although still only in her teens, was sweet, gentle, kind and intelligent, and we cannot doubt that Gerald was deeply in love with her. One night in the year 1107 a band of ruffians led by Owain ap Cadwgan attacked the castle of Cenorh Bychan, where Gerald and his family were staying, and abducted Nest and her two children David and Angharad. Nest was apparently not averse to the idea of being abducted, but Gerald was afterwards filled with shame, for at the height of the conflict he had fled from the family's living quarters by sliding down the garderobe, which must have been an extremely unpleasant experience.

Owain fled to the Vale of Llangollen with Nest and the two children, leaving Gerald to suffer the ridicule of his peers. Wales was thrown into turmoil because of the incident, and the combined wrath of the Norman barons, the South Wales princes, and the king himself descended on the heads of the members of the Cadwgan clan. Owain's father Prince Cadwgan suffered most, losing his possessions in Powys, and eventually his life, in the bloody conflicts that followed, while his wayward son escaped to Ireland. Eventually Owain lived to reign over Powys, and it appeared that he had been forgiven when after making a political alliance with the King he served with distinction in various battles in Normandy. But Gerald never forgave the wrong that had been done to him, and as the years passed he waited and waited for his opportunity for revenge.

At last an uprising in South Wales brought Owain and Gerald together on the side of the king, as unlikely comrades in arms. The brash and impulsive Owain had forgotten the incident at Cenorh Bychan, and as the military campaign progressed it appeared that Gerald had also learned to forgive and forget. But one day, during a lull in the fighting, Gerald observed that Owain had gone out riding in the forest alone. Quietly he summoned a small troop of his mounted Flemish bodyguard and slipped out of the camp. They met in a clearing. We do not know precisely what the two men said to each other, but Owain, off his guard and in a relaxed mood, died in a hail of arrows. Afterwards, without any great ceremony or celebration, Gerald and his men returned to their camp and resumed their tasks for the day. It had taken eight years, but the warrior with the long memory had finally had his revenge.

Date: 1115

Sources: Sheppard-Jones p 41; Warner p 64

8.2 Return from the Barbary Coast

William Scourfield of Castle Villa in Brawdy parish was both a landowner and a merchant. Like many of the Pembrokeshire squires he had part ownership of a trading vessel, but he was unusual in that he enjoyed the occasional adventurous voyage himself. One day in the year 1555 he took his leave of his young wife Anne and set off from Milford on a voyage to France. His ship, the Trinity, never returned.

The years rolled by, and nothing was heard of either William Scourfield or his vessel. Anne at last concluded that she was bereaved, and decked herself "in the dark weeds of widowhood." But since she was of good breeding, and was heiress to one of the largest estates in North Pembrokeshire, it was not long before she began to attract various suitors. It so happened that Morgan Philipps of Picton Castle, one of the county's leading gentry, was looking for a wife; and after studying his little book of Pembrokeshire pedigrees and his list of the extent of Pembrokeshire estates he decided that Anne would fit the bill admirably. He proposed to the young widow, and she accepted. They were married in Slebech Church, and beneath the bunting on the towers of Picton Castle a lavish wedding reception was held for the top people in Pembrokeshire society. Anne and Morgan lived and loved together happily enough, and they were blessed with a daughter.

All seemed well with the world, until one day in 1563 a bronzed and bearded figure appeared at the door of Castle Villa. It was William Scourfield, whose ship had been blown off course towards the North African coast. Six of his shipmates had died, but he and five others had been captured by the Moors and had spent seven years there in a barbarian prison. At last he had contrived to obtain his freedom from his captor King Merocus, having promised to raise and deliver a ransom for the release of his fellow prisoners from Haverfordwest. On arrival in London he had obtained permission to raise alms in the cities of London and Bristol for the payment of the ransom; and we can only conclude that he kept his word and obtained the release of his old shipmates. Mission accomplished, he headed for home, anticipating a warm welcome from his loving wife.

Naturally our hero was somewhat aggrieved when he returned to Castle Villa to find that there was nobody there to listen to his exotic tales of mountainous Barbary and of his adventures amid the fierce and turbanned Moors. On finding that Anne was happily installed at Picton Castle with her new husband and daughter, he immediately demanded her return. Morgan Philipps was very fond of Anne, and told William to clear off back to Barbary. So the matter went to the courts of law, and as a result of the hearing Anne was returned to William at Castle Villa. We do not know how Morgan took this turn of events; but at any rate he disliked being without a wife, and before long he married an heiress from North Wales whose spinsterhood was above suspicion.

By all accounts William and Anne settled down again happily as man and wife; but the bearded adventurer had had too many close shaves for comfort, and his urge to travel suddenly disappeared. For the rest of his life he stayed very close to home.

Date: 1563

Source: F. Jones p 68

8.3 Rescue from the Smalls Light

In the late eighteenth century Henry Whitesides became something of a local hero in Pembrokeshire, having moved into the county from Liverpool. He was an engineer by training but a maker of violins, spinets and harpsichords by profession. He was friendly with many Liverpool merchants and shipowners, and around the year 1775 some of them were very concerned about the dangers presented to their vessels by the Smalls, a deadly reef far out from the Pembrokeshire coast and in the main shipping channel. One of Henry's friends was John Phillips, a merchant with Pembrokeshire connections, and maybe because of the terrible tragedy of the **Phoebe and Peggy** only a couple of years earlier (see Story 3.2) the men were moved to build a light on the Smalls. The friends travelled to Pembrokeshire, and after investigating the reef John Phillips obtained a fifty-year lease from the crown. The men started work immediately, using Solva as a base, and with Henry in charge of design and engineering.

Henry Whitesides decided to build not a solid tower of stone but a "strange wooden-legged Malay-looking barracoon of a building" with a small octagonal cabin (containing the light and living quarters) supported on nine tall piles fixed to the rock. The idea was that the force of the waves should be dissipated as they passed through the tower legs. The original plan was to make the piles of iron flanges bolted together, and these were made and shipped out to the Smalls, 22 miles west of Solva. But they proved to be too rigid, and Henry then decided to use oak beams instead.

By late 1776 the work was almost complete, but those who had been working on the structure complained that it moved so much during storms that they became seasick, and that a bucket filled with water quickly lost half its contents because of the vibrations. In early January 1777 Henry decided to investigate by spending some time in the lighthouse himself, and so he travelled out to the Smalls with three lighthouse keepers in harsh winter weather. Once there, the weather deteriorated further, and there was a terrible storm on 13th January. Henry and his colleagues experienced great difficulties. They ran out of oil and candles, and could do nothing to tend the light or to keep warm. They used up almost all their food and water. At last, in fear of losing their lives, they decided upon the last recourse of shipwrecked mariners: the message in the bottle.

On 1st February Henry and the keepers wrote three identical letters, addressed to Thomas Williams of Treleddyn, near St David's, who was the local agent for the Smalls Light project. Each letter was placed in a tightly corked bottle, and each bottle was placed inside a cask. On each cask they wrote the words: "Open this and you will find inside a letter." In the letters, Henry referred to their "most dangerous and distressed condition", and expressed the fear that if they were not taken off before the next spring tide they would all perish. He asked Thomas Williams to "fetch us from here as fast as possible." The three casks were then thrown into the sea, probably with very little expectation that they would ever be seen again. One of the casks was eventually washed up in Galway Bay in Ireland, but by an extraordinary twist of fate the other two actually reached Thomas Williams. One was washed up three days later in the creek of Porthselau, where Mr Williams kept his small boat; and the other was found on Newgale Sands.

Being a man of action, Thomas Williams immediately affected the rescue of Henry Whitesides and his friends, much to the relief of all concerned. Henry made certain changes to the structure, and by 1778 the Smalls Light was in full service. The strange nine-legged structure remained in operation for 80 years, and became the most profitable light in the world. John Phillips and his descendants were well pleased. As for Henry Whitesides, he decided that providence was on his side, and he settled in Solva after marrying the daughter of a local publican.

Date: 1777

Sources: Warburton p 22; Brinton and Worsley p 76



8.4 The Crafty Cardi

Once upon a time there was a wealthy farmer from Pembrokeshire who had three special friends. One of them came from Carmarthen; another from Haverfordwest; and the third from Cardigan. When the farmer died, his will stated that all his worldly possessions were to be shared equally between his three friends. But there were two conditions. Each friend had to be present at his funeral, and as a parting gesture each one had to place a gift of £100 in his cold hands as he lay in his open coffin before burial.

And so the morning of the funeral came. The three friends visited the farmer's house and, each in turn, they went into the room where the open coffin lay. The Pembrokeshire man went in first, paid his last respects, and placed one hundred crisp pound notes in the dead man's hands. Then the Carmarthen man did the same. Finally the Cardigan man went in. He took his wallet from his pocket, and discovered that it contained not even a halfpenny. He felt in his jacket pockets and trouser pockets, and fared no better. "Never mind though," he said to himself. "The old man will not be without his due."

And he took a cheque book from his waistcoat and carefully wrote out a cheque for £300. Taking the two hundred pound notes from the coffin as change, he placed the cheque in the dead man's hand. Then he replaced the lid on the coffin and went out of the room with a clear conscience, a bulging wallet, and an angelic smile on his face.

Date: c 1947

Source: Gwyndaf 1990

8.5 Pandemonium on the Parrog

Old Daniel Thomas (who was called Daniel y Pant because he came originally from a farm called Pant) ran a little inn called the Parrog Arms, down on the Parrog in Newport. It was a miserable wet summer. The hay was mowed, and turned and turned, but it never dried and in the end it went rotten in the fields. Earlier on, Daniel had made several casks of beer in anticipation of the demand from thirsty harvesters, but since the harvest failed they never needed it. And to make matters worse, the beer started going sour in the casks, and Daniel could not even give it away.

That was the year when Daniel was trying to fatten up his sow called Susan. The weather must have affected her as well, because she lost her appetite, and whatever tasty morsels were placed in front of her, she just turned up her snout and walked away. Old Daniel became very worried, for she was as thin as a rake, with her ribs showing. But then one of Daniel's neighbours suggested that some of the stale ale mixed in her feed might whet her appetite. So Daniel agreed to try, although he was a bit sceptical about the idea. He mixed up a bucket of meal and stale ale, poured it into the pig trough and called Susan. She came over, without much spirit; but after a tentative lick or two at the magic mixture her ears pricked up, and in no time at all she had scoffed down the whole lot. So keen was she that she licked the trough clean, until it shone like the sun.

Well now, Daniel was delighted at this turn of events. He went back to the house, made another bucketful of the mixture, and filled the trough up again. And Susan finished it off for the second time. Daniel called his wife Mari, and together they watched her gobble down a third bucket of meal and stale ale. At last her stomach was so full that she could eat no more. Next morning Daniel gave her several more bucketfuls, and continued to feed her with the same mixture for several days. Towards the end of the week she was really beginning to look more like her old self, and Daniel thought that maybe they would have some decent Christmas bacon after all. He gradually cut down on the amount of meal in the mixture, until at last Susan was being fed on slops, skimmed milk and stale beer only. She became as plump as a mushroom, quiet and contented, and the neighbours were full of admiration. Indeed, Daniel thought it was a real pleasure to be in her company.

But one day things took a turn for the worse. Daniel was in the kitchen when his wife Mari came running in. "Daniel bach," she said. "Go down to the pigsty. I don't know what's come over old Susan. There's an awful riot over there." So Daniel went down through the garden, and heard a strange squeal as he approached the pigsty. He peeped inside, and saw Susan rushing about in a frenzy. As soon as she saw Daniel she jumped straight over the wall and headed for him at a gallop. Poor Daniel fled back up the garden path, with Susan in hot pursuit. He just got to the kitchen in time, and slammed the door as Susan arrived. She attacked the door like an angry bull, with Mari peeping fearfully out of the small kitchen window. The old sow was just getting ready for a further charge at the door when she saw somebody coming along the quay wall. She became even more furious and charged straight at him. The poor fellow was so surprised that he did not get out of the way, and before he could do anything Susan went for his legs and threw him straight down into the

field. He rolled over and over, screaming, and then got up and fled home.

Then Susan saw somebody over on Traeth Mawr (Big Beach), and decided to go for him as well. She charged across the river and started trundling along the beach, but the man saw her coming and was able to take shelter among the bushes at the back of the sand dunes.

By now Susan was out of breath, and she ambled back across the river. The pandemonium had brought out all the neighbours; but as she approached they all fled inside and locked their doors. She prowled back and forth, searching for another victim. Daniel now decided that Susan had become a public danger, and he thought it best for all concerned if she could be shot, preferably from a safe distance. He didn't own a gun, but Ifan Dafis did, and he lived only a few doors away. So Daniel crept stealthily through the garden and along the hedge towards Ifan's cottage, hoping that Susan would not catch sight of him. Once there, the two men held a council of war. Daniel was all for shooting the sow, but Ifan said "I don't think she's gone mad. But I think she's got a spot of the horrors on account of all that beer you've been giving her. I think that if we can tow her out into the bay, and keep her there for a bit in the cold water, she'll come over this spot of bother."

So a cunning plan was devised. By now the tide had come up, and the two men made a boat ready at the water's edge behind the old storehouse on Parrog. They also prepared a long rope with a loop on one end. Susan was prowling about over near Pen Catman, and when she came nearer, Daniel called "Biwcs, biwcs, biwcs". As soon as she heard him she came for him like a rocket, but at the last moment he jumped over the wall and slipped the noose over her head. She became even more furious, and went for Daniel and Ifan with her feet crunching on the gravel at the water's edge. But the two heroes leapt into the boat and pushed it off, rowing as fast as they could, out along the river channel and into the deep water of the bay, with Susan in hot pursuit.

Sad to say, it turned out that Susan could swim faster than they could row. She started swimming round and round the boat until it was spinning like a top. Daniel and Ifan were so giddy that they felt as if they were hanging upside down from the clouds. At last there was nothing for it but to let go the rope and escape back to the shore, leaving Susan swimming around out in the bay. When Daniel and Ifan returned to the Parrog there was a large crowd of onlookers, attracted by all the commotion. Daniel thought Susan was bound to drown, but she had a strange energy about her, and she swam back and forth between Pen Morfa and Pen Dinas over and over again, plunging and diving as she went. When it got dark she was still at it, and everybody went home. Daniel could not sleep, worrying as he was about his poor pig. So he got up at dawn and went down to the beach. There was no sign of Susan, but the beach was covered in fish – mackerel, herring, and pollack – that had been frightened onto the beach by Susan's diving and splashing in the bay.

Daniel and many other Parrog folk were at it for days, collecting up all the fish. Daniel had a cart and two horses delivering fish to Crymych, from where it was sent off by train. He made more money out of that one catch than he had made out of years of farming at Pant.

Date. 1880?

Sources: D. Lloyd Richards; Gwyndaf 1990

8.6 Wil Canaan's Tale

Wil was an old character who lived on a small-holding called Canaan, not far from Rhydwylym. Like Shemi Wad, he was a great teller of tall tales. One of Wil's famous tales was told around 1920, many years after his death, on the hay-fields of Glynsaethmaen, not far from Mynachlog-ddu. This is how it was told as the thirsty harvesters drank their tea

I was saying one day that there was not much work on the farm. And you see, boys, it came to my mind to go out for a day's shooting. I thought now, for a little change, instead of taking cartridges with me in this old gun, I'd try a few hazel nuts. So I took a bucket full of nuts with me, and went out to shoot. After walking for a while, I saw Dai's old donkey standing there in the field, and I thought, well, it would be a good idea to have a pot shot at it. So I took aim and shot it on its flank. It just stood there and never noticed a thing! I never thought about it afterwards, and I went home quite happy, remembering nothing about the old donkey

But you see, boys, a short while after that, about a month or so, I went out and saw Dai's old donkey standing in the middle of the field, and do you know what had happened? A big hazel nut tree had grown up out of its back! And I was thinking, well, there's not much work on the farm today, so maybe I should go out for an afternoon of nut-collecting. So I took my bucket and hopped up on the donkey's back and started climbing up this tree. What nuts there was! I was filling my bucket and my pockets and going higher all the time

Soon I was right at the top of the tree. I looked up and I was far away in the middle of the clouds. And do you know who I saw there? A little old woman winnowing corn. She was very busy up there in the clouds, and when she saw me she said "How are you today?" "Oh, I am very well thank you. And how are you then?" "Oh, very well indeed, considering," said she. "Come on up for us to have a little chat." And I went up to the old woman, and a nice old woman she was too. After we had chatted for a while, she said "Would you like a cup of tea?" And we had a cup of tea. Talking away as one does, you see, from one thing to another, the time passed away nicely enough. Well, when I looked down, boys, do you know what had happened? The old donkey had moved off, and the tree had moved off with it. Well, now I began to wonder how on earth I was going to get down from these clouds. I was very worried, I can tell you! But the little old woman said, fair play to her, "Don't you worry now. I'll tell you what I'll do. I will make you a finger-and-thumb rope of straw and I'll drop it down, and then you can hold onto it and I'll let you down step by step." "Very good," said I. "That's very kind of you indeed."

And that's how it was. I was coming down by this old straw rope and well, the ground beneath me seemed very far away. But I was coming nearer the ground all the time, until..... crash! The old rope broke and down I went, head first. And there I was with my head stuck fast between two big stones and my feet waving in the air. I began to wonder what I could do. So I left my head there and went off home for my mattock to get it free. And do you know boys, without a word of a lie, when I returned for my head the crows had pecked out my eyes.

Date: c 1900

Source: *Gwynndaf* 1990

8.7 How Billy Biddle Stopped the Battle

Billy Biddle, who died in 1852, was the king of the Pembrokeshire Fiddlers. He was a native of Jeffreyeston near Tenby. He was always at home during the winter months, but during the summers he would be "on the road", travelling all over South Wales, playing his Duke fiddle brilliantly at fairs, weddings, wakes and other events. At wakes he would play weird, frenzied music designed to scare away the spirits who lurked near the room where the dead person lay. At weddings he was often invited to be the "king of mirth" or master of ceremonies, and he played his wonderful fiddle in a light fantastic vein which the dancers could never resist. At some of the big village green fairs, for example in Yerboston near Tenby, there might be a dozen or more itinerant fiddlers; but Billy Biddle was always reckoned to be the best of them, and his company of dancers was always greater than that of any of the others.

Billy Biddle must have been a striking man when he was young, and even when he was in his seventies he was referred to as "polite and dignified of manner." But he was also a famous character, full of eccentricities and able to keep his head and his rhythm even after imbibing vast quantities of ale at the venues where he performed. He kept his hard-earned takings in a special pocket on the inside of his flannel shirt, and he had another pocket on the inside of his top hat for lumps of resin and spare violin strings.

One day around the year 1830 Billy was attending one of the great games of knappan between the adjoining parishes of Jeffreyeston and Carew. There was a huge crowd of onlookers, with music, festivities, and food and drink in plentiful supply. The game in south Pembrokeshire was like a primitive sort of hockey or bandy, and the players all used clubs or "bandos" to hit the ball. On this occasion (as on many others) the game got out of hand, and before long there was a pitched battle going on with the players involved in a free-for-all fight. Suddenly, above the sound of the warfare, the players and the onlookers heard a strange sound. First, they thought it was a horse. Then it came again, and people thought it must be a cow. Or was it a donkey? Now it sounded like a cockerel. And now people became certain it was a goose..... or maybe even a hen laying an egg. At last, when silence had descended on the combatants and their supporters, somebody realised that Billy Biddle was playing his fiddle. Somebody began to laugh, and as Billy continued with his menagerie of farmyard sounds the laughter spread until the whole crowd was affected by uncontrollable fits of hysterical laughter. And so, in the words of an observer, "their madness was turned to mirth".

In 1852, when Billy was an old man of eighty, he set off as usual for his summer season of playing in the towns of the South Wales Coalfield. He was never seen in Pembrokeshire again. Nobody knows what happened to him. Maybe he died in a workhouse somewhere, or at the roadside. Away from Pembrokeshire he was known by only a very few people, and he had no family to make enquiries concerning his whereabouts. But the memory of Billy Biddle is still green in those parts of "Little England" which he enlivened with his high spirits and skilful fiddle playing.

Date: c 1830

Source: *Meredith Morris* p 11

8.8 Twm Waunbwll and his Mam

Thomas Phillips of Waunbwll, near Glandwr, was one of the great local characters of the early years of this century. As is the fashion in rural Wales, he was always known as Twm Waunbwll after the name of his farm. He was a huge man, with a wide girth, a ruddy complexion and a twinkle in his eye. Although he was wildly eccentric and uneducated, he was no fool, and he succeeded as a farmer because he seemed to know precisely when to buy and when to sell. There are many tales about his astute business deals which led to the ownership of substantial properties throughout the area. He died a bachelor in 1914, having lived much of his life with his old mother.

There are many stories still in circulation about Twm and his Mam, both of whom appear to have been quite forceful characters. It is said that when Twm was in middle age his Mam decided that it was high time for him to find a wife. Twm had never been one for the ladies, having been trapped like many of his contemporaries in the running of the family farm after the death of his father. Also, Twm's huge size (he was well over six feet tall and weighed 22 stone) was something of a disadvantage. Accordingly, Mam decided that Twm needed a little training in the niceties of courtship.

One day she told Twm that in order to find a pretty young wife he would need to know how to creep up to the house of his beloved at dead of night. Once there, he would need to know how to charm her with sweet words from beneath her bedroom window. So Mam decided on a little play acting. "Now then, Twm," she said. "You go outside and stand under my bedroom window. Give me a couple of minutes to go upstairs, and then throw up a pebble or two against the window pane to attract my attention. And then we'll see how you get on." Twm did as he was told, and threw up a couple of small pebbles, which rattled on the window pane. Mam peeped out through the curtains and said in a coy voice "Who's there?" At this, Twm got quite irritated and replied loudly "Dammo, Mam! You know it's me, for you only sent me outside a moment ago!" Twm never did get the hang of courting, and never did marry.

Old Mrs Phillips was lame in later life, and needed much assistance from Twm in getting about. She was also a cantankerous old soul, who did not suffer fools gladly. She was obsessively careful with money, and passed on this characteristic to Twm also. When Mam died Twm addressed the assembled company of family, friends and neighbours at the Waunbwll wake. Standing over her coffin he proclaimed: "Listen to me, all you good people! If my Mam owes any of you here a single penny piece, let us settle up this minute, for she will not rest well in the ground with any debts upon her conscience! Speak now, or for ever hold your peace!" And as he glared over his white whiskers at all the mourners nobody was surprised that not a single person spoke up about an unpaid debt. Afterwards, when the funeral procession reached the Glandwr Chapel graveyard the mourners discovered that Twm had insisted on his Mam's grave being located just inside the gate. Later he was asked why he had chosen this particular site, upon which he replied "Well, my old Mam was a bit lame, and being by the gate she'll have a better chance to get out quick on Judgement Day."

Date: c 1900

Sources: Miles p 35; Mrs D. James; Mr D B Bowen

8.9 Twm Goes to Sea

It was the great day of the annual trip to the seaside (*Dydd Iau Mawr* in Welsh). As usual, the Glandwr families and the whole community round about set out in the early morning, piled into wagons and carts, with some on horseback. There were children in their Sunday best, wildly excited and chattering nineteen to the dozen, mothers and fathers anxiously organizing, grandpas and grandmas settled comfortably in the best seats, and picnic hampers filled to overflowing with fresh bread and butter, home-made jam, cooked vegetables, cakes and buns, oranges, apples and pears. One wagon had a pile of firewood, and another had footballs and skittles, bags and blankets, towels and bathing costumes. Some of the young men, dressed to the nines, were on their ponies, rearing to go, and anticipating encounters with the young ladies of Aberporth. Somebody up near the front of the procession was playing on his fiddle. Further back, a couple of families were singing *Cwm Rhondda*. So off they went, a bright and cheerful convoy, along the lane towards the sea, with the rising mists before them and the rising sun at their backs.

Twm Waunbwll was in the throng, on his best pony. His Mam was in one of the wagons, determined to keep a good eye on him lest he should be led astray by his wild friends from the village. The journey to Aberporth was long and hot, and when the expedition forces arrived there Twm was not in a good humour. He was a very large young man, and the pony did not really accommodate him adequately; as a result he had a sore bum, quite apart from feeling hot and bothered. Once on the beach, he sat and sulked while all his friends went in for a swim. But then, since it would be some little time before the picnic was ready, the young men decided to hire a rowing boat and go for a trip around the bay. "Come on, Twm!" they shouted. "Don't sit there looking so miserable!" And after much cajoling, Twm was convinced to join his pals in the boat. They placed him in the stern, where his great weight had the effect of lifting the bows well clear of the water. And so, with the boat looking distinctly down-at-heel, off they went around the bay, with Twm's friends taking it in turns to row.

They all had a wonderful time, singing, shouting to the folks on the shore, and directing amiable insults at whichever incompetent rower happened to be in charge. The sea was calm and the water warm, but during the whole trip Twm sat petrified in the stern, hanging onto the sides of the boat for dear life, and not saying a word to anybody. At last, when they had all returned and were safely ashore, the lads ran laughing up the beach to where the picnic was all laid out on sheets and blankets. Twm followed, trembling and white-faced. "Well now, Twm", said his Mam as he arrived, "Did you enjoy the trip on the water?" Twm almost exploded. "Enjoy?" he said, with passion. "Enjoy? Dammo, Mam, how could I enjoy a thing like that with only half an inch of planking between me and Eternity?"

Date: c 1875

Source: Mr Noel James

8.10 Twm and the Men from the Ministry

Shortly before Twm Waunbwll died in 1914 the country was plunged into war with Germany. There was grave concern about the country's ability to grow its own food supplies, and government surveyors were sent out to visit every farm with a view to calculating how many acres of cereals might be grown. One day two of these surveyors appeared in the Glandwr area, and Twm discovered that without his knowledge or permission they had ensconced themselves in one of his fields. They put up a tent and appeared to be turning the field into their operational HQ.

Twm was none too pleased with this development, and strode up to the tent to remonstrate with the Men from the Ministry, speaking of course in Welsh. The inspectors spoke no Welsh, and tried to explain what they were doing in English. Soon it became apparent that English was a foreign language to Twm, but all seemed to be well when the men showed Twm their official permit, printed on blue paper. Mumbling under his breath, Twm walked back up to the farm, leaving the inspectors to analyse their maps in their tent.

But Twm was not to be beaten, and he instructed one of his farm hands to move his notoriously fierce herd of Welsh Black cattle into the field where the tent was pitched. Then he climbed onto a hedge to enjoy the fun and games. As soon as the cattle saw the tent they rushed playfully towards it. The thundering hooves caused the Men from the Ministry to make a very rapid evacuation, and after trying to frighten off the animals they fled in disarray across the field with the playful cattle in hot pursuit. One of the men spotted Twm sitting on the hedge roaring with laughter. "For God's sake, man," he shouted with terror in his voice, "do something to stop them!"

At this Twm cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled back (in Welsh, of course): "show them the blue paper!"

Date: 1914

Source: Mrs Gwennie Davies



..... after trying to frighten off the animals they fled in disarray across the field.....

8.11 Twm Waunbwll and the Servant Girl

By the early years of this century Twm Waunbwll had become so successful as a farmer and businessman that he owned several properties in and around the town of Cardigan. It was his custom to call in and collect the rent from his tenants when he came into town to do his shopping on Saturday market day. However, Twm was not at all your standard landlord, for he used to turn up on the doorstep with rent book in hand and his great shopping sack on his back, looking for all the world like a tramp. Normally on his visits to town he wore breeches and leggings, tweed waistcoat and jacket, with a bowler hat upon his head.

One day he called as usual to collect the rent at a big house called Dolwerdd, in the Netpool district of the town. It so happened that the tenant had just employed a new maid called Marged, who had not been informed that Twm would probably be calling in his capacity as owner and landlord of the property. Twm knocked at the front door, which was opened by the new maid. The poor girl was taken aback by the huge scruffy figure which confronted her on the doorstep, but she assumed that he must be a tradesman or an old tramp calling for a cup of tea and a crust of bread. So she told Twm that she couldn't let him in through the front door, since the master wouldn't like it. "But if you come round to the back door," she continued, "I'll give you a cup of tea and a bite to eat." Twm gave her a broad smile, and walked round to the back of the house.

Once in the kitchen Twm enjoyed his light refreshments, chatted to Marged for a while, and then asked to see the master. The servant girl duly reported to the master that there was an old tramp in the kitchen, and that he wanted to talk to him. "show him in, then!" said the master, and the girl was most surprised when Twm and the master greeted each other like old friends. She left them in the office, talking earnestly about what seemed to be financial matters. After a little while the master rang the bell to summon Marged back to his office, and asked her if she would be so kind as to show Mr Phillips out, nodding towards the front door rather than the back. Still not quite understanding what was going on, the servant girl led Twm along the passage towards the front door.

Twm stepped outside into the fresh air, put his bowler hat on his head, and threw his great heavy sack onto his back. "Thank you, Marged bach, for the nice bite to eat," he said. "Fine house you've got here. And very pleased I am that I own the front door as well as the back!" And with that he gave the astonished servant girl a broad wink and set off up the road to the town.

Date: 1905?

Source: Mrs H.G. Howells



8.12 Twm Waunbwl and the Chapel

Twm Waunbwl appears to have had quite a difficult relationship with the Congregational Chapel at Glandwr. He attended chapel regularly, but he was renowned locally as a man who never threw money away. This was resented by some, for in later life he was a very wealthy man who owned a number of properties in north Pembrokeshire and Cardigan town.

On one occasion there was some discussion in the chapel about replacing the old clear glass windows with frosted glass, which would be more expensive but which would make the chapel look more attractive. Twm resisted this idea very strongly, and he was pressed by the chapel elders as to his reasoning. It quickly emerged that from his seat in the chapel Twm had an excellent view of Waunbwl across the valley, and that during the chapel services he could keep a constant eye on the place just in case it should catch fire or suffer from some other catastrophe. Frosted windows would have led to Twm worrying terribly every Sunday morning about the state of the farm, therefore he was dead against the plan, claiming that it would have been a waste of money anyway.

When Twm was quite old the chapel minister called on him at Waunbwl to ask for a donation to help in the purchase of a parcel of land next to the graveyard. He explained that the graveyard was almost full, and needed to be extended. Twm was not renowned for his generosity, and he replied that as far as he could see there was still plenty of room for more graves to be crammed in to the existing churchyard. His mother was buried just inside the graveyard gate. "My Mam was a miserable old woman," he said. "And she's not complaining that she has too little room!"

When Twm died in December 1914 he left a large estate valued at over £20,000. At his funeral the Glandwr chapel was packed with mourners and with people who came from far and wide just in order to listen to the funeral oration from the minister. They were sadly disappointed, for the minister conducted the service strictly according to the book. There was no tribute to Twm, and although his very large coffin stood before the pulpit the minister did not even mention him by name. Afterwards he was buried in the graveyard outside, and his headstone can be seen there to this day.

Date: 1914

Source: Mr D.B. Bowen



8.13 The Glandwr Buffalo Hunt

When old Twm Waunbwl died in 1914 there was no heir for the estate, and all that he had built up over the years of careful farming was sold off. It was announced in the local press that there was to be a grand auction of the farm, stock and effects, and on the appointed day a great crowd turned up. The auctioneer set to work, taking the crowd with him as he moved from one sale item to another. All of the farm equipment was laid out in the field next to the farmhouse. As usual, all of the neighbours bought something in the sale as a sign of community solidarity and as a memento of the great man.

But most of the interest was in the sale of the livestock, for Twm had a reputation as a top-class cattle breeder. He had a fine herd of Welsh Black cattle, well fed and well looked after. However, nobody could handle them except Twm himself, and they were so fierce and uncontrollable that some likened them to the buffalos of the Great Plains of North America. With mounting excitement the local farmers and butchers awaited the cattle sale; and when the time came the auctioneer and his helpers opened the gate and moved into the field where the Welsh Blacks were grazing peacefully. As soon as they spotted the intruders the cattle charged towards them, upon which the men beat a hasty retreat. Some helpers tried with their dogs to round them up and get them into a holding pen, but the cattle would have none of it. In the end, to the great amusement of all the neighbours, the auctioneer had to conduct the auction for the cattle in the adjoining field, with himself and the potential buyers gazing at the animals across the hedge.

The bidding was brisk, and the herd was sold for a good price to Mr Phillips, the local butcher. Towards the evening, when the sale was complete, and having put down his money, Mr Phillips came along to claim his beef on the hoof. He sent his men in to the field to round the animals up, so that he could take them away to be butchered. But like the auctioneer's helpers his men also fled in disarray when the mighty beasts charged towards them, and the butcher summoned a council of war. Twm's Welsh Blacks clearly had no intention of leaving the field alive, and by now it was almost dark. Some of the neighbours murmured that Twm and his animals were not giving up their beloved Waunbwl without a fight. Mr Phillips had no option but to send off a request for a local marksman to assist him next day in his task of turning the Welsh Blacks into prime beef.

And so it was that next morning, to the great amusement of the locals, a mighty buffalo hunt was held in Twm's field. The marksman settled down on a convenient hedge with his rifle. He picked off the animals one by one, and when at last all the fallen animals were dead the butcher and his helpers were able to enter the field with horses and carts. The animals had to be bled where they fell, and then the heavy carcasses were hauled up with block and tackle onto the carts and taken away. Mr Phillips was not amused, for all this had involved considerable expense, as well as making him something of a laughing stock in the community. But he need not have worried. Twm's beef was in great demand, and tasted excellent.

Date: 1915

Source: Mr D.B. Bowen

8.14 The Solva Volunteers

When the "Last Invasion of Britain" took place on the Pencaer Peninsula in February 1797 there was great excitement, and not a little alarm, all over North Pembrokeshire. According to legend, the course of events (see *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales*, 3.4) was greatly influenced by a heroic band of volunteers from Solva.

When the people of Solva heard that the French had landed at Carregwastad Point, Mr Henry Whitesides was in the village. (It will be recalled that he was the Liverpool contractor responsible for the building of the first Smalls Lighthouse.) Being a man of action, he immediately called for volunteers, and quickly assembled a force of five sailors. Off they went up the valley, with Mr Whitesides on horseback and the others on foot. The leader of the expedition was the only one who had a musket; the others were armed with axes, pitchforks and sickles. After a long journey of about 15 miles they approached Carn Gelli, not far from Goodwick, with no idea as to the military situation that they might encounter.

Suddenly, as they entered a field, they came face to face with a group of five marauding French soldiers. We can suppose that all concerned were equally scared; but Henry Whitesides urged his sailors to stand firm, and handed his gun to one of them who claimed to have used firearms before. The French levelled their muskets and fired without effect, but when the Solva sailor fired he immediately killed one of the enemy, causing his colleagues to flee. As they took to their heels, the sailor managed to get in two more shots, both of which caused injuries to the Frenchmen. They fell to the ground, at which Mr Whitesides cried "Now boys, let us load again and pursue the rascals!" So off they set in hot pursuit; but just as they were about to catch up with them another party, this time consisting of 18 French soldiers, came around the corner.

The gallant leader now decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and he said to his marksman "Now is your time to fire and then run for it!" The sailor fired for the last time, this time missing his target, upon which the Solva Volunteers took to their heels. They scampered off out of the field and down the lane, not forgetting to take with them some booty from the fallen Frenchmen. Mr Whitesides, being a chivalrous gentleman, dismounted and set his horse loose since he thought it unfair that he should have any advantage over his comrades. In any event they all escaped, since it was late in the day and the French were too drunk to follow anyway, having spent the afternoon plundering casks of Portuguese wine from the local farmhouses.

It was said afterwards that General Tate, in charge of the disreputable French expeditionary force, observed this whole episode from the top of Carn Gelli, and was immediately convinced that there was not the slightest possibility of the "peasant's revolt" which he and his superiors had hoped for. Thus his decision to surrender was hastened by the brave actions of the Solva Volunteers.

Date: 1797

Source: Warburton p 25

8.15 The Legend of Twm Carnabwth

Twm Carnabwth (Thomas Rees of Carnabwth) is one of the great folk heroes of Pembrokeshire, having been credited with a leading role in the Rebecca Riots which rocked the county in the period 1839 - 1844. Twm lived in a smallholding close to the farm of Glynsaethmaen near Mynachlog-ddu. His cottage was originally built as a *ty unnos* or "one-night house", thrown up between sunset and sunrise according to the ancient belief that such a house entitled the builder to occupy and own the site. Later he rebuilt the cottage in stone and called it Carnabwth (Stone Cottage); and there, in a single small room, he and his wife Rachel raised their children Elizabeth, Daniel and John.

Twm scratched a miserable living off his boggy patch of land, and earned what he could by selling his labour to neighbouring farmers. He was also a man of huge stature and prodigious strength, and he made the most of these assets by taking part in prize fights at country fairs all over West Wales. He seldom lost, and in one celebrated battle he even beat Gabriel Davies of Carmarthen, who was regarded as hard as nails and virtually invincible. Twm lost an eye in that fight, but even this did not lead him to abandon his pugilistic career. Some of his winnings found their way home for the support of his family, but mostly they disappeared in alehouses.

Strangely, Twm managed to combine his talents as a prize fighter and a hard drinker with the serious duties of a deacon at Bethel Chapel in Mynachlog-ddu. He was the chief reciter of the *Pwnc*, and always did his duty faithfully (after two days of alcohol deprivation) when the scriptures were recited at the Whitsun festival. He knew his Bible inside out, and was especially knowledgeable about the Old Testament texts used in the *Pwnc*. Maybe it was he who chose the text (Genesis 24, verse 60) which came to be used as the theme song and battle cry of the Rebecca Rioters.

It is a part of local folk-lore that the first Rebecca Riot, which involved the destruction of the tollgate at Efailwen, was planned at a secret meeting in the barn at Glynsaethmaen. Twm was at that meeting, and he was probably elected to be the riot leader. He must have been a party to the decision to dress all the rioters in grotesque female costumes, with blackened faces and straw under their bonnets. And he must have been involved in the decision to play out a small charade involving Rebecca and her daughters prior to the destruction of the tollgate. Twm, having acquired female dress which was (almost) large enough to fit him, led the rioters at Efailwen, but having set the pattern for the riots which spread like wildfire throughout West Wales, it is probable that he never played the part of Rebecca again.

After his moment of glory, Twm retired into the background, well protected by a conspiracy of silence in the neighbourhood. He continued with his farm labouring jobs and with the running of his little holding until 1876. He died in very beautiful circumstances, as indicated on his tombstone in Bethel Chapel, Mynachlog-ddu: "No one but God knows what may happen in one day. While fetching a cabbage for my dinner, death came into my garden and struck me down."

Date: 1839

Sources: D. Williams p 189; Molloy p 27

8.16 How to Lose an Election

One of the best-known figures in Pembrokeshire in the period 1950 - 1970 was Mr W.L. Davies. He was born in Tegryn, but after service in World War I he emigrated to Canada and made his fortune there in the metalworking industry. He was also a successful farmer, having operated a farm of 800 acres in New York State. He became a specialist in the manufacture of roller skates, and after returning to Britain in 1938 he eventually found his way back to Pembrokeshire and set up the Davies Roller Skates Factory in Pembroke Dock.

In 1942 "W.L." acquired Pantyderi Farm near Eglwyswrrw, as well as a number of adjoining farms, and he founded Pantyderi Estates Ltd. With its 768 acres of clean land the Estate became a centre of farming innovation, and attracted a great deal of attention from the farming community throughout West Wales.

In 1955 the great man decided to stand for Parliament as an Independent candidate, having already been much involved in public life. During the election campaign one of his friends who was doing some canvassing on his behalf called on a farmer near Boncath. He spent some time extolling the virtues of the candidate, and ended his elegant speech thus:

"So, Mr Thomas bach, you can see that William Lewis Davies is the man to represent Pembrokeshire in Parliament. There are three reasons why you should vote for him. First, he is a great man, a successful industrialist and farmer, who has come home from the New World to serve Pembrokeshire faithfully and well over the years. Second, he is a local man, born and bred in these parts. And third, you and he were at school together."

"Indeed we were," came the reply, quick as a flash. "And the bugger pinched my marbles!"

As it happened, the great man did extremely well in the election, but he failed by a narrow margin to be elected.

Date: 1955

Sources: R. Evans; E.T Lewis 1972, p 248



8.17 Benjamin the Pugilist Preacher

One of the great local characters of Pembrokeshire in the middle part of the last century was one Benjamin Thomas. He was born at Tyrhos in Eglwyswen parish, had his schooling at Eglwyswrrw and Fishguard, and became a famous Baptist minister at Newcastle Emlyn, Penarth and Narberth. He died in 1893, and was known in later life as Myfyr Emlyn, which can be loosely translated as "the philosopher of Emlyn".

In his younger days Benjamin was not so much a philosopher as a man of action, and he was renowned both for his religious zeal and for his methods of meting out instant justice on wrongdoers. Before becoming a minister of the Baptist Church he was in constant trouble with the deacons at Eglwyswrrw for his involvement in fist-fights and for his reluctance to display brotherly love. He was a strong, powerfully built young man who performed prodigious feats as a weightlifter; he won many a gold sovereign as a result of his wagers throughout Pembrokeshire at hiring fairs.

When he had been accepted as a minister in the church he continued with his energetic fitness programme, and his strength became something of a local legend. Occasionally he was challenged by other pugilists who travelled from far and wide to confront him. Normally, as a respectable man of God, he managed to brush these challenges aside. But on one occasion two large men, somewhat the worse for drink, confronted him in the road at Eglwyswrrw. It turned out that they were local men who had gone to Glamorgan to work in the coal mines and who were back home for a short holiday. They challenged Benjamin to a fist fight, and when the preacher refused they jostled him and sneered at him.

By now there was a large crowd on the scene, and Benjamin found that he was being cheered on by his friends and neighbours. He could resist no longer. He accepted the challenge, and the three men took off their coats. Then he put down a golden sovereign as a wager, and invited the colliers to do the same. With the three golden sovereigns on the ground, Benjamin faced up to his two tough opponents.

Suddenly, as the combatants circled warily, Benjamin called out "Stop a moment, my friends! I cannot fight until I have spoken to my Heavenly Father. So please bear with me while I have a few words in his ear." With that, he dropped to his knees and clasped his hands in front of him in an attitude of prayer. With his eyes closed he raised his face towards heaven, and shouted out in his best pulpit voice: "O Lord and Heavenly Father, forgive me, but I must defend your holy name against these heathens who confront me! Give me the grace and strength to beat the living daylight out of them! But, O Lord, let me not use **all of my strength**, for if I do they will be gravely hurt." Then, after a theatrical pause, and with his voice rising to a great crescendo, Benjamin continued "I am sorely afraid, O Lord, that one or both of these heathens will be killed in the ferocity of my passion! So let me be gentle with them so that they may be safely carried away and restored to good health after the contest is done. I ask this in the name of our Lord and Saviour. Amen." When he opened his eyes, Benjamin found that the brave colliers had fled. He picked up the three gold sovereigns, and went on his way.

Date: 1860

Source: E.T Lewis 1972, p 233

8.18 Shemi the Hunter

Shemi Wad (James Wade) of Goodwick was a folk hero who died at the ripe old age of 80 in the year 1897. During the latter part of his life he was known throughout north Pembrokeshire as a larger-than-life character who always had a good tale to tell, especially after he had been primed with a few pints of ale. He was greatly loved by the local children, who often crowded around him next to the well at the top of the Post Hill (or outside his primitive little cottage in Broom Street) and listened entranced to his extraordinary stories.

Shemi had no proper job, and he earned his keep in a multitude of ways. He was a part-time poacher, gardener, fisherman, hunter, tinker and slaughterman, taking jobs where he could find them but seldom travelling far from Goodwick and Fishguard.

Hunting stories figured quite prominently in Shemi's repertoire. He claimed to be an expert archer, and told the local children that he could flight his arrows from the Goodwick side of the Parrog to the Fishguard side with such deadly accuracy that he could hit Captain Harnies' front door knocker every time. Nobody ever saw his bow and arrows, but it was well known that Shemi owned a double-barrelled shotgun, and this famous weapon featured in a number of his tall tales. He liked to tell of the occasion when he went hunting for curlews on the marsh with his friend Ben Jones. Poor old Ben could not hit a single curlew, but Shemi took one shot with his trusty shotgun and downed nine birds all at the same time. Shemi claimed that his secret as a hunter lay in the fact that he did not use ordinary cartridges like everybody else, but a lethal mixture of powder and nails. One day he was out hunting, and his dog was after a hare. He saw that the hare was about to run past a tree, and so he took a quick shot and nailed the animal to the tree trunk, neat as anything.

Another of Shemi's secrets as a hunter lay in the barrels of his shot-gun, which he had heated and bent slightly, with wonderful results. "So you see," he said, "whenever I shot at hares and rabbits I could hit them smack on even after they had turned the corner!"

One of Shemi's oddest stories, which had the local children wide-eyed with wonder, was the one about the dog and the scythe. One day, at harvest time, he was out hunting in a field of corn with his dog. The dog put up two hares, and as they all ran through a gateway the dog ran onto a scythe which a farm worker had carelessly left lying on the ground. The poor dog was sliced neatly in half, from nose to tail. "But d'you know," said Shemi, "one half of the dog went after one hare and caught it, and the other half went after the other hare and caught that one too!"

But that was not the end of the story. "D'you know," Shemi continued, "I fixed the old dog. I had a bit of special ointment in my pocket and I grabbed the dog before he died. I rubbed the ointment on him and sewed him up with a bit of thread. But I was in such a hurry I made a mistake. I put his front end where his tail should be and his backside where his head was supposed to be! But d'you know, that was the best dog I ever had. He didn't have to turn to catch a hare -- he could grab it nice and easy from either end!"

Date: c 1880

Sources: Emrys 1937; Gwyndaf 1990



8.19 Shemi's Giant Cabbage

When he was not poaching or tinkering or telling tall tales, Shemi Wad of Goodwick enjoyed a spot of gardening. He had a small garden at the back of his cottage in Broom Street, and he also did occasional "gardno" work for others in the village. He was renowned for his enormous vegetables and soft fruit, which nobody else but himself ever saw, let alone tasted. The story of Shemi's "big potato" was famous throughout the area; it was said that it was so big that it had to be blasted apart with dynamite and taken home in four pieces, each one transported by a horse and cart.

Then there was Shemi's amazing cabbage. He liked to tell that he once lost a fine sheep. He searched high and low, but couldn't find it anywhere. He gave the sheep up for dead, and concentrated on his cabbage patch, tending one particular giant cabbage with loving care and attention. And when the time came to cut his amazing cabbage it was so tall and wide that inside it he found the sheep together with two lambs, happy as anything. Soon after Shemi had related this episode to an admiring audience in the Rose and Crown, the tables were turned on him by James Glandwr. Mr James was a good metal-worker, and he told Shemi that when he was a young man he had been making brass bowls on a large farm near Fishguard. One bowl was a particular challenge, said James, for there were no less than forty tinkers working on it, each one so far from the next that none of them could hear the others beating the brass. "Good God!" exclaimed Shemi, rising to the bait. "What were they doing with such a big bowl?" "Well now," said James Glandwr, with a twinkle in his eye. "It was to boil your cabbage in!"

Date: c 1880

Source: Gwyndaf 1990

8.20 Shemi's Flight from Milford Town

If Shemi Wad had any heroes, they were probably the old sea captains whose sailing vessels crossed and re-crossed the Seven Seas and who called from time to time at Fishguard, Abercastle, Newport and the other small ports of Pembrokeshire. The Ancient Mariners brought back romantic tales of strange and exotic places, and these fired Shemi's imagination. Although he had only ever owned a small fishing-boat, he expected children and other listeners to believe that he had once been a heroic sea-captain himself. The most elaborate of his tales to have been handed down went something like this.

Now then, when I was a young man I was first mate on the **Royal Duke**, a big sailing ship with four masts and a figure-head that was four times -- well, maybe only three times -- the size of Frenni Fawr. I landed one day in Milford. I had plenty of money from my wages, but I also had a collection of pearls from the king of the Fiji Islands for saving his wife from the Red Indians. He lost his temper with me after that, he said I fancied his wife. But the truth was that she fancied me! Oh, I could tell you a lot about that, but not just now. After the old king started to get up to his antics I ran away from the island -- not because I was scared of the old rascal, but because I wanted to keep the pearls, you understand. When I got to Valparaiso I sold most of the pearls.

Well, at last I got to Milford. Now there are big cannons there, from the time of the wars between the Egyptians and the Welsh. They point out to sea to keep the enemies at bay -- not like us around here who leave Fishguard Bay open to any foreigner who feels like coming in! To tell you the truth, I had a good time in Milford town, where I met lots of old ship-mates. Before the end of the week I didn't have a farthing left in my purse. Well, I started walking around the town, thinking of home and trying to work out how to get back to Goodwick without any money to pay for the coach. Then it started to rain heavily, and of course there was no bed for an old seaman without a cent in his pocket. But then I remembered about an old cannon, big enough to sleep in, down at the old fort. So when it got dark I found it and slipped in, feet first, into the muzzle so that only the tip of my nose stuck out. I slept nice and dry and cosy as a badger!



I remembered about an old cannon, big enough to sleep in, down at the old fort



Then I went through a great flock of starlings, and I got covered with feathers and muck all over.

Then I had a terrible dream. Dear me, I dreamt that the king of Fiji had caught me and I was standing in front of him with thousands of warriors standing round us. Each one had a big drum. Then the old king raised his hand and said "sgwrsh!" as if he had sneezed. With this, the thousands of men all hit their drums at the same time, and the old king gave me a mighty boot up the backside. And what a kick! Imagine four hundred horses kicking you all at the same time! I was kicked so hard that I was flying through the air like an old wood-pigeon, on and on, head first, without stopping. Before long I was flying through a flock of crows. They kept on bumping into my head and falling down by the thousand because I was flying so fast! Then I went through a great flock of starlings, and I got covered with feathers and muck all over. As I flew along I scraped the feathers and muck from my face, and as I opened my eyes I said to myself "Well, good grief! This is no dream! I am indeed flying through the air!"

I remembered then that they fire the cannon every morning for the Coast Guards, to tell the Greenwich time. The old cannon could shoot anything in it for a distance of 60 miles -- and this time it was me being fired! "How will I get back to Milford town with no money in my purse?" I asked myself. "And how will I stop at all if I don't knock into something? It's just one big empty space up here."

That minute I saw a church spire ahead of me, and I thought it would be the end of me if I hit it at full speed. Luckily I only scraped it, but my foot caught the weather-vane and down it fell, with a shower of stones and slates and mortar, on top of the priest. He was screaming blue murder, but I didn't have a chance to stop and explain. As I flew on I heard him yell "Look, look! There's an eagle!" Before long, thank goodness, I went into a clump of clouds that were squashed together like sacks of wool. That stopped me right enough, and down I fell, about two miles, falling like a stone. Then I had an idea that saved me. I opened my great-coat and held my arms out like a pair of wings, and came down gently, like an angel. And where do you think I fell? Right on the lifeboat slip in Pen Cwm!

If you don't believe me, go down there to see. They had just cemented the slip and the marks left by my big old clogs are there to this day, plain as anything

Date: c 1890

Sources: Emrys 1937, Gwyndaf 1990

8.21 Shemi Goes Fishing

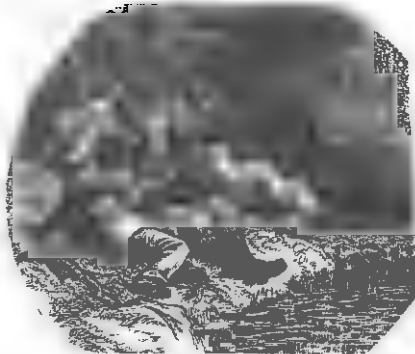
Shemi Wad of Goodwick was proud of his prowess as an inshore fisherman, and for a while he owned a small fishing boat. He also had half-shares in a fishing net with his friend Dai Reynolds. The two men used to catch mackerel, lobsters and crabs out in Fishguard Bay. One day they were fishing around the Cow and Calf Rocks off Pencaer, having enjoyed a few pints before setting off. Dai started to complain that Shemi had been taking too large a part of the catch in recent weeks, since the net was owned fifty-fifty. Shemi pretended not to hear, but when Dai persisted with his complaints he replied impatiently "If you don't shut up, Dai, I'll share this boat with you too! I'll have the inside and you can have the outside!"

Shemi liked to tell how he had once caught a giant herring when he was out with the nets. It weighed no less than four and twenty stones, and Shemi and Dai couldn't get it into the boat. So they towed it to Old Beach and dragged it up on the pebbles. When they opened up the monster fish they were greatly surprised to find Jonah inside, alive and kicking and grateful to be rescued.

On another occasion Shemi was fishing with a line from the river bank in the Cwm. He caught a fine sewin, and he was pulling it in when along came a great big heron from nowhere. The bird swallowed the sewin and the hook, leaving Shemi hanging onto the line for dear life. He tried to pull the heron in to the bank, but the old bird was so strong that it flew off out to sea, with Shemi dragged along behind. High above the clouds they flew. Once or twice the bird began to tire, and flew lower and lower until Shemi was in danger of falling into the sea; but our hero helped out by flapping his arms and legs in order to gain height again. At last the heron landed, and Shemi came down with a bump on a big rock by the sea-side. He landed so hard that his feet made deep marks on the rock. He realised that he was in Ireland, and was wondering what to do next when a giant crab came along. Shemi immediately leaped onto its back, and off it swam towards Pembrokeshire again, delivering the intrepid fisherman safely back to Goodwick. The poor old crab died from its exertions, and gave a good solid meal to Shemi and half the village. Then he used the crab's shell to make a nice new roof for his pig-sty.

Date: c 1880

Source: Gwyndaf 1990



8.22 The Tory Voter in Hakin

Old Tommy Jenkins had been a Labour voter all his life, and a faithful member of the Trade Union into the bargain. There was a parliamentary election in the offing, and the party faithful sorely missed Tommy's help on the campaign trail. But he was seriously ill, and the word went about that he was going downhill fast.

On the day before the election a rumour reached Party HQ that old Tommy had joined the Tory Party. This was greeted with disbelief, for nobody could believe that Tommy had undergone a deathbed conversion after devoting most of his life to the Labour cause. Tommy's pals decided that severe damage was likely to be done to party morale unless this rumour could be stopped, and so a delegation was sent to visit him and find out the truth.

On arrival at Tommy's house later that evening the friends were ushered upstairs to find the old man looking very ill indeed. After a while they asked him if it was true that he had joined the Tory Party, and they were dismayed when he told them that it was indeed true. "But this is how I sees it, boys," said Tommy. "I knows my time has come, and I won't be seein' the light of day tomorrow. So there will be no vote from me in this 'ere election. But we needs every vote we can get, so I thought it was better for them buggers to lose a vote than for us to lose one of ours!"

Duly impressed by this impeccable logic, the friends departed, leaving Tommy on his death-bed with a saintly smile upon his face.

Date: 1992

Source: Word of mouth

8.23 The Good Lord and the Potato Patch

Before his elevation to the peerage, Lord Gordon Parry lived for many years in the little town of Neyland, on the north shore of Milford Haven. He was very active in local politics, and stood in a number of parliamentary elections as a Labour candidate. He worked in Sir Thomas Picton School in Haverfordwest, and was - and still is - a very popular figure in the public life of the county.

Gordon was still living in his unpretentious terrace house in Neyland at the time of his elevation, and it took a little time for everybody to get used to his new title. According to legend, a few days after the announcement, there was an evangelical crusade going on in Neyland. A band of enthusiastic amateur evangelists had been trained in doorstep crusading techniques, and off they went on their heavenly mission. One enthusiastic young man had been briefed to knock on all the doors in the street where Lord and Lady Parry lived, in order to spread the Gospel. When he knocked on the door in question, it was opened by Lady Parry, who did not happen to be wearing her regalia at the time. Indeed, she looked, to all intents and purposes, like a perfectly ordinary housewife. The young man offered up a silent prayer, took a deep breath, and with one hand on his heart and the other on his Bible, he asked in his best trembling evangelical voice: "Madam, is the Lord in your house?"

Quick as a flash, Lady Parry replied "Not just now. He's out the back digging up some spuds. Hang on and I'll go and fetch him!"

Date: c 1975

Source: Word of mouth

8.24 Posh Wedding In Goodwick

Not long ago there were two Pembrokeshire ladies named Mrs Davies and Mrs Jones. They lived in the same street, just a few doors apart, in the north Pembrokeshire village of Goodwick. One of them had a most attractive daughter called Mair. She was very eligible, and only nineteen years old.

One day Mrs Jones and Mrs Davies met down at the post office, where they were picking up their Social Security money. "Good morning Mrs Jones bach," said Mrs Davies. "How are you then?"

"Very well indeed, thank you, bach," said Mrs Jones. "And have you heard our news?"

"Oh, what's that?" asked Mrs Davies, all interest.

"Our Mair is getting married"

"Oooh, there's nice," said Mrs Davies. "And when is the baby due?"

"Don't be disgusting," replied Mrs Jones, looking down her nose "Babies has got nothing to do with it"

Mrs Davies looked suitably impressed. "Ooooh, there's posh," she said.

Date: 1992

Source: Word of mouth.