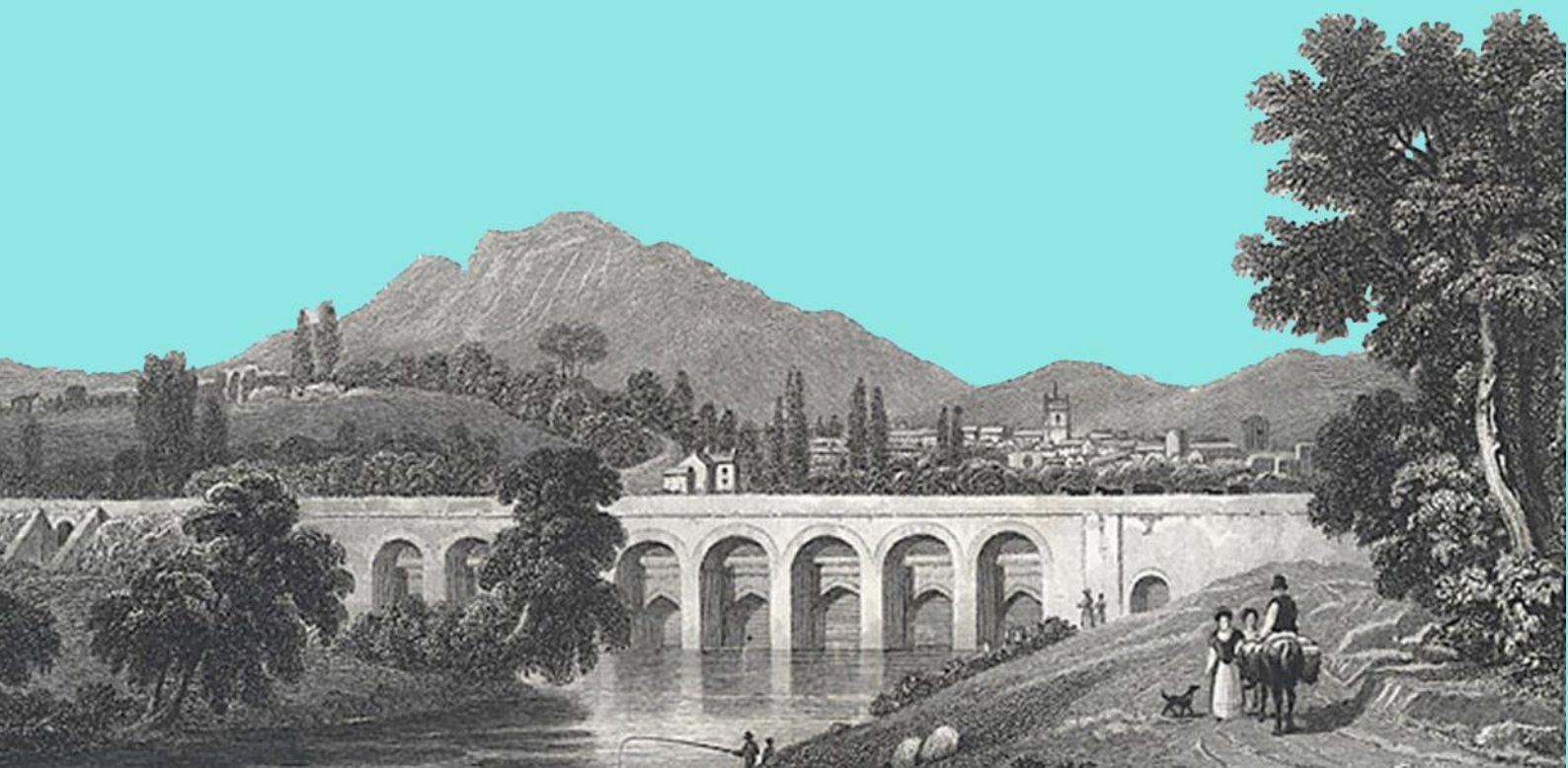


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Introduction

Welcome to the Second Edition of the Gobannium Gazette. Thank you for reading this second collection of articles resulting from the investigations of the Research Group and other invited contributors. For the next edition we would welcome contributions from anyone who would like to submit a short article about some historical research they have done. We know that sometimes people feel that their research is not 'professional' enough to be published, but it really is so important that any research is published. Not least because otherwise someone will have to do it again, but also because it all adds to the greater understanding of that period of history. We hope that you enjoy this new collection of articles of a very varied nature that give some idea of the spread of interests within the Research Group. If you have been looking into a subject that interests you, it is likely to be of interest to other people and if you would like any help or advice, feel free to ask, or join the Research Group!

Gill Wakley (*Editor*)

Contents & Authors

Friends, Enemies and the Eisteddfod: 'suffragette' incidents in Abergavenny, 1913 Gwen Seabourne	Page 3
A Brief History of Rother House in Nevill Street Bianca Emberson	Page 11
How and Why Did Children Die in the Mid-nineteenth Century in Abergavenny? Marilyn Diosi	Page 16
Who was Micah Thomas? Where was the Abergavenny Baptist College? What other Non-conformist buildings exist? Gill Wakley	Page 26
Nine Financially Independent Women of 17th Century Abergavenny Sue Smith	Page 33
Gobannos – The Return of the Celtic Smith God Frank Olding	Page 43
Sir Zachariah Wheatley, The War Mayor of Abergavenny (1914 – 1919) Marilyn Diosi	Page 46

Friends, Enemies and the Eisteddfod: 'suffragette' incidents in Abergavenny, 1913

'The Press reports that Suffragettes have thrown the residents of Abergavenny, particularly the promoters of the National Eisteddfod, into a state of considerable excitement' ¹

The National Eisteddfod of Wales was held in Abergavenny in August 1913.² Leading up to it, there seemed to be reasons to suspect trouble. The arson campaign by 'militant suffragettes' was at its height. Wales and Abergavenny had been targeted by suffragettes in the past, and the National Eisteddfod had been the scene of trouble both in 1909 and 1912.³ Reginald McKenna, the Home Secretary, north Monmouthshire MP and a particular suffragette hate-figure, was expected to speak at the Eisteddfod, and Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and regarded by many suffragettes as both treacherous to 'the cause' and responsible for inciting violence against individual women, was thought likely to attend.⁴ To combat the perceived suffragette threat, extra police were hired and other security precautions taken,⁵ and, in a less orthodox response, an 'anonymous Welshman' threatened, in a letter to the press, to shoot any suffragette attempting to disrupt the Eisteddfod.⁶

The ensuing days did indeed bring incidents relating to the campaign for votes for women, though not those which had been feared. McKenna switched speaking slots, to thwart any suffragette attack.⁷ Lloyd George stayed away, claiming 'urgent business'.⁸ There was no direct 'militant' attack on the Eisteddfod, but suffragettes were present - in person and in the imagination - in Abergavenny and its environs, and the evidence about this presence, and reactions to it, show the many cultural and political layers, the contested and finely detailed identities and the crude tropes and stereotypes of the campaign for votes for women, as experienced in this corner of south-eastern Wales.

1. The incidents

Suffragettes (or those so labelled) were reportedly present in large numbers around the Eisteddfod space - the Maes - in Bailey Park, leafleting, and attempting to get to McKenna in his car.⁹ In addition, there was some apparently genuine destruction by 'militant suffragettes' in Abergavenny during the Eisteddfod period, and also two

fires shortly afterwards in nearby Llangattock, which were initially blamed on suffragettes.



Several newspapers noted fires at Abergavenny Cricket Club's pavilion and the burning of a hayrick in the area, both being attributed to militant suffragettes (though no arrests of suspected suffragette arsonists were made).¹⁰ A

A hayrick at Red Barn Farm Abergavenny similar to the one burnt in the incident (*Monlife Heritage*)

smaller number of papers also reported that an eighteen-year-old Abergavenny 'boy' had started fires at Llangattock-iuxta-Usk,¹¹ and had attempted to blame them on 'militant suffragettes'.

In this period of frequent suffragette arson, press reports frequently followed a standard pattern. The presence of suffragette literature at both sites was emphasised.¹² There was some variation in the amount of damage reported to have been caused to the pavilion, from total destruction, as initially claimed in *Votes for Women*, to just the front of it having been burnt. A number of papers seemed somewhat torn between wanting, on the one hand, to emphasise the extent of the fire, in order to stress the danger to human life, noting the peril and difficult escape of a caretaker on the premises, and on the other hand to suggest failure and incompetence on the part of the presumed suffragette arsonists.¹³

A modern commentator put down the pavilion and haystack arson attack to 'frustration' on the part of the suffragettes.¹⁴ Leaving aside the unfortunately loaded description of women as 'frustrated',¹⁵ and assuming that the attacks were in fact the work of suffragettes,¹⁶ the contention that these were senseless lashings out by those who had wished to attack McKenna, or the *Eisteddfod* more directly, should not be allowed to pass without examination. It is entirely possible that, rather than being a 'Plan B', or a lashing-out, the targets were carefully selected. Both the cricket pavilion and the hayrick were on land which was part of the Nevill estate.¹⁷ The Nevill Marquess of Abergavenny was a noted Conservative figure, and the Nevill family had links with high-profile anti-suffrage campaigning.¹⁸ Another pavilion in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, linked with the Marquess had also been targeted by (presumed) suffragette arsonists in April 1913.¹⁹ Targeting of the Nevills would indicate both a wider plan, tying this to activity in England and Wales more generally, and also a degree of sensitivity to Welsh, and local, conditions. Targeting Conservative landowners could be seen as a wiser strategy, in what was at the time Liberal Wales, than going after Liberal politicians.

The fires at Llangattock do not seem to have been started by suffragettes, but they are still informative about the views on the suffrage struggle of those other than the militant suffragettes themselves. Some details come out in accounts of the prosecution of the suspect, Douglas James, in Abergavenny Police Court, and at Monmouthshire Assizes, on 29th August and 3rd September. He was charged with maliciously setting fire to outbuildings at Llangattock Rectory on 12th August (shed), and 27th August (stabling and coach house).²⁰ When the police came to investigate the second fire, James was questioned and described and pointed out a woman he said he had seen lurking around, and 'produced a large piece of paper on which were the words "Votes for Women"', which he said he had found in the stable. The woman was questioned but the police, who evidently did not suspect her, instead arrested James.²¹

While he was in Usk Gaol, James confessed to a rector that he had printed the poster, because he 'wanted to have a lark with the servants'. He also said that he had started the fire by accident, having dropped a match. Perhaps James had thought of his suffragette-blaming ruse after the investigation of the first fire: on that occasion, the Chief Constable had, in his presence, said that he did not think that the fire was the work of suffragettes, as there were no 'Votes for Women' papers about.²²

At Abergavenny Police Court, the prosecution laid out what appears to be a damning case against James, showing that he had lied and changed his story more than once. The case went up to the Monmouthshire Assizes. At the assizes, James's luck changed. He pleaded 'not guilty' and the jury agreed with him. The judge, Lord Coleridge, dismissed him with a light remark: 'Now, my boy, the third time perhaps you won't be so fortunate. You can go now.'²³

The acquittal is hard to read. Did Douglas James convince the (all male) jury that there really was a suffragette lurking around,²⁴ or did they just feel amused at his 'lark', or convinced that a couple of months in Usk Gaol, waiting for his trial, had been sufficient punishment, and steer things to this conclusion? Whatever may be the correct interpretation of the acquittal, there are instructive aspects to the apparent facts surrounding the fires, and the way in which James defended himself. Various hoaxes, by and against the militant suffragettes, were reported by the press,²⁵ so his story fitted into a ready-made narrative pattern. The story about this being part of a 'lark' with the (female) servants at the rectory suggests a rough sort of humour about suffragettes and suffrage, played out amongst 'the lower orders', both men and women. Such mockery could be set alongside many other examples of amateur performative response to suffragettes. The penetration of suffragettes into Welsh culture - both English and Welsh language - was very deep. A search of contemporary Welsh newspapers shows, for example, the ubiquity of fancy-dress representations of suffragettes. Very frequently, these are men in suffragette 'drag'. For example, the Merthyr Express of 22nd January 1910, in its account of a fancy-dress ball, reports with some glee:

*'A tall and muscular Suffragette scorned any man's arm and vigorously twirled other women around. As nothing political disturbed her serenity, she remained peaceful, leaving her dog whip, chain and poisonous powders behind. The loudest things she wore were striped stockings and elastic boots - and these occasionally caused a little fright when the mere man forgot to dodge the folds and the skirts upset his equilibrium.'*²⁶

It seems to have been seen as obviously and universally funny for a man to dress up as a suffragette. For example, at a carnival in Llandovery in May, 1913, the prize winners in the 'humorous' category of the fancy dress competition were: (1) D.J. Davis and party, Brynamman, 'Suffragettes'; (2) W. Thomas and party, Llandovery, 'Suffragettes'; (3) equal - Willie Davies, Greyhound Hotel, Llandovery and Ewart Harries 'bear trainer and bear' and Ewart Gladstone Stone, 72 High Street, Llandovery, 'Jenny Jones from Wales, first real Welsh Suffragette.' and there were other suffragettes, WPSU references, and an additional Jenny Jones, Welsh suffragette.²⁷ Further popular cultural influence can be seen in jokes and 'humorous' writing,²⁸ amateur poetry, speech and drama,²⁹ songs and courtroom banter,³⁰ and a wide audience would have been reached in 1913 in the cinema and a waxwork tour.³¹ Suffragettes were referred to in advertisements,³² and were the subjects of essay competitions,³³ a (controversial) question on a scholarship exam,³⁴ mock elections and a trials.³⁵ There was even a racehorse named 'Suffragette'.³⁶

James's own background was far from privileged. As the Abergavenny Chronicle was keen to report, he was 'the son of a widow',³⁷ working as assistant to the groom-gardener, previously having been a printer and an apprentice carpenter, and the prosecutor showed his dim view of those in a lowlier position in life, when he said:

‘The prisoner, like many of his class, had a certain amount of simplicity with a strong admixture of cunning’. A man who undoubtedly did have a vote, sneering at a young man with no vote, accused of an offence which had occasioned casting aspersions on women seeking a vote (for themselves, though not, immediately, for the young working-class women with whom James said he had been having a ‘lark’) presents quite a tangle of identities. And that is before we factor in ‘the Welsh thing’.

2. Cymreictod,³⁸ gender, suffrage

Douglas James, though apparently born in Abergavenny, did not count himself a Welshman, much less a Cymro Cymraeg.³⁹ There is, therefore, no obvious ‘nationalist friction angle’ to his activities. Given that no arrests were made in relation to the other fires occurring in proximity to the Eisteddfod, it is not possible to comment on the ‘national’ identity of any suffragette fire-setters. There are, however, matters worth considering with regard to the national/cultural politics of the situation and incidents, contributing to the growing literature on the complex relationship between suffragists and Cymreictod/Welshness.⁴⁰ The imperfect mapping of Welshness and Cymraeg, between Welshness and the Eisteddfod, and the mixed and liminal character of Monmouthshire add extra layers of complexity to this issue.

Until comparatively recently, there was an accepted narrative that suffrage campaigning, and particularly militant violence, was largely not acceptable to liberal, nonconformist Wales.⁴¹ That Wales was not interested, or was actively hostile, was a view put forward by some influential Welsh voices at the time. There was contemporary ‘othering’ of suffrage or militancy, which might take a ‘nationalist’ form. ‘Suffragette’ activity was associated with the English.⁴² A North Wales newspaper was pleased to report that a woman who had called herself Georgina Lloyd, on arrest for window smashing, turned out to be the rather less Cymric Emily Fussell, from Bristol (or, to be precise, Kingswood).⁴³ Another newspaper claimed that Wales had ‘no outstanding suffragette’,⁴⁴ and there were a number of enquiries in Welsh newspapers as to how to translate ‘suffragette’, and (rather proud) assertions that there was no such word in the old language.⁴⁵ Suffragette noise, or, perhaps, ‘shrillness’, was contrasted to the call for peace which was a key part of Eisteddfod ceremonial.⁴⁶

The idea that suffragettes represented ‘the un-Welsh’ was certainly present, and encouraged, by politicians, and by those connected to the Eisteddfod movement. When suffragettes interrupted proceedings at the 1909 Eisteddfod, the response of the Archdruid Dyfed was very negative, setting English women against Welsh people in general, (and perhaps Welsh men in particular).⁴⁷ Lloyd George played up the insult to the nation angle in dealing with suffragette interruptions to his Eisteddfod speech in 1912, saying

*‘I fail to see what [these foolish people] think they gain by insulting a whole nation in the national festival of its democracy’.*⁴⁸

Given the male dominance in the Eisteddfod and Gorsedd, this, of course, says something about Lloyd George’s idea of ‘democracy’,⁴⁹ as well as his language-and-Eisteddfod-led idea of the Welsh ‘nation’. The response of Dyfed (and, perhaps to some extent, Lloyd George) may be seen as partly defensive of Welsh language culture of the ‘Eisteddfod Nationalism’ type. Contempt of Wales and Welsh was frequently expressed by the English establishment.⁵⁰

Another interpretation has been that Wales was particularly hostile. Certainly, extremely rough treatment was dealt out to suffragettes in Wales on more than one occasion, including, in particular, at an opening by Lloyd George of an institute in Llanystumdwy, in 1912.⁵¹

In favour of the view that Wales was not particularly interested in women's suffrage campaigning is the fact that Wales was slower than England to organise for women's suffrage.⁵² Although Wales had comparatively few WPSU branches,⁵³ recent writers have shown that there was a network of organised suffragists of various hues, and that there were Welsh 'militants'.⁵⁴ A small dent has been made in the idea that the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) active in Wales were all middle class and all alien to Welsh culture, and that 'colonisation' was all in one direction.⁵⁵ It should also be noted that it would hardly be surprising if political campaigns were dominated by those with the time and the clout to push them forward: there was English influence in anti-suffrage beyond the borders of England too.⁵⁶

While there was certainly some culturally insensitive material about the Welsh in suffragette newspapers,⁵⁷ the apparent leaving of Welsh as well as English language literature at the sites of (alleged) WSPU arson attacks in Wales in 1913 might indicate either a local link or else the capacity of the WSPU to be slightly more sensitive to the Welsh issue. Some suffragist groups had emphasised their Welshness, though language and symbol,⁵⁸ and even the WSPU were not (always) as clumsy and 'imperial' as they have often been portrayed in this respect. The interruptions at the Eisteddfods, and at Llanystumdwy, however much they might have seemed legitimate targets, were construed as and/or felt as an insult and were very alienating in Wales. A direct link between the 1909 Eisteddfod interruption and violence in Wales against suffragettes was made.⁵⁹ Far from there having been a necessary and obvious opposition between the suffrage campaign and 'Eisteddfod Nationalism', however, in 1908, the Cardiff WSPU had marched under a banner which had the motto 'Ein Hachos yn Erbyn y Byd' (our cause against the world), echoing the wording of an eisteddfodic slogan 'Y gwir yn erbyn y byd' (The truth against the world).⁶⁰ By 1913, perhaps they had begun to be more accommodating to Welsh-speaking Wales: it was noted in newspaper reports that some of the suffrage literature left at the scene of the Abergavenny fires was in Welsh.⁶¹ Overtures were also being made to a different, but equally difficult, Welsh constituency: the WPSU was undertaking an effort to speak to working class audiences in South Wales in August, 1913.⁶²

We should not, in any case, suppose that 'Welshness' was not problematic, that it was possible for there to be a single Welsh response to, or view of, suffragettes. From the point of view of Abergavenny and Monmouth, the whole question of nations and borders was rather complicated.⁶³ Monmouthshire had a liminal position at this time: historically part of Wales, but, from the Early Modern period, linked to England for some administrative purposes. As if to emphasise its liminality, Abergavenny was often described in terms of a 'gateway to Wales'. It was not a predominantly Welsh-speaking area by then, and there were some indications of hostility to, or ridicule of Welsh language revival attempts.⁶⁴ Although Abergavenny and Monmouthshire had, in fact, been important in the nineteenth century revival of interest in Welsh culture and the Eisteddfod,⁶⁵ now there were, arguments about how 'Welsh' the Eisteddfod would be,⁶⁶ and, while there was support for the strengthening of Welsh culture,⁶⁷ there were also some objections to it.⁶⁸

Concluding thoughts (for now)

The Abergavenny cases are good correctives to a too simple view of Wales as not interested in, or hostile to the suffrage campaign, or militancy, and an assumption that the WSPU were all middle-class English imperialists trampling all over cherished Welsh cultural institutions, and may prompt consideration of why setting up this opposition was and has remained attractive. They emphasise the fact that anti-militant voices in Wales did not all speak in Welsh, or have any link to the cause of Welsh language nationalism, and, even as far as the 1913 Eisteddfod itself was concerned, the suffragette 'excitement' was not the only matter for concern: there was controversy in the choral competition, and some English speakers causing a scene when things ran late and they had to sit through Welsh drama contests.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it was not a financial success.⁷⁰

In the area, fears of outside-sponsored suffragette violence continued to be raised into 1914. Thereafter, former WPSU members, both outsiders and home-grown, underwent the well-known transformation into super-patriots if not warmongers, and became popular, even with previously hostile Welsh newspapers.⁷¹ In no need of the old enemy within, Welsh papers now enjoyed the story of a suffragette, a soldier and a banjo.⁷² The request of Private Joe Leonard, Pontycymmer, for a banjo was answered by an 'anonymous suffragette', leading to humorous correspondence in the Glamorgan Gazette.⁷³

Children in Abergavenny, however, were still being warned off suffragette militancy in 1916, with the story of Nancy the Suffragette, in which a Dutch doll becomes a suffragette, bites a policeman, and goes to prison, where, in the correct suffragette manner, she goes on hunger strike. Rescued by Teddy, she sees the error of her ways and decides not to be a suffragette again.⁷⁴ At the time of the Eisteddfod of 1913, as now, Abergavenny's official motto was 'Hostes nunc amici': foes now friends. Not quite, perhaps.

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2. On the Eisteddfod: see, e.g., K.B. Stacey, 'Heritage versus modernity: the National Eisteddfod as an example of Welsh leisure customs in the twentieth century', in R. Snape and H. Pussard (eds), *Recording Leisure Lives: history archives and memories in Twentieth Century Britain* (Eastbourne 2009). 181-95; A. Llwyd, *Prifysgol y Werin: hanes Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru 1900-1918* (Abertaweek 1908); C. Loether, 'Creating traditions through the suspension of memory: the Welsh eisteddfod', *Rendez-vous* 33:2 (1999) 33-45; K. Bernard, 'The National Eisteddfod and the evolution of the all-Welsh rule', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies* 3 (2003) 33-47.
3. See, e.g., *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28th August 1912, p. 3; *Votes for Women (VFW)*, 30th August 1912, p. 3; *Hereford Times*, 24th August, 1912, p. 6; R. Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009) (WSM) 81; *Abergavenny Chronicle*, (AC) 23rd August, 1912; *VFW* 18th June, 1909, pp. 4, 11, 25, 26; Wallace, *WSM*, 96 ff.
4. *AC*, 30th May, 1913; *VFW* 13th September, 1912, p. 8; *Yorkshire Post*, 25th September, 1912, p. 3.
5. See, e.g., *Western Times*, 7th August 1913, p. 4; 'Mr McKenna's Fear of Suffragettes'; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 8th August, 1913, p. 3; *Times*, 7th August 1913, p. 13, 'Mr McKenna and the Eisteddfod'; *AC*, 8th August, 1913.

6. I have yet to find the original letter, though there are references to its having been received by 'a Cardiff newspaper' in, e.g., the Dundee Courier, 4th August, 1913, p. 5 'A threat against the suffragettes'. Elsewhere, this story ballooned into a threat by '400 idle Welshmen' to shoot suffragettes disturbing the Eisteddfod': special report of the Sydney Sun Special Cable - Press vol. XLIX 6th August, 1913, p. 9.
7. Western Times, 7th August, 1913, p. 4; Times 7th August, 1913, p. 13.
8. Times, 8th August, 1913, p. 8.
9. AC, 8th August, 1913.
10. VFW, 15th August, 1913, p. 10.
11. (Llangatwg Dyffryn Wysg).
12. The Suffragette, 15th August, 1913.
13. The cricket club's next annual report seems not to have made any mention of the fire: AC, 1st May, 1914, p. 5.
14. C. Bearman, 'An examination of suffragette violence', EHR 120 (2005) 365-97, 376.
15. See, e.g., H. Mulholland, 'Nadine Dorries storms out of PMQs after David Cameron quip', Guardian, 7th September, 2011; T. Shipman, 'I'm not one of the lads: David Cameron apologises in sexism row in a bid not to alienate female voters', Daily Mail, 3rd October, 2011.
16. Note that the report in the Suffragette did not mention the hay rick fire but only the pavilion.
17. The farm on which the hayrick was burned was on the Nevill estate, though occupied by a Mr Holly, tenant farmer. The Pen-y-pound Pavilion was also on Nevill land: A.K. Hignell, 'A brief history of Avenue Road, Abergavenny': <http://cricketarchive.com/Archive/Articles/0/805.html> (now paywalled).
18. See, e.g. Lady Dorothy Nevill (ed Ralph Nevill), The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill (London, 1906), pp. 73-4: my thanks to Margot and Bryn Seabourne for this reference. Lady Dorothy was herself a prominent anti-suffragist: see, e.g., Spectator, 6th June, 1908, p.3.
19. VFW, 18th April, 1913, p.11; T. Dudgeon, Bats, Baronets and Battle: a Social History of Cricket, (2013) 87-9.
20. AC, 29th August, 1913, 5th September, 1913; Daily Mail, 4th September, 1913, p. 3.
21. He seems to have described such a woman previously: AC 5th September, 1913; Daily Mail 4th September, 1913.
22. AC, 5th September, 1913.
23. AC, p. 3. Note the view of Viscountess Rhondda, This Was My World (London, 1933), 154 of the hostility of the Chief Constable of Monmouth, and the chaplain in Usk gaol, when she was arrested for suffragette activity.
24. If so, might it have been a mistaken attack meant to be targeting the Rolls/Llangattock family, prominent in Tory politics, though with a title deriving from another of the local Llangattocks: AC, 4th April, 1913?
25. See, e.g., VFW, April 11th 1913, p.11; 25th April, 1913 p. 13; Wallace, WSM, 88. Note the 'lark' defence working for a non-suffragette woman: VFW 5th June, 1914, p. 9.
26. Merthyr Express 22nd January 1910, p. 6.
27. Camarthen Journal 16th May 1913, p. 7. For drag suffragette football matches, see, e.g., Glamorgan Gazette 8th January 1909, p. 6. This was certainly not a Welsh phenomenon alone, much as one might wish to trace connections with the Rebecca rioters or 'Scotch cattle': R Jones, 'Symbol, ritual and popular protest in early nineteenth century Wales: the Scotch cattle rebranded', WHR 26 (2012) 34-57, 49.
28. Jokes often took familiar patterns: fierceness of suffragettes to men, e.g. AC 18th September 1914, p.7; suffragette as 'shrew' to her husband: North Wales Chronicle 17th July 1914, p. 6.
29. See, e.g., Cambrian, 26th July 1907, p. 4; Welsh Coast Pioneer 2nd May 1907, p. 5.
30. AC, 2nd May 1913; Aberdare Leader 19th July 1913, p. 6.
31. See, e.g. Camarthen Journal, 27th June, 1913, p. 4; Aberdare Leader, 2nd August, 1913.
32. Aberdare Leader, 6th December 1913, p. 4.
33. Camarthen Weekly Reporter, 20th June 1913, p. 6.
34. Monmouth Guardian, 9th January 1914, p. 5.
35. Montgomeryshire Express, 6th April 1909, p.5; North Wales Chronicle, 3rd April 1914, p. 8.
36. See, e.g., Aberdare Leader, 9th August 1913, p. 8.
37. 29th August, 1913, 5th September, 1913. See also Daily Mail, 4th September 1913, p. 3.
38. 'Welshness'.
39. Census, 1911. Cymro Cymraeg = Welsh-speaking Welshman.
40. See, e.g., U. Masson, 'Political conditions in Wales are quite different: party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912-15' WHR 9 (2000) 369-88.
41. John, RLB, 30; Wallace, 48. A Rosen, Rise Up Women: the militant campaign of the WSPU (1974). 202 tables do not mention any Welsh examples. Wales is played down in Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragettes: a history of the militant suffrage movement 1905-1910.
42. A.V. John, 'Run like blazes: the suffragettes and Welshness', 29.
43. North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser, 10th July 1914, p. 10; Denbighshire Free Press 11th July 1914, p. 6.
44. Camarthen Weekly Reporter, 26th November, 1915, p. 4.
45. Pleidleiswraig was the coining preferred in the Weekly News and Visitors' Chronicle for Colwyn Bay, 28th December, 1906; The Cambrian 27 (1907) 38, but thereafter, the 'Wenglish' term, 'y suffragette' finds favour. For 'no Welsh word for suffragette' view, see, e.g., The Cambrian, 3rd May 1907, p. 4.
46. See, e.g., the 'Welsh News' section of the Liverpool Daily Post 7th August 1913, p. 8: 'Heddwch unbroken by suffragettes'.
47. Glamorgan Gazette 18th June, 1909, p. 8; Archdruid Dyfed's 'improvised' englyn belittled the suffragettes in the hall and threatened them, or taunted them with jail. See also Wallace, 210, on cartoons.
48. Yorkshire Post 6th September 1912, p. 7.
49. See, e.g., 'What the Eisteddfod has meant to Wales: an inspiration of true manhood and a developer of

- knowledge' by James Winstone CC JP, Merthyr Pioneer, 18th December 1915, p. 3.
50. See, e.g., HC Deb 10th July 1913 col. 661; Musical Times, 1st December, 1912.
51. See, e.g., John, RLB, 33; Dylan Morris, 'Merched y screch a'r twrw' yr WSPU yn Llanystumdwy 1912' Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions no 46, 1985; Ann Holt, 'The battle of Llanystumdwy' New Society, 18 Sept 1987. For a dim view of the violence against and bullying of suffragettes, from Wales, see, e.g., Weekly Mail, 1908. See also a man's defence to a charge of assaulting a woman, that she had attacked him, and had been jumping around 'just like a Llangennech suffragette', which goes some way to suggesting that violence against a suffragette was understandable: Cambrian Daily Leader, 4th March, 1915, 3. The English press found this something of a conundrum, and it was at least sometimes the case that contempt for the Welsh trumped scorn for the suffragettes. Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 7th September 1912, p. 4; John, RLB, 34.
52. Wallace, WSM, 57.
53. John, RLB, 29.
54. John RLB 31; Masson, 'Political conditions' See, generally, John, RLB; Wallace, WSM.
55. See examples in John, RLB, 31-2, 36.
56. See, e.g., Fred Maddison, 'The Labour Movement,' 14th, 21st, 28th March, 1913.
57. VFW, 4th October, 1912, pp.1, 4, 10.
58. John, RLB, 29; VFW 3/7/1914.
59. Evening Telegraph, 30th June 1909, p. 2; Dundee Courier 30th June 1909, p. 5
60. Wallace, WSM, 60. See also 61, 68, 78; John, RLB, 32. VFW 9th July, 1908.
61. The Suffragette, 15th August 1913.
62. Wallace, WSM, 75; South Wales Worker 30th August 1913, The Suffragette, 15, 22, 29 Aug, and 5, 12 Sep 1913.
63. School Music Review 1st September, 1913 p. 74; AC 27th June, 1913.
64. See, in particular, ACe, 10th January, 1913, 'The curse of Babel'; Rhondda, This Was My World pp. 8, 183.
65. Abergavenny had been a centre for smaller scale eisteddfodau in the 19th C: The Abergavenny Eisteddfod | Museum Wales; Cardiff Times, 20th April 1895, p. 6
66. See, e.g., AC, 24th January 1913; 13th June 1913; 1st August 1913; 8th August, 1913; 11th July, 1913.
67. AC, 28th March 1913, 'Abergavenny Easter Eisteddfod'; Mrs Gruffydd-Richards of Llanover. 'Insult to Wales', AC, 14th February 1913.
68. The local AAAA was annoyed at it displacing an athletic event and wanted a percentage of the profits if they gave up their sports: AC, 4th July 1913.
69. AC 15th August 1913.
70. See, e.g., Camarthen Weekly Reporter, 15th August 1913 p. 4; AC, 7th and 14th August 1914, 15th January 1915.
71. AC 22nd July 1915, p. 6; AC, 6th August 1915, p. 5; AC, 15th October 1915, p. 5.
72. Glamorgan Gazette 8th August 1915, p.5; 13th August 1915, p. 3; 10th September 1915, p. 5; 22nd October 1915, p.5.
73. We may, of course, be much less inclined to see this as a light matter, when we reflect that a likely use of a banjo in this period would have been in blackface minstrelsy.
74. AC, 15th December 1916, p. 3.

A Brief History of Rother House in Nevill Street

In the first edition of the Gobannium Gazette, I wrote a comparison between the two Abergavenny Local History Society surveys in which I was involved. The first survey was done prior to the existence of computers, the non-digital result (i.e. a book) is still lurking on the corner of a shelf in the new Abergavenny library.

I hoped this would satisfy the need for me to have to write anything further - but here we are – another edition of the Gazette! I wondered whether, if I asked nicely, ChatGPT™ would write it for me. But no-one called Alexa™ lives in my house. And frankly I have absolutely no idea how to use any of them. I cannot be the only one who is alarmed by the use and exponential rise of AI in every aspect of our lives. We know photographs have been manipulated since the invention of the camera, but now it is troublingly easy to doubt everything we see or read.

The Abergavenny Street Survey¹ gives some general observations about the buildings in the town. When Leland² visited Abergavenny between 1535 and 1543, he referred to it as “a faire waulled town, meately well inhabited”. Churchyard³, who visited Abergavenny in 1587, commented that “Aboraynies Towne is wall round about and hath fayre Suburbs also”. In the 17th century Abergavenny was a wealthy town and much more important comparatively than it is today. It is situated where both wood and building stone are available for the construction of houses, so there would have been a variety of both building materials and building techniques.

I am not sure about the “fayre suburbs” today but vernacular buildings (i.e. houses and other buildings made using local materials) were exactly what we would expect to have seen. Buildings that were made using old, trusted techniques and skills. The production of brick was industrialized in the 19th century. The laborious process of hand-moulding, which had been used for 3,000 years, was superseded by “pressed” bricks⁴. Up to the 18th century, wood and local stone was readily available. By the 19th century, with the industrial revolution, the construction of canals and eventually railways, led to easier transport for brick and other materials that could be brought in from outside the immediate area.

If we look at Nevill Street today, it is good to see that much of the street still has a cohesive identity. In 1794, the Improvement Commission was set up to “tidy up the town” which had got into a derelict state. The Commission decreed that overhangs and projections should be removed, and these alterations account for the rather uniform appearance of Nevill Street, which was the first to be altered. Many of the buildings are listed. Buildings that are of special architectural or historic interest can be listed, which gives them legal protection⁵. Number 11, Nevill Street (Rother House) is Grade II listed. It is described in its listing as “probably 1780-90 and little altered externally since”⁶. The building has Tudor foundations but is of course much changed over the centuries since. It is “rusticated in stucco” with “long and short chamfered quoins”.

Were the builders asked to “rusticate the building”? Did they know their long from their short quoins? Of course they did. Apprenticeships in Britain go back to medieval times. In fact, “the Code of Hammurabi of Babylon, which dates from the

18th century BC required artisans to teach their crafts to the next generation”⁷. We can be sure our builders were skilled workers who had done an apprenticeship.

Rusticate can mean to banish temporarily from university. This may not have been applicable to the average 18th century builder! It can also mean retiring to the country - but here it means that they aimed to make the building look as if it is in the countryside, in a rural setting, despite the busy building work going on all around. Stucco means “plaster” in Italian. The difference between the two arises in their respective uses. Traditional stucco is made from lime, sand and water. It was used to give the appearance of stone at a fraction of the cost⁸.

“Quoin ends enhance the appearance of a building. Instead of a mason having to hand-dress a piece of stone, a quoin is simply laid. Stone quoins make corners less prone to damage and the process of rendering much faster”⁹. Architects and builders use quoins to give the impression of strength and firmness to the outline of a building.



*Rother House, 11 Nevill Street
(Abergavenny Street Survey)*

Until recently, the inside of this building was in a poor state of repair. It was damp and there were large cracks in some rooms and plaster was falling off walls. In mid-2024, I was pleased to see that it underwent extensive internal work, necessitating the current occupants to temporarily move out. The house that has Tudor foundations, or even earlier, can now continue on its way in the 21st century.

Who has lived in a house like this? It looks very grand and spacious but would originally have been a wood, wattle & daub structure, a warren of rooms and open hearths, probably on the pattern of a burgage plot¹⁰, the long narrow plots fronting onto what was called Rother Street originally, after the horned cattle marketed there. The first information we have of a named inhabitant comes some 300 years into the life of the building. Around 1810, we know that the Deeds state the owner was “Mr. John Allpress and before him, Reverend John Williams”. How do we know? At the time of our original street survey in the early 1980’s, much of the information on past occupiers, their names and professions, were obtained from directories, mainly Pigot’s and, later, Kelly’s.

Pigot's Directory was started in 1814 by James Pigot. It covered England, Scotland & Wales in the period before civil registration began and was a valuable resource for professions and trades. Kelly's was a trade directory started by the wonderfully named Frederic Festus Kelly in 1835. It listed all tradespeople in a town and was also a general postal directory. I remember Kelly's – brick-like red-covered volumes - from my childhood. They have apparently become collectible, and some have been digitised and can be found online¹¹.

The next known named occupier of Rother House was in 1822. "Mr. William Thomas Davies, Attorney". This is really satisfying – a building which today is still solicitors offices, was already being run as such 200 years' ago. From 1835-1838, Pigot's states Tom Gabb is a "resident". In 1850, again Pigot's directory names Tom Gabb as "attorney, clerk to the magistrate". Given that the Gabb surname is an established Abergavenny family of solicitors, it is not surprising to see them appearing at this time. However, in 1862, one Edward Morris had moved in, and he was a "tea, grocer, baker & confectioner". Intriguing to think that Mr. Morris may have had to clear piles of dusty files to make a space fit for producing and selling food items – or did he just live there and keep his shop elsewhere? He seems to have stayed a few years but by 1871, according to Kelly's directory, Henry Taylor was in situ, he was called a "furniture broker". Perhaps this necessitated more internal changes and having to sweep up the grocer's tea leaves before moving in with his furniture business.

Henry Taylor wasn't there very long. By 1875, John Harris Conway Junior was trading as brick, lime, coal and salt merchant. This may have made quite a mess of the place although I like to think that the lime and coal was not actually piled up in the rooms. There is plenty of room out at the back!

Then comes yet another frustrating gap in the records. The volunteers who gathered the information for the first street survey would have mainly had access to directories and written documents, found in our local library and the Abergavenny Museum but there would be many missing or lost directories and documents such as deeds may not have been readily available.

In 1895, William Dyne and Samuel Hopkin Steel were physicians and surgeons in the building. I wonder how much cleanliness they were able to achieve although it is already 20 years since the coal merchant had been there. At the same time as the surgeons, one Illtyd Gardner was in residence. In 1901 we are back to Solicitors in the form of Edgar Frederick Gardner whose residence this was and who was running Gardner's Solicitors. In 1906, Illtyd Gardner, who had once shared his space with the surgeons, is also still there. The firm was now known as Gardner & Heywood Solicitors. In fact, Kelly's states it is a "County Court/Solicitors". This business and its name continues for many years, into and beyond WW1. By 1914, more partners have joined, and it becomes known as Gardners, Heywood, Grey & Wagstaffe.

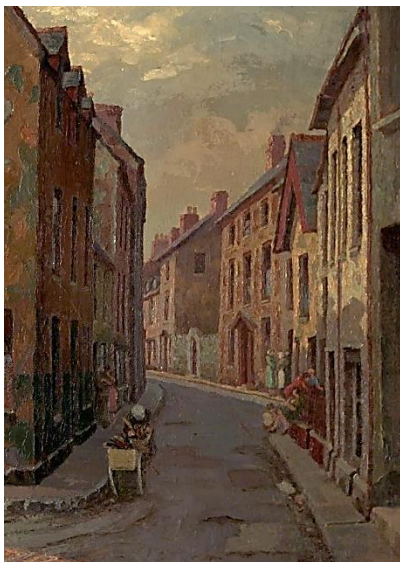
In 1923, Henry E. Lyons appears as a "jeweller & residence". Did he own the whole building or only part of it? Did he sub-let rooms as well, as was common? Whatever his status, I see him short-sightedly bending over a bench hammering away at silver or precious stones, while the solicitors and the County Court swirl around him. In 1930 "M.B. Burton" appears and the property seems to now also house the Abergavenny Chamber of Trade. As well as the solicitors? But hang on, not so fast. In

1934 we discover M.B. Burton is a dentist. Was he possibly using the rooms once used by the surgeons, while living in another part of the house.

Between 1934 and 1937, Mr. Burton (dentist), Gardners *et al* (the Solicitors), along with the Vale of Usk Development Association, the Abergavenny Chamber of Trade and the Abergavenny Licensed Victuallers Association, were somehow sharing the building. (I need a drink just thinking about it.) In fact, in 1934, Kelly's also lists the presence of Ministry of Labour Offices although they seem to have moved on by 1937.

By 1942, Kelly's only names Malcolm Beverley Burton and Mrs. Agnes Burton whose residence this was, respectively a dentist and artist. Maybe they became very fed up with all those tenants and got rid of the lot. That is, of course, conjecture but I can't say I blame them if that is what happened, but it does sound as if it became a residence mainly, rather than a place of business. The Burtons had a lovely garden with a "terrace and two gazebos at one end, the right-hand gazebo was used by Mrs. Burton"; it is not stated who used the other one! There were tennis courts, owned by the Burtons, which could be viewed from the garden, but which were actually situated "across the back lane". The Burtons were still in residence in 1948. In 1952 they donated the tennis courts to Harold Road School so that they could be dug up and used to teach gardening to the children, (perhaps this had already happened during the war years.)

As an aside, Agnes Beverley Burton (wife of Malcolm Burton, the dentist), was well-known as an artist. She was born in 1892 in East Anglia and studied at the Norwich School of Art. In 1937, along with a few others, she founded the Abergavenny Art Group, an organisation which is still thriving today. Her work has appeared in auctions both here and in the US and in 2008, Abergavenny Museum held an exhibition of her work. Agnes Burton died in 1967.



Tudor Street
Agnes Beverley Burton
(Monlife Heritage)

There is little more information until 1969-1978 when C. Price & Son had builders' offices. Charlie Price, a very well-known local builder, had an extensive retail space on the other side of Nevill Street at nos.14-18 for many decades. In 1972, alongside C. Price, was "Bardolin (part of L&N Securities)". Whatever this was, it has sunk without an internet trace.

From 1978 (when C. Price's offices presumably moved out) until 1981, Rother House perhaps remained empty. However, in 1981, Red Dragon Aluminium Ltd. Windows moved in. Again, there is no further information on this company, nor how long they stayed. By 1988, the premises are known as Gartside, Harding & Davies, Solicitors. 36 years' later, after undergoing many changes to both building and names (now Martyn, Prowel, Gartside), it is nice to see they are still there¹².

So that is a brief look at just one property. I would love to go back to speak to the people who worked in such diverse trades as lime & coal merchants, jewellers, furniture merchants, dentists and solicitors. How did they negotiate the space both separately and together? Surely there would have been servants, at least up to 1914. Was there a tap, well or a water pump? A privy in the garden? Many of the other houses in Nevill Street have an equally detailed history and the information gained gives an insight into the changing occupations and structure of the town.

People were, of course, just like us, working to make a living, in trades and professions, many of which still resonate today. Letters and documents were carried by hand or sent in the many-deliveries-per-day postal system. They, too, possibly railed at the new-fangled items that gradually changed their lives – the telephone and typewriter distant precursors to our digital world now held on one small hand-sized device.

Bianca Emberson

Notes

1 www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk

2 John Leyland's *Itinerary* provided a unique source of observations and raw materials for studying local history. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Leland_\(antiquary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Leland_(antiquary))

3 *The worthines of Wales* Paperback – 3 Sept. 2016 by Thomas Churchyard (author) modern reprint of an original last published in 1876. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Churchyard>

4 www.britannica.com

5 <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/discover/historic-wales/>

6 www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk

7 www.britannica.com

8 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stucco>

9 <https://www.haddonstone.com/en-gb/product-category/house-exterior/walls/quoins>

10 www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk

11 University of Leicester, Special Collections Online <https://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/>

12 www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk

How and Why Did Children Die in the Mid-nineteenth Century in Abergavenny?

Introduction

This article, as part of a research project undertaken by ALHS in 2020, explores the causes of death in the 0 - 5 year age group in Abergavenny during the mid nineteenth-century. Although infectious diseases featured highly in this sample, the focus here is on four other prevalent causes of death namely: convulsions, atrophy, brain disorders and 'other' causes. Today Abergavenny is a small, vibrant market town, with many facilities and attractions which draw people to the town. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, Abergavenny, like most towns, had poor sanitation, insufficient water supplies and overcrowded housing, giving rise to high levels of disease amongst the working classes. The research findings are presented below, followed by a brief outline of the four prevalent causes of death and why disease and death pervaded Abergavenny during this time.

The Sample

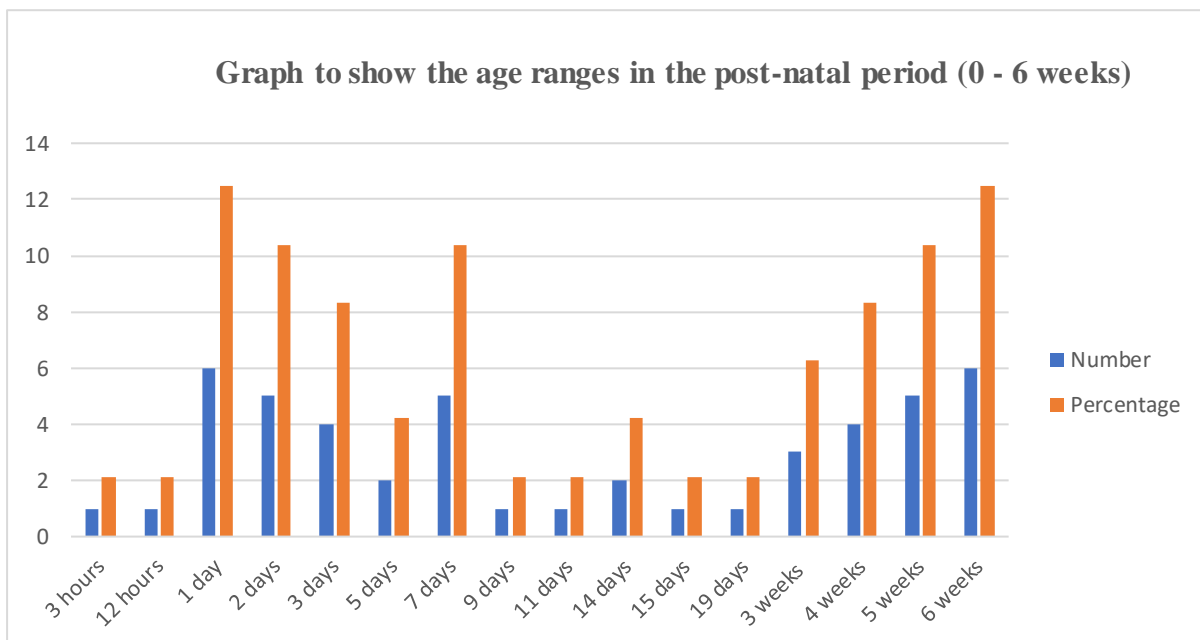
The causes of 346 deaths in the 0 – 5 year age group were downloaded from the St Mary's Priory Church Records through a family history site. The cohort spanned ten years from 15 June 1837 to 16 June 1847. The data was inputted and analysed in an Excel spreadsheet. Ten causes of death were not recorded; the remainder of the findings are presented next.

Age range of the 0 - 5 year age group

The ages of the 346 deceased ranged from 3 hours to 5 years as described below.

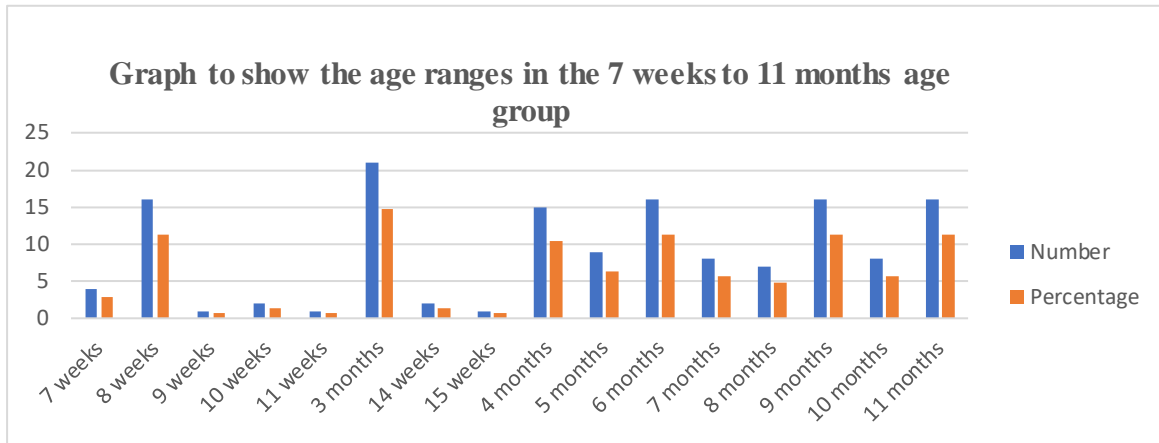
The post-natal period (0 – 6 weeks)

The post-natal period is defined as the period between birth and 6 weeks in which an infant death has occurred. The deaths of 48 (13.9%) babies were recorded in this category ranging from aged 3 hours to 6 weeks, as shown in the graph below:



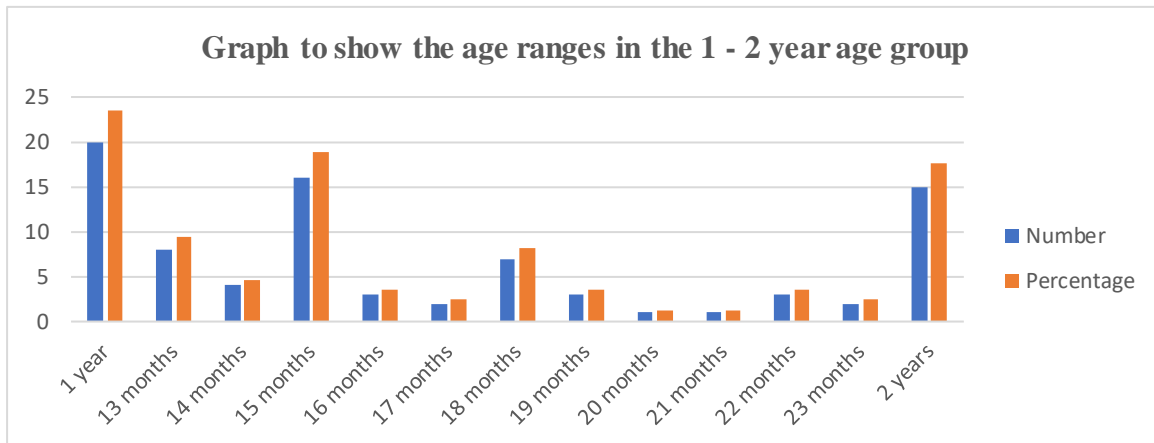
7 weeks to 11 months age group

A total of 143 (41.3%) deaths were recorded in the above group, as illustrated in the graph below:



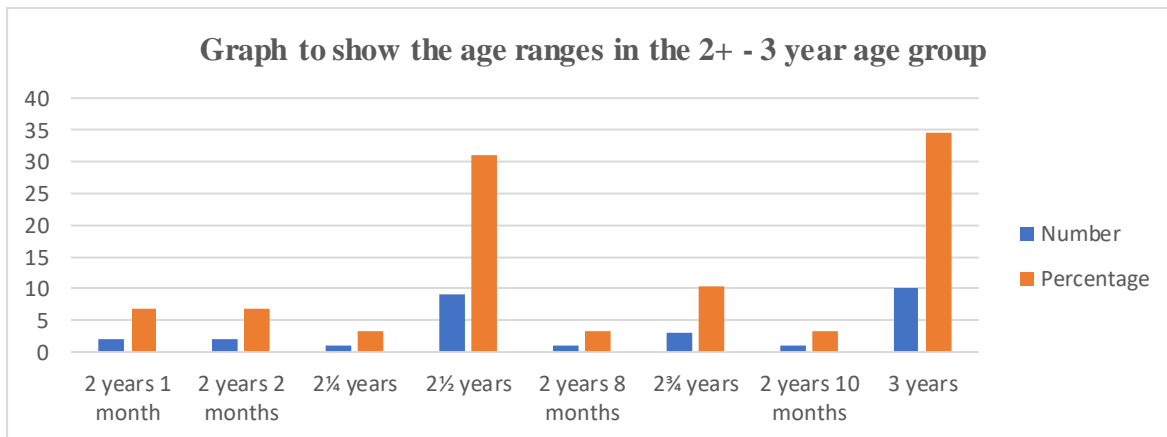
1 - 2 year age group

In the 1 to 2 year age group a total of 85 (24.6%) deaths were recorded, as the graph below shows:



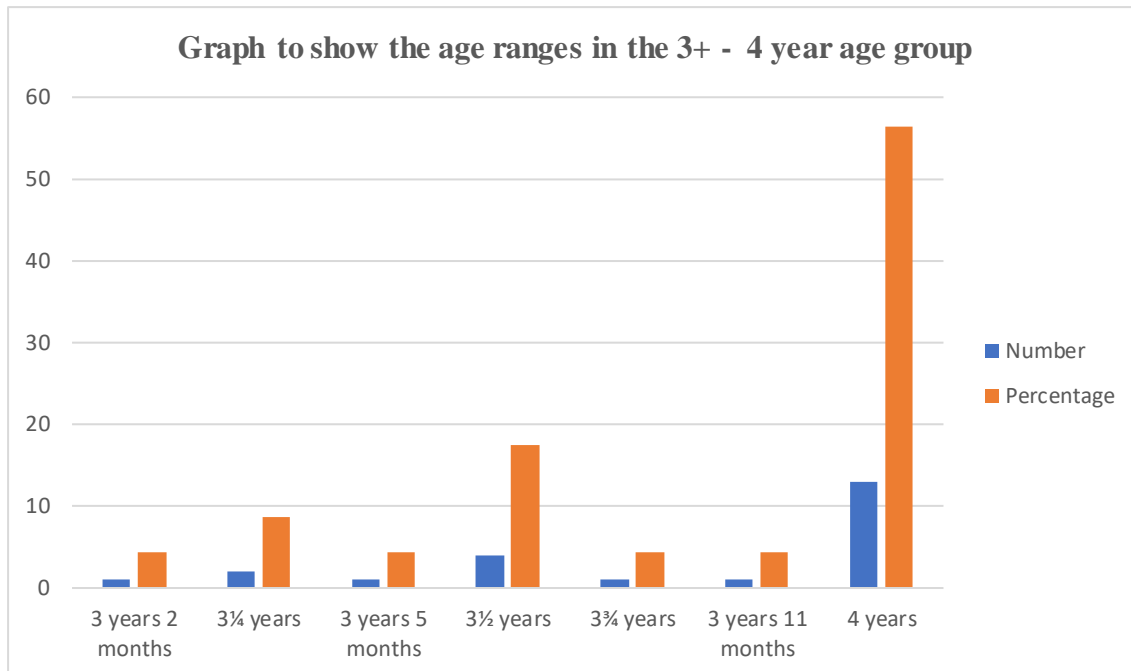
2+ - 3 year age group

In this group 29 (8.4%) deaths were recorded. The age range is shown in the graph below:



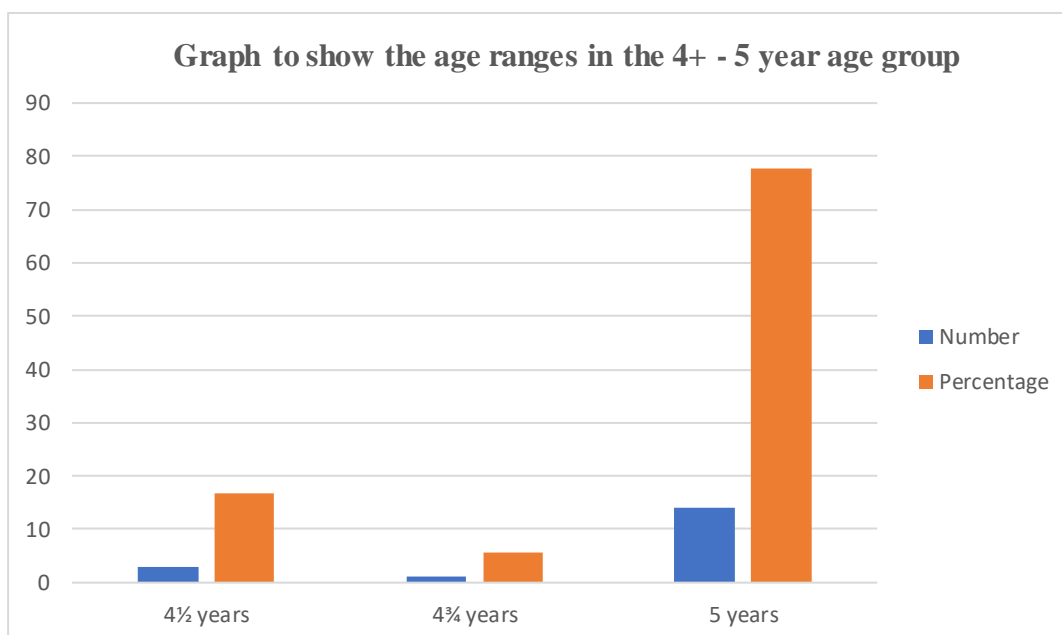
3+ 4 year age group

Twenty-three deaths (6.6%) were recorded in this age group, as illustrated in the following graph below:



4+ - 5 year age group

A total of 18 (5.2%) deaths were recorded in the above group, the age ranges are illustrated in the following graph:

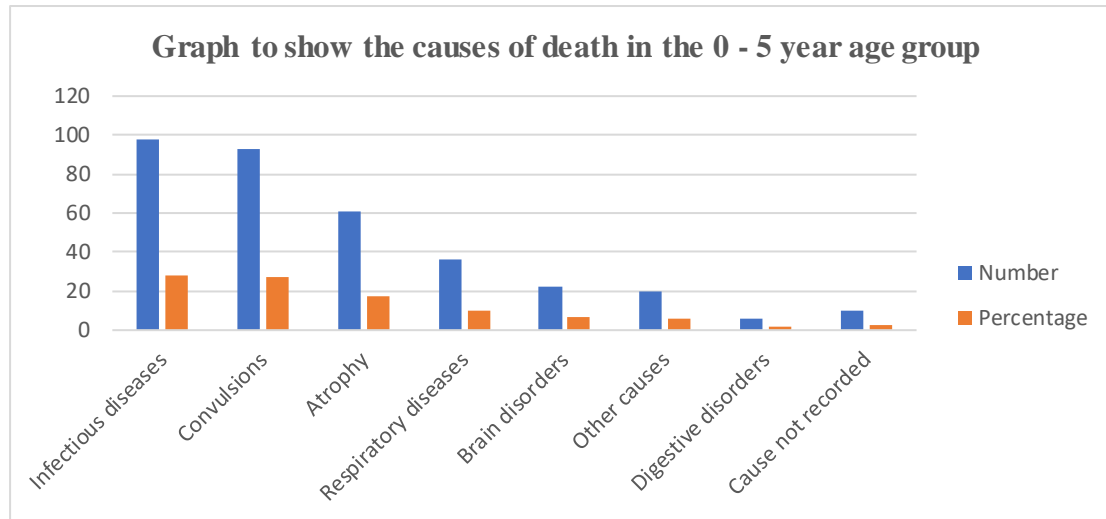


Sex Distribution of the Deceased

From the total of 346 deaths, 189 (54.6%) of the deceased were male, whilst 157 (45.5%) were female.

Causes of Death

As mentioned previously, infectious diseases featured highly in this sample, accounting for 28.3% (98) of deaths. Deaths from infectious diseases were presented in a previous article published in the *Gwent Local History Journal*¹. Here, however, the focus will be on the causes of death from convulsions, atrophy, brain disorders and other causes. Ten causes of death were not recorded, as illustrated in the graph below:



Convulsions

In all 93 (26.9%) deaths were recorded, of which 82 (88.2%) deaths were attributed to convulsion or convulsions, 5 (5.3%) deaths were recorded as convulsions from teething and 1 (1.8%) death was recorded as fever from teething. The ages ranged from 2 days to 4 years, with the highest incidence in the 7 weeks to 11 months age group with 50 recordings followed by the 0 – 6 week and the 1 – 2 year age groups with 14 recordings each.

In the eighteenth-century deaths in babies were often recorded as convulsions and were described as ‘An involuntary contraction of the fibres of the muscles, whereby the body and limbs are preternaturally distorted’². By 1785, with improving medical knowledge, it was more apparent that convulsions were symptoms of underlying causes³. In the early nineteenth century diarrhoea and convulsions were often seen in infant deaths, consequently they were used interchangeably as a cause of infant death. However, with the introduction of the General Registration Classification in 1839, these terms became independent of each other⁴.

Convulsions can affect both children and adults. As young infants and children are less able to regulate their own temperatures, any underlying infections which cause a

¹ Diosi, M. (2022) Did where you lived in Abergavenny in the mid-nineteenth century affect whether you lived or died from infectious diseases? *Gwent Local History Journal of the Gwent Local History Council* Number 132 pp: 19 – 34.

² Convulsion in Thornber, C. *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss/html. Accessed: 12 July 2024.

³ Gerard, I. and Root, K. (2017) Convulsions in *Living with Dying: Everyday Culture of Dying within Family Life in Britain 1900-1950's* Available at: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2148/convulsions>. Accessed: 22 July 2024.

⁴ Ibid.

temperature above 38 degrees Celsius can result in a febrile convulsion⁵. Teething was often recorded as a cause of death in the nineteenth century, due to the common symptoms occurring at the same time as teething, such as distress and crying due to the pain of erupting teeth, fever, convulsions and diarrhoea⁶.

Atrophy

Atrophy accounted for 61 (17.6%) deaths, of which 56 (96.6%) were recorded as Atrophy, 3 (4.9%) were recorded as Debility and 1 (1.7%) was recorded for each of Atrophy and hydrocephalus and Atrophy and teething. The ages ranged from 1 day to 2½ years, with the highest incidence in the 0 – 6 weeks and 7 weeks – 11 months age groups at 22 (36.1%) and 29 (47.5%) deaths respectively.

In the early nineteenth century atrophy was described as ‘wasting’⁷. Debility is defined as ‘to waste away through undernourishment, ageing or lack of use, become emaciated’⁸. Today the terms used in early childhood (children under the age of 2 years) are failure to thrive or more recently faltering growth. These relate to inadequate growth and/or low weight gain. Principally the cause is deficient nutrition, leading to insufficient calorie intake in the first few weeks of life. There may be several reasons for this, such as the mother’s inadequate nutrition in the ante-natal and post-natal periods, inexperienced breast feeding technique or an inability to produce breast milk, feeding problems associated with underlying infections, cleft palate/hare lip, inability to suck properly and social and/or environmental factors⁹. In the nineteenth century an absence of knowledge, along with the substandard living conditions, poverty, and a lack of adequate nutrition would have resulted in malnutrition.

Brain disorders

A total of 22 (6.4%) deaths were recorded in this category, in which 17 (77.2%) deaths were recorded as hydrocephalus, 3 (13.6%) deaths were attributed to water on the brain and 1 (4.5%) death was recorded for each of the following: epilepsy and acute hydrocephalus. In this category the ages ranged from 3 months to 5 years with the highest incidence being recorded in the 1 – 2 year age group at 12 recordings.

The term hydrocephalus was first coined by Hippocrates and Galen (both Greek physicians) and early and medieval Arabian physicians. They all believed an accumulation of water in the brain caused the enlarged head, hence the term ‘water on the brain’. In fact, it is the accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles (or cavities) of the brain which creates pressure on the brain tissues, leading to brain damage or death¹⁰.

⁵Febrile seizures. Available at: <https://nhs.uk/conditions/febrile-seizures>. Accessed: 12 July 2024.

⁶Gerard I and Root, K. (2017) Teething in *Living with Dying: Everyday Culture of Dying within Family Life in Britain 1900-1950's* Available at: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2172/teething>. Accessed: 22 July 2024.

⁷Atrophy in Thornber, C. *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss/html. Accessed: 12 July 2024.

⁸Thompson, D. (ed.) (1996) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* p. 79.

⁹Scholler, I. and Nither, S. (2012) ‘Understanding failure to thrive’ *Paediatrics and Child Health* Vol 22 Issue 10 October, pp: 438 – 442.

¹⁰Bohnenberger, A. 2017, ‘Hydrocephalus During Infancy’ Available at: <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/hydrocephalus-during-infancy>. Accessed: 20 July 2024.

In babies and children hydrocephalus maybe congenital or acquired¹¹. Congenital hydrocephalus affects babies at birth. The causes include inherited genetic abnormalities, developmental disorders due to defects in the brain, spine or spinal cord, for example spina bifida, complications of a premature birth or via a maternal infection acquired during pregnancy, such as Rubella or mumps. Babies born with congenital hydrocephalus have an unusually large head (or macrocephaly), with a thin shiny scalp, a bulging fontanelle with fixed downward looking eyes, called “sun setting” and may have feeding problems, irritability, seizures, vomiting and sleepiness¹².

Acquired hydrocephalus results from brain or spinal tumours, infections of the central nervous system, such as meningitis or typhus, known as brain fever in the nineteenth century¹³ or a severe head injury. Underfed small children and babies frequently appear to have large heads in comparison with their body size, leading to an assumption of hydrocephalus. The medical profession would not have been aware of these factors in the nineteenth century.

‘Other’ causes

Overall, this category accounted for 20 (5.7%) deaths. The ages ranged from 3 hours to 4½ years, with the 7 weeks to 11 months age group presenting with the highest incidence of deaths at 7 (35%), followed by the 1 – 2 year age group at 5 (25%). Some interesting causes of death were recorded in this category, as indicated below:

Three (13%) deaths were recorded as sudden death, 2 (8.7%) deaths were recorded for each of the following: Dropsy and dropsy of the heart, inflammatory fever and premature labour, resulting in the deaths of twin boys and 1 (4.3%) death was recorded for each of the following, as shown in the table below:

Table to show the causes of death with one recording

Cause of death	Age	Sex
? Natural death – inquest verdict	10 weeks	A foundling, female
Deformed	1 day	Male
Worm fever	3½	Female
Inflammation	1 year	Male
Drowned in the Kibby	23 months	Female
Carditis	2 years	Male
Suffocation – cause unknown - Coroner’s verdict	9 weeks	Male
Crushed to death by a wagon	3½	Female
Overlaid by a nurse	6 months	Female
Drowned by accident	4 years	Male
Ulcerated womb	4½	female

¹¹ Hydrocephalus. Available at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/hydrocephalus/. Accessed: 20 July 2024.

¹²Hydrocephalus. Available at: <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/hydrocephalus> Accessed: 20 July 2024.

¹³ Brain fever in Thornber, C, *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss/html. Accessed: 20 July 2024.

An outline of the more obscure causes of death, for instance, sudden death, dropsy, worm fever, carditis, overlaid by a nurse and ulcerated womb follows.

Sudden death

In present day terminology this is referred to as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or 'cot death'. It is defined as 'the sudden, unexpected and unexplained death of an apparently healthy baby'. Although the exact cause is unknown, SIDS is probably due to a combination of reasons, such as environmental factors and minor illnesses. It is more prevalent in the first six months of life in babies who are premature or of low birth weight, often male and occurs more frequently during sleep¹⁴. The three babies who died from sudden death were all male and aged 2 months, 3 months and 4 months.

Dropsy

In the eighteenth-century dropsy, or oedema as it is known today, was described as 'a collection of water in the body'. During the nineteenth century it was further defined as 'a swelling caused by the accumulation of abnormally large amounts of fluid. Caused by kidney disease or congestive heart failure'¹⁵. This definition still applies today. Diseases such as cardiac failure, lung disease, liver disease or pancreatitis and malnutrition cause the body to produce too much fluid or impair the drainage of fluid, causing oedema. In the nineteenth century death was probably caused by the underlying disease rather than the oedema¹⁶.

Worm fever

As worm infections were common in the nineteenth century, worm fever was often recorded as a cause of death, perhaps masking other more subtle causes. Worm fever possibly indicated 'fever or enteritis during which worms [probably threadworms] were passed in the faeces'¹⁷. Threadworms are common in children. They usually appear at night to lay their eggs around the anal area, causing extreme itching. During scratching the eggs are transferred to the fingers and subsequently transferred to bedding, clothing, other surfaces, pets, food and drink. Therefore, hand and home hygiene is essential, especially when preparing food and drink. Although threadworms themselves are not fatal, the underlying fever and enteritis is likely to be the cause of death¹⁸.

¹⁴ Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS): Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-sids/> Accessed: 24 April 2024.

¹⁵ Dropsy in Thornber, C. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html. Accessed: 8 July 2024.

¹⁶ Gerard I and Root, K, (2017) *Living with Dying: Everyday cultures of Dying within Family Life in Britain, 1900 – 50s* Available at: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2156/dropsy>. Accessed: 22 July 2024.

¹⁷ Worm fever in Thornber, C. *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss/html. Accessed: 8 July 2024.

¹⁸ Threadworms. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/threadworms/> Accessed: 20 July 2024.

Carditis

In the early nineteenth century carditis was described as ‘inflammation of the heart’¹⁹. The heart is composed of three layers of tissue: the epicardium, (the outer layer), the myocardium, (the middle layer composed of cardiac muscle) and the endocardium (the inner layer). These layers are surrounded by the pericardium, a thin protective fluid-filled sac.

Today, carditis is divided into three forms: Endocarditis, Myocarditis and Pericarditis. In the nineteenth century endocarditis was defined as a ‘disease of the heart valves that can result from rheumatic fever’²⁰, but today includes the inner lining of the heart.²¹ Myocarditis was described as ‘inflammation of the heart muscle (myocardium)’²² and pericarditis was recorded as ‘inflammation of the pericardium, the membrane around the heart’²³. Bacterial or fungal infections are the main causes of infection.

The term ‘carditis’ used in the nineteenth century may have related to congenital heart disease. This is a common type of birth defect which affects the heart. There are two forms of congenital heart disease, namely, cyanotic heart disease in which babies may have a blue tinge to the fingers, toes or lips due to insufficient oxygen in the blood, or acyanotic heart disease when blood is not pumped efficiently around the body due to a defect²⁴. In the nineteenth century physicians would have had little knowledge of congenital heart disease.

Overlaid by a nurse

According to Joseph Illick “overlaid and starved at nurse” was listed as a cause of death in the London Bills of Mortality between 1639 and 1659. In the seventeenth century aristocratic and higher social class women frequently employed lower class women who had recently lost a baby and/or had children as wet nurses to feed their babies. Wet nursing was a source of income for lower class women but was often fraught with problems. Firstly, an unscrupulous wet nurse might ‘take on’ too many children and have insufficient breast milk to feed them all, leading to malnutrition and neglect. Secondly, babies were often given laudanum, an opiate, to quieten them. Thirdly, concerns were raised by Jacques Guillemeau, a French obstetrician, that wet nurses might try and swap a dead infant in their care for another. Lastly, the wet nurse might dispose of her own baby to enable her to look for work in an affluent family. However, by the nineteenth century, the practice of wet nursing had somewhat diminished²⁵.

¹⁹ Carditis in Thornber, C. *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html. Accessed: 20 July 2024.

²⁰ Thornber, C. Endocarditis in *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

²¹ Endocarditis. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/endocarditis>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

²² Thornber, C. Myocarditis in *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

²³ Thornber, C. Pericarditis in *Glossary of Medical Terms used in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Available at: www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

²⁴ Congenital heart disease Available at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/cardiovascular-disease/heart-disease/congenital-heart-disease/>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

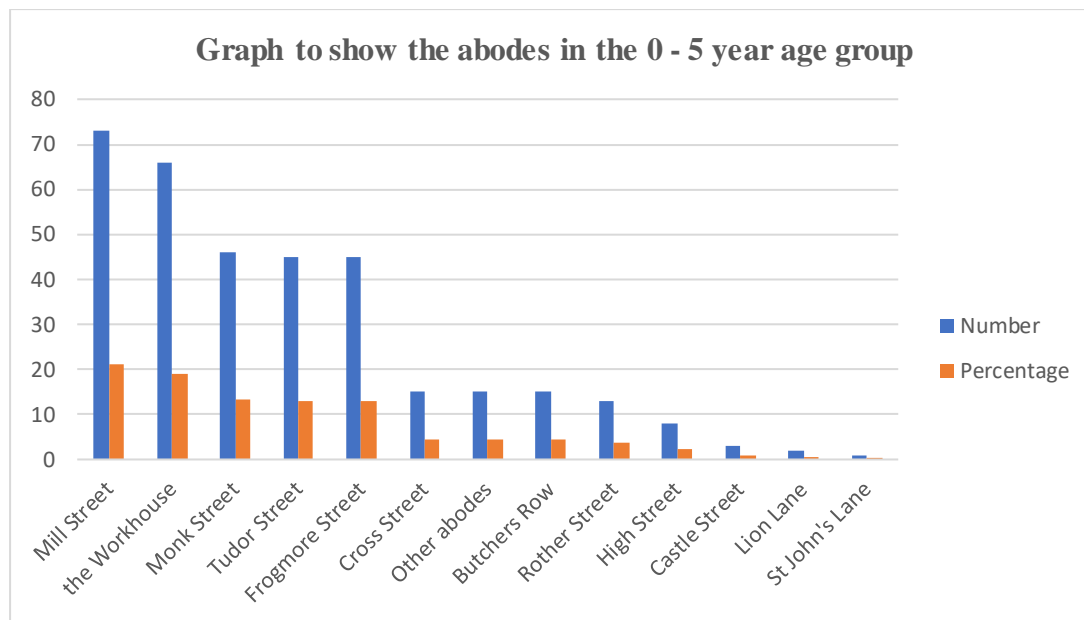
²⁵ Stockton, R. (2015) ‘5 Horrifying Acts of Child Abuse That Used To Be Totally Legal’. Available at: <https://allthatsinteresting.com/child-abuse/4>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

Ulcerated womb

Ulcerated womb in a 4½ year old child is difficult to define. It is possibly due to cervical erosion²⁶ or to cervicitis²⁷ caused by a bacterial infection which has spread to the surrounding tissues and probable systemic infection. Another possible factor is genital prolapse, which is associated with spina bifida or malnourished children.²⁸

Reasons for the Deaths

All the children lived in the more deprived areas of the town, listed in descending order as: Mill Street (73), the Workhouse (66), Monk Street (46), Tudor Street (45), Frogmore Street (45), Cross Street (15), Other abodes (15), Butchers Row (14), Rother Street (13), High Street (8), Castle Street (3), Lion Lane (2) and St John's Lane (1). The abodes are shown in the graph below:



The deaths were due primarily to inadequate nutrition (as discussed under Atrophy) and the substandard living conditions in the town. During the nineteenth century, with little or no building regulations, dwellings were built haphazardly in overcrowded, damp courts and yards with narrow passages and tunnels. Windows were often small, failed to open or were boarded up to avoid window tax, resulting in a lack of light and ventilation²⁹. The window tax, introduced in 1696, was a banded tax paid according to the number of windows in a house. Consequently, windows

²⁶ Britannica *Cervical erosion*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.co./science/cervical-erosion>. Accessed: 16 May 2024)

²⁷ Britannica *Cervicitis*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.co./science/cervical-erosion>. Accessed: 16 May 2024.

²⁸ McGlone, L., Patole, S. (2004) 'Neonatal Genital Prolapse' *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 23 February Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1754.2004.00321.x> Accessed: 9 August 2024.

²⁹ Steel, S. H. (1847) *A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the town of Abergavenny*: James Hiley Morgan. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/areportsanita00steegoog/page/n16/mode/2up>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

were bricked up to avoid paying the tax. After doctors and others argued that a lack of light contributed to ill health, the tax was repealed in 1851.³⁰ In addition, the privies were inadequate, and cesspits were rarely cleaned out and often overflowed due to flooding. With little provision for the collection of rubbish, piles of waste built up in the passages and tunnels, attracting rats and other vermin. Water was supplied by pumps, public wells or springs in most parts of the town. Mill Street and Monk Street sourced water from the contaminated pond, or from stored water in open water butts. Gas supplies were expensive and inadequate for the town's needs³¹.

Mill Street was the worse place to live. The putrefying skins, horns and hooves from the two tan yards, along with the open sewer produced overpowering odours, particularly in the summer months. The filthy stables, slaughterhouses and pigsties in Monk Street also contributed to the smell and filth. Odours from making tallow candles for the mining industry also permeated throughout the town³². Regarding the Workhouse, a new Union Workhouse was built just outside the town, now named Hatherleigh Place, between 1837 and 1838. It replaced the Workhouse situated in Mill Street and housed 150 inhabitants.³³ A third (22) of the deaths were recorded as convulsions, predominantly in children under the age of 1 year and possibly due to underlying infections. Abergavenny was not a pleasant place to live for those with insufficient income in comparison to those who could afford to live in the cleaner, less polluted areas and pay for a better water supply, privies that were cleaned and rubbish that was collected.

Conclusion

This article has focused on a small sample of 346 children in the 0 – 5 year age group over a 10 year period in the mid-nineteenth century. It has highlighted four causes of death besides infectious diseases, namely: convulsions, atrophy, brain disorders and other causes. Unsurprisingly the highest incidence of death was in the 0 – 2 year age group. The predominant reasons for the deaths were deficient nutrition and the substandard, overcrowded living conditions in which the children lived, particularly in Mill Street, Monk Street, Tudor and Frogmore Streets and the Workhouse. A lack of medical knowledge and understanding of disease in the nineteenth century also contributed. Children in the impoverished, overcrowded areas of Abergavenny died from diseases associated with malnutrition, poverty and deprivation.

Marilyn Diosi

³⁰ National Archives *Window tax* Available at:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/georgian-britain-age-modernity/window-tax/#:~:text=The%20window%20tax%252C> Accessed: 7 August 2024.

³¹ Steel, S. H. (1847) *A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the town of Abergavenny*: James Hiley Morgan. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/areportsanita00steegoog/page/n16/mode/2up>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

³² *ibid*

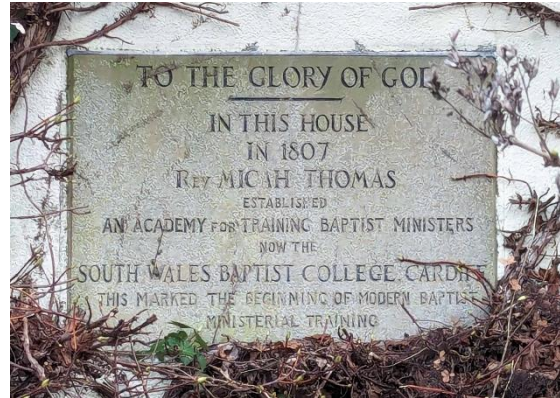
³³ Higginbotham, P. *The Workhouse in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire* Available at: <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/Abergavenny> Accessed: 7 August 2024.

Who was Micah Thomas? Where was the Abergavenny Baptist College? What other Non-conformist buildings exist?

From opposite the bus stop on the A40 by Tesco's, walk up Pen-y-pound. Turn left at the traffic lights then almost immediately right. From this junction with Avenue Road, walk up Pen-y-pound towards the Tennis Club (which is on the left) and the Pen-y-pound Stadium (Thursday's Club) football grounds on the right. As you walk, look out for a house on the left, Aenon House, 34, Pen-y-pound.

The plaque commemorates Micah Thomas and the Baptist College.

Micah Thomas¹ was born on 19th February, 1778, at Whitson, Monmouthshire. He was the son of a farmer, a member of New Inn Independent church. Later his parents settled at Llangibby, and he was sent to school, first at Tredunnoch and then at Trosnant, Pontypool. In 1795, he joined the Pen-y-garn Baptist church at Pontypool²



and began to preach in 1796. He entered Bristol Baptist Academy in February 1801, and was ordained at Ryeford, Herefordshire, on 19th September 1802. In January 1807 he moved to Abergavenny, and became tutor and principal of the Baptist Academy, opened that year. The academy was opened with one student, Jonathan Davies of Capel Iwan, Carmarthenshire, on January 1st, 1807, and two others entered in February. He also became minister of a new English Baptist Church known as Frogmore Street. This church, founded in that year, 1807, worshipped in Tudor Street Welsh Baptist Chapel (built in 1769 as an offshoot of Llanwenarth) until the chapel was opened in Frogmore Street in 1816. After his resignation in 1836 due to failing health after an operation in London, the college transferred to Pontypool. He continued as minister of Frogmore Street English Baptist church until his death on 28th November 1853. The college was later moved to Cardiff where students were able to attend Cardiff University³.

Particularly after the Act of Uniformity (1662), it was difficult for those not attending the Established Church of England to attend the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge which required students to pass tests affirming their allegiance either before admission (Oxford) or before taking their degree (Cambridge). If they had sufficient income, they might attend foreign or Scottish Universities and there was a Presbyterian Fund set up to support those attending Utrecht University. Academies funded by philanthropic Non-conformists or by subscribers were set up in Britain. Proceedings in ecclesiastical courts against the tutors of these academies were common in the seventeenth century. Prosecutions became rare after 1723, when, under the protestant William III, the Regium Donum, a grant to supplement the income of poor Non-conformist clergy was established. The Dictionary of Welsh Biography gives details of many of the people who established or ran the Non-conformist colleges and there are informative links in Genuki⁴ also.

Micah Thomas married Sophia Wall of Ross and later Rachel Harris, daughter of John Harris, Govilon, and granddaughter of the Rev. Morgan Harry, Blaenau Gwent. Described as “devout, scholarly, and determined”, Thomas stood for a better-educated ministry and tried to supply it. His administration and discipline were criticised as being too strict, expecting a high standard of behaviour from the students. There were also criticisms of some of his doctrinal interpretations and, for a time, a mistaken claim that he was an ‘Arminian’, diverging from the accepted interpretation of the Baptist faith. Under Micah Thomas's rule the Academy grew in strength, usefulness and influence. It was never a large institution, and its curriculum was necessarily modest, but it marked an important stage in the development of Baptist ministerial education in Wales. The over-all number of its students was only 103, possibly 106, in twenty-nine years but many of them were men of outstanding ability and future leaders of the denomination. Three of them subsequently became Principals (or Presidents as they were then called) of the three colleges of Pontypool, Haverfordwest and Llangollen: Dr Thomas Thomas, David Davies and Dr John Pritchard. Some Abergavenny students pursued further studies at English colleges. The students lived in rented rooms in the town and went to Micah Thomas's home, Aenon House, for tuition. He was one of the people who campaigned for the lives of the Chartist leaders who were sentenced to death at Monmouth in 1840; their sentences were commuted to transportation for life to Australia. He clearly believed in what he taught.

Were there other colleges in Abergavenny?

David Jardine (1732 -1766) was ordained at Abergavenny in 1754 and started a school, the Abergavenny Academy (for Congregationalists), with Benjamin Davies as his assistant. Born at Denbigh, he had been a student at the Carmarthen Academy between 1752-4. Jardine continued to minister to the church at Abergavenny and to be head of the Academy until he died on 1st October 1766. He was married to the daughter of Lewis Jones of Bridgend. David Jardine was said to be an excellent teacher and many of his students became prominent amongst Congregationalists. It is not clear from the records where the Academy was situated. The “Old School Room” on Castle Street was not built until 1903 as a schoolroom for the Congregational Church next door (which preceded the present United Reformed Church). The Congregational Church was founded in Abergavenny in 1692 and was on its present site sometime in 1707.

Benjamin Davies attended the Congregational Academy grammar school at Carmarthen from around 1754. At an unrecorded date he became assistant tutor at Abergavenny Academy, and, on the death of David Jardine, was appointed (8 December 1766) as tutor and pastor of the church there. In September 1781 he moved to become classical and mathematical tutor at Homerton Academy just outside London.

Background Information about Non-conformity

In 1534, the Church of England was established by the Act of Supremacy under Henry VIII. In 1536, Wales was incorporated under the royal authority of the king by the Act of Union making the Church of England the established Church of both England and Wales⁵. Everyone was expected to subscribe to the state church, adhere to its teaching, consent to its authority and support it financially. Then, religion was part of everyday life in a way that is difficult to appreciate today.

The Church of England was disestablished for two short periods. The first suspension, under the Roman Catholic Queen Mary from 1554-8, was ended by the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. In 1603, James I succeeded Elizabeth I. James I (James VI of Scotland) had been tutored by Protestants, but also had a Catholic mother. Both of these religious groups hoped for tolerance, but he was more interested in his own individualistic views and suppressed all who tried to undermine his absolute authority. He called the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 which, under his direction, resolved to enforce conformity amongst the clergy, leading to about ninety ejections or suspensions - and a feeling of persecution. In 1604 the Book of Common Prayer was imposed. He commissioned the Authorised Version of the Bible, first published in 1611 and, in 1618, imposed the Book of Sports, which specified which recreations were acceptable on a Sunday.

After the Civil Wars, from 1645-60, there was the second period of suspension under the rule of the Commonwealth. During this time, the enforced use of the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer and the episcopal government of the Anglican Church were both suspended, enabling many incumbent clergymen to organise worship according to their own convictions (within certain limits).

After the Restoration in 1660, the Act of Uniformity (1662) required all clergy be ordained according to the rites of the Anglican Church, to subscribe to a statement of doctrine and belief known as the 'Thirty-nine Articles' and to give their 'unfeigned assent and consent' to everything in the Book of Common Prayer, which remained the only legal liturgy to be used in the Church of England. Some of the clergy refused to conform. They either left the Church or were ejected from their livings, sometimes taking part, or all, of their congregations with them, providing the origin of the term 'Non-conformist'.

This definition of Non-conformist only has meaning in the context of the Christian religion of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, since it primarily denotes a refusal to conform to the requirements of the Church of England. Theoretically, Roman Catholics could be included, but because of the very different belief system, the fear of the Parliament that the country would be taken back to that religion, and the subsequent different legal position, they have always been considered separately.

Since the status of the Established Church was protected by statute, refusal to conform to its precepts was a *civil* offence. On the re-instatement of the Established Church in 1662, civil restrictions were imposed on those who did *not* conform to its requirements. These were only ameliorated by the Act of Toleration in 1689 and only removed by further legislation in the early nineteenth century, which also included relaxations of restrictions for Roman Catholics.

Non-conformists are defined as members of Protestant religious groups whose predecessors refused to conform to the doctrine, discipline and practices of the established Anglican Church. Their history may be traced to the activities of Puritans who objected to the compromises enshrined in the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Settlement, and to the events and tensions of the first half of the seventeenth century when the earliest Independent / Congregational and Baptist churches were established. Those in Wales included the Independent church at Llanvaches, Monmouthshire in 1639 and the Baptist church at Ilston, Gower in 1649.

Independents / Congregationalists emphasise the independence and autonomy of each gathered congregation of believers, and Baptists believe in the baptism, not of infants, but of believers, by total immersion. Other groups which also emerged in the seventeenth century included the Unitarians (who reject the doctrine of the Trinity) and the Quakers, the Society of Friends (who do not observe the sacraments of baptism and holy communion) and a large number of other small groups who tended to fade out once their leaders died. All these groups, also known as Dissenters, were persecuted in the years following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and especially by the 1662 Act of Uniformity.

The variety of Welsh Non-conformists were further increased in the eighteenth century following the evangelical revival which began as a reform movement within the Anglican Church. Calvinistic Methodists separated from the Church of England in 1811. They were influenced by the emphasis of the sixteenth-century theologian John Calvin on the total sovereignty of God with the elect “chosen from the beginning of time”. Their descendants today are members of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, and those of John Wesley’s followers, who formed part of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, are members of the Methodist Church.

Buildings for Non-conformist meetings in Abergavenny

Early meeting houses or chapels were generally small structures which provided simple accommodation for the local congregation to worship. Some were built after meetings had initially been held in members’ homes or in the upper rooms of public houses. Barns or cowsheds were also occasionally converted into suitable religious premises. A common feature of many was the central position of the pulpit, representing the predominant emphasis on preaching the word of God.

Llanwenarth Baptist Church in Govilon

This appears to be the earliest chapel built locally and illustrates the variable fortunes of the Baptist movement well. After leaving the New Model Army during the Commonwealth, John Miles came to Wales and settled at Ilston in the Gower. In 1652, supported under the provisions of the Act for the Better Propagation of the Gospel in Wales, he travelled up the Usk Valley, preaching and encouraging the formation of new congregations. As a result of his ministry, the fellowship that later became Llanwenarth Baptist Church was formed just outside Abergavenny, under the leadership of William Pritchard⁶. After the Restoration in 1660, the fellowship was forced to go into hiding. It was not until 1688, when Charles' brother, the Catholic James II, was ousted by his Protestant brother-in-law, William of Orange, that Baptists began to feel free to worship openly. In 1695, the fellowship, still led by William Pritchard, leased land from Christopher Price, a sympathetic apothecary who had his commercial premises in Abergavenny. They built their first Meeting House, which was licensed for worship in 1696. This small Meeting House probably occupied the northern end of the current building in Govilon. William Pritchard died in 1713, but by that time the fellowship at Llanwenarth had already called their next minister.

Joshua James had come to Govilon in 1695 as co-pastor and Llanwenarth played a major role in the formation of the Welsh Baptist Association (1700) and founded a day school where children were to *'be freely instructed in reading, writing, arithmetick, and likewise in the Principles of Religion'*.

Joshua James died in 1728, and the life of the fellowship entered a quiet period. This lasted until the ministry of Caleb Harris (1746-1792). It was during his time that Llanwenarth, like many Non-conformist causes of that time, suffered in the arguments over Unitarianism⁷. The church called a co-pastor, James Lewis, to Llanwenarth in 1791 and he soon found himself in sole charge. His ministry proved highly successful, and soon the membership was nearly 350.

The canal behind the chapel was completed in 1805 with a gate from the towpath providing access to the chapel. Francis Hiley had only just graduated from the Abergavenny Academy when he was appointed by Llanwenarth in 1811. The period of their individual and joint pastorates was a high point. Between them they baptised over 1,400 people. Francis Hiley was a renowned preacher in both Welsh and English. Known as the “Silver Trumpet of Gwent”, he was reported to have preached outdoors to great crowds of over 1,000 people, standing on top of a wall so that he could be seen by all.

Tramroads were built to move the coal, iron and limestone being taken out of the hills. A network of tramroads were developed in the Govilon area and Crawshay Bailey applied to the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Company for the construction of “... a railway from the canal at Llanwenarth to our iron furnaces at Nantyglo”. It took just 7 months to build the twin track tramway. Much of the route into Govilon is still plainly visible with School Lane following the original route⁸. The railway from Abergavenny to Merthyr followed and Station Road got its name after 1862, when Govilon railway station opened (the railway closed in 1958). The population increased and many were working families attracted to the Baptist non-conformist religion and way of life.

By 1830, the membership of Llanwenarth had grown to 629. Several members were “released” by the mother chapel to found independent fellowships. Altogether, Llanwenarth founded twelve daughter churches throughout Gwent. James Lewis died in 1837 and Francis Hiley in 1860. As the area became more industrialised, many incomers from England and Ireland arrived to work and the language of worship became English rather than Welsh. This pattern was repeated by many other chapels.

Other Non-conformist buildings in Abergavenny

The Act of Toleration passed in 1689 allowed Non-conformists their own places of worship and their own teachers and preachers. This was still subject to their acceptance of oaths of allegiance to the crown. Almost immediately, meeting houses blossomed. Non-conformists still could not hold political office (nor could Roman Catholics) which led to ‘occasional conformity’, where men also occasionally attended the church of the state religion. However, in 1711 the Occasional Conformity Act imposed fines on those who were found to be worshipping at Non-conformist meeting houses after receiving communion in the established church.

Early Meeting houses recorded and not now visible or in use.

A list of early meeting houses in Abergavenny⁹ appears in the National Library of Wales Journal from 1954. In 1776 an Independent chapel was registered in the house of Thomas Morgan. A house called Tŷ Morgan, possibly the same one, was registered in 1812, now as a Calvinistic Methodist house. In 1814, a house in Nevill Street, possibly number 24 (which was demolished in around 1962) was registered as Protestant, being occupied by Ebenezer Skeel, a schoolmaster.

In 1816, a room joining onto the house occupied by William Watkins in Nevill Street was registered as a Protestant house. This appears to be number 25 (now a hairdresser) which is on the corner of the access to four cottages where the Malthouse used to be.

The site of 49 Cross Street, where the present 'Great George' on the corner of Cross Street and Monk Street is situated, was the first non-conformist meeting house thought to be established in 1688 (although this seems unlikely as the Act of Toleration was not passed until a year later) and to continue until 1751¹⁰. It is just up the hill from Plas Gunter Mansion where there was a Roman Catholic Chapel in the attic.

A branch of the Llanwenarth Baptists was established as a Welsh Baptist Chapel between numbers 17 and 19 Tudor Street in 1769. It closed in 1889, largely because of the decline of the use of the Welsh language in the area. After use by the Salvation Army and later as a Mission Hall, it was demolished in 1957⁷. Plas Elyrch retirement building now occupies this site.

A Baptist chapel was established and registered in 1816 by Micah Thomas (see above) in Frogmore Street. This became the schoolroom when the existing Baptist Chapel was built. It was demolished when Tesco's was built and the money from its sale used to alter the Baptist Church to accommodate the schoolroom there. The headstones from the burial ground behind can still be seen in the delivery area.

In 1849, a Protestant building was registered, called the Schoolroom, under the Cymreigyddion Hall, in 'Budbill Lane' near Tudor Street, which was the property of Mr. Edward Lewis of Abergavenny, tinman, and previously occupied as the Abergavenny Charity School. This meeting house was registered with the Archdeacon of Monmouth. No 22 Tudor Street is now demolished; 'Budbill Lane' is probably Byfield Lane, incorrectly transcribed.

Non-conformist buildings still visible

The '*Chapels and Churches*' Trails and Tales leaflet available from the Tourist Information Centre in the Market Hall (and from the ALHS website) is a useful guide



to many of the existing religious buildings in central Abergavenny. Others not mentioned in the leaflet are intriguing, like the corrugated tin building on Cae Pen-y-Dre, which was put up as a chapel of convenience by the Holy Trinity Church for the people moving into the houses built in that area for the railway workers and others.



The Victoria Street Tabernacle Primitive Methodist chapel was erected in 1850 as shown by the plaque on its side and is now used by the Salvation Army. No record of the date of its closure seems to exist.

It is well worth keeping your eyes open as you walk around Abergavenny for the intriguing remnants of its previous history – religious and otherwise!

Gill Wakley

Notes

- 1 https://mail.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/14-3_109.pdf
- 2 Matthews D Hugh. *From Abergavenny to Cardiff: History of the South Wales Baptist College 1806-2006*. Abertawe: Gwasg Ilston, 2007.
- 3 <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/ChurchHistory/TheoColl> (accessed August 2024)
- 4 Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999)
- 5 <http://www.govilonbaptist.org.uk/history.htm> (accessed July 2024)
- 6 <https://austinuu.org/wp2013/whats-the-difference-between-trinitarian-v-unitarian/> (accessed September 2024)
- 7 <https://www.govilon.com/trails/places-of-interest> (accessed July 2024)
- 8 Hywel D Emanuel, *National Library of Wales journal*, Vol VIII/4, Winter 1954
- 9 Louis Bannon, *Remember Abergavenny*, Vol 1, Old Bakehouse Publications 1995, p9. Available in Abergavenny Library and www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk
- 10 <https://coflein.gov.uk/cy/safle/400564/> (accessed July 2024)

Nine Financially Independent Women of 17th Century Abergavenny

The women of the seventeenth century are largely invisible. Their names are recorded in parish records at the time of their baptism, marriage and funeral but they usually only appear as the daughter, wife or widow of a man rather than as a person in their own right.

Some women of the 'middling sort' come to notice because they are wealthy enough to write a will and bequeath property and goods to others at their death. If a married woman wished to write a will she needed the permission of her husband to do so. The wills were written and then signed in the presence of witnesses, usually with a mark rather than a written version of their name and most marks seem to be based on their first name initial though an X is common. The will was also sealed and unless the will-writer owned a stamping instrument (matrix) they would have used their own finger or thumb print.

The National Library of Wales has a collection of wills, many of which include an inventory, which is available online and this includes some wills made by Abergavenny women in the Restoration period.

<https://www.library.wales/catalogues-searching/catalogues/specialist-catalogues/wills> This investigation looks at the wills of some of these women to find clues which suggest where their incomes came from.

Although we do not know the ages of these women most of them have adult children and it is surprising that no grandchildren are mentioned in any of the wills discussed. The one thing that these women would have had in common was that they would almost certainly have been living in Abergavenny throughout the time of the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth period, experiencing all the disruption, turmoil and fears that would have involved. They might have witnessed the arrival of Prince Rupert in 1644 and the welcoming of King Charles I in July 1645 by his host James Gunter of the Priory. But during the wars many people lost their lives, incomes or livelihoods, while some possibly benefited from providing goods and services to the soldiers passing through the town or garrisoned at the Castle (if the soldiers had money and didn't steal). The damage to the windows and interior of the St Mary's Church must have been shocking, even to non-church goers. The austerity of the Commonwealth period must have been difficult for many with the restrictions on celebrations and limitations on singing, dancing and sports. The installation of an un-named non-conformist vicar would have made big changes to their Sunday worship. By the time of the deaths of these women a new Anglican vicar had been installed – John Greenhough – an outsider with a name more familiar in Lancashire than Wales. Lancashire, like Monmouthshire, was a Royalist-supporting county. It was John Greenhough who put the parish records into better order, using Latin, and started including some occupations and places of residence as well as the essential details.

Abergavenny was a town noted for its textile and leather industries which meant that many of the townspeople, while not rich and with absolutely no security against disease or disasters, were probably living reasonably comfortable lives. A typical

weaver would have had to work very hard to earn his living and his family would have had to work too. Spinners are never mentioned in records of the time but the huge quantities of spun yarn required to keep the weavers employed meant that women and children must have been fully occupied as spinners. They would have been very noticeable around town with their spindles in action as it is an activity which can be carried on while talking with a neighbour or just benefitting from the light outdoors. All sorts of businesses would have required the assistance of the families in order to be profitable, from the innkeeper's wife supervising the cooking and cleaning to the leather worker's small son or daughter being sent out to deliver a pair of mended shoes. The wills of these Abergavenny women show that some women were much more economically active in the town than we might have expected.

The majority of women in the seventeenth century would have grown up knowing that they would need to work for their living but in most cases this would have been unpaid work for their family or their husband's business. There must always have been jobs as servants available, in a private home, farm or hostelry. Women wanting to work while living at home might be employed by the day as washerwomen or for charring. By scraping and saving a wife might save enough to buy a few chickens or even a cow, then selling eggs or milk on market days could have added significantly to the family income. Women of the middle classes would have been totally dependent upon their families. For the majority of people at the time the income gap between living in adequately comfortable conditions and having to 'go on the parish' was scarily small.

All the documents used in this investigation were written in English but we do not know how widely English was spoken in Abergavenny then. Possibly only one or two of the women whose wills we look at below would have been able to read their will, or understand it if read to them in English. The majority of girls received no formal education as this was well before the introduction of chapel schools, but what they learned at home must have been extensive. Literacy was not considered necessary for women or the poorest people but nobody could survive without basic numeracy skills. At a time when any money in your pocket might consist of old coins cut into halves or quarters to supply small change, or the newer coinage which was only struck in higher denominations, or tokens produced by businesses, the ability to add and subtract was essential. No woman could have bought or sold goods in the market without the ability to do arithmetic, and probably also to do it in her head, although tally sticks would have been commonly used. Many households would have owned a slate and slate pencil to practice numbers and letters. If the boys in a family were lucky enough to receive some education then no doubt the girls learned a lot from them.

The disadvantage of using wills and inventories to learn more about individuals is that they can only give a limited picture of the person's lifestyle. Even the most detailed inventory will only list the property of the writer of the will and not that of any other person living in the property, such as items bequeathed to a son by his dead father or any items bequeathed to the widow in her dead husband's will but left for her use until her death. The wills do not list items that are attached to the building, like wall cupboards or shelves. The effect is of looking into a house through small windows so only part of the rooms are visible. The inventory writers were also in the habit of lumping groups of articles together for valuation. We frequently see

inventory items described as ‘oulde trumperie’ or ‘wooden trumpery’ which would have revealed far more about lifestyles had the items had been individually listed. All the inventories describe typical two-story houses with sleeping chambers upstairs and a main hall downstairs with a kitchen behind. There were often storerooms and sometimes outbuildings with the occasional pigsty or chicken house in the garden.

The inventories always start upstairs in the main sleeping chamber where valuable items, possibly a gold ring, and clothing were kept in chests. Women’s clothing at this time consisted of a smock or shift, usually made of linen, worn next to the skin. These would be washed as frequently as the owner could manage as the upper layers of clothing would have been kept clean only by brushing, spot-cleaning and airing. Next a bodice (bodise) was worn over the shift and this was normally boned to give some support. ‘Petticoats’ at this time might be either undergarments made of linen or skirts made from wool, both use the same name and went on over the shift. Garments were more commonly fastened with ties rather than buttons. By the end of the 17th century skirts with a split front, opening to show off a decorative petticoat below, were just coming into fashion. Other items of clothing that often appeared in wills and inventories included waistcoats and scarves. Aprons were an important addition to a woman’s clothing and these women would probably have owned several from coarse working aprons for outdoor work, to greasy kitchen aprons up to an embroidered apron for best. No mention is made of outdoor clothing so it is likely that indoor and outdoor clothing was all the same to them and extra layers and shawls were simply added as it got colder or wetter. No hats are mentioned in these wills.

After the valuables and clothing, the rest of the contents of the chamber were listed. Here it is useful to remember that the change in the use of words over time can lead to confusion. So the ‘beds’ in the inventories would be called mattresses now. Curtains were hung on the bedstead and not at the windows, where you had shutters. Rugs were part of the bedding and if you were wealthy enough to own a carpet, it would have been displayed on a table or laid on a chest and definitely *not* walked on. If there was any floor covering it was likely to be straw matting or a floor cloth.

A bedstead could be an elaborate ‘four-poster’ or a simple wooden frame with rope criss-crossing the base to form a support for the ‘beds’. The ropes needed to be tightened periodically to keep the bed from sagging (Good night – sleep tight!). Straw matting might be laid on the ropes to stop the bottom bed slipping through the gaps, then the other beds, depending on how many you owned, were laid on top. The cheapest beds were filled with chaff and these would be laid at the bottom, then flock-filled or a flock and feather mix and the most expensive and most comfortable were feather beds which would be topmost. Flock was a by-product of the textile industry so must have been readily available locally and there must have been a good trade in feathers from various sources. A truckle bed was often stored under the bedstead that could be rolled out and a bed laid on top for sleeping. But a straw or chaff bed could be laid down and slept on anywhere in the house, which many servants would have done.

The linen on the beds might be coarse sheets or expensive damask and most of the women in this study owned some of each. A bolster would have been laid at the top of the bed and it and the bed covered by a bottom sheet. Then pillows (flock or feather) were added, followed by a top sheet. Then additional rugs and blankets were laid on

top, although blankets were not often listed. Over it all was laid a coverlet which was probably made from a more decorative, colourful fabric or possibly embroidered. In wealthier households the bed curtains might also have been embroidered as were the pillow covers that appear in some inventories. Although very few chairs were upholstered at this time, cushions were used for comfort and also to display the embroidery skills of the women. Most of the inventories include at least a few cushions.

After the contents of the bed chamber (valuables, clothing, furniture and bedding) were noted and valued, the assessors moved on to the other upstairs rooms which usually contained only beds and a few items of furniture. Then they moved downstairs to the hall where you could expect to find a table board. Only the tables tops were recorded at this time as table-boards rested on trestles or other sorts of legs, none of which are mentioned in the inventories studied. The hall would also have a few stools, benches and chairs and probably a screen, possibly made from wainscot (Spanish oak). Some of the furniture might be 'joined', meaning better quality furniture made by a joiner. The hall could have had decorative wall paintings but as so few have survived we cannot know how common they were.

The kitchen was visited next and could have been bright with polished copper and brass and gleaming pewter. Most wooden items in the kitchen were not separately listed so we have to imagine wooden spoons and trenchers (round ones made by a turner, not the earlier square ones) and a variety of cooking pans. Any container for heating water was called a kettle. An iron grate was an expensive item so was always itemised in the inventory. Coal was starting to be used for household fires at this time but would have necessitated the purchase of a new grate and also needed different cooking methods and equipment. Roasting a joint over a coal fire could give the meat a strange flavour so roasting over wood was favoured. But access to wood for burning was getting more difficult and coal was becoming more readily available. Trivets were much in evidence and were used to support pots and pans over the fire and would be moved nearer or further from the heat as needed.

After the kitchen, the inventory appraisers moved on to the contents of any storerooms and outside premises. Finally, any livestock would be valued, plus the value of any standing crops in gardens and fields. The inventory also included the rental from property owned and money owed to the deceased, usually from bonds. The inventory was signed by the people who had made the valuations and a copy made. The will and inventory were sent to the Church Court for assessment and it is these that in many cases have survived in the National Library of Wales collection.

Jane Upton – *whose husband was missing*

Jane Upton was buried on 30th March 1665 and made her will on the 28th of March while *very Sicke of Body but in pfect memory*. She made her mark, possibly based on a J or E, rather than a signature. Her inventory shows that she did not own anything of individual value but had the full complement of household goods one might expect plus three cows, a calf and a pig. She also had butter tubs, a churn and other items indicating that the family had the means to produce milk, butter and soft cheese beyond their own needs, so it could be that the family supplemented their income from selling these.

Jane was anxious that her children, some of whom must have been quite young, were provided for *that they may not be burdensome to the said Towne of Burgavenny*. It is difficult to make out the family arrangements. Jane mentions two daughters separately: Martha and Agnes, so it might be that they had left home to work or had married. She had two sons: Job and Daniel; and four other daughters: Mary (the eldest child), Blanch, Susan and Grace. In addition, there was a daughter-in-law who was another Mary. The term daughter-in-law was used to denote a step daughter at that time so this Mary must have been the daughter of Jane's husband, John Upton, from a previous marriage.

The common law rights of 'femme coverte' meant that married women did not have the right to make a will without her husband's permission, but Jane does not state that she is writing her will with the permission of John Upton. In fact, she makes no mention of him at all and it is the burial record that says she is his wife. In Jane's inventory comes the item: *Her husbands wearing Apparrell 2 pair of Briches 3 coats, hat – 15s 00d*. It must be extremely rare for a woman to be recorded as the owner of her husband's clothing. The whereabouts of John Upton might have been unknown, but it seems that he was not expected to return soon.

Jane bequeathed most of her belongings and the rent of a house in Monk Street to Thomas Stubbs, gent, and William George for them to use for the upkeep of her children. She bequeathed the rent of the house the family were living in to Mary until Job and Daniel came of age, if Mary lives that long, which suggests that Mary is unwell. There must have been another family or person sharing their house and paying rent.

The lease of a property in Dingestow is bequeathed to Martha and another lease in Abergavenny to Agnes. Mary, Susan and Blanch are each to receive a cow each and Grace is to have the pig. If Mary dies then the rent of the family home is to go to Blanch, Susan and Grace and her cow to Jane's step-daughter Mary. Jane bequeaths all her *household stuff* equally to Martha and Agnes. Her *wearinge Apparell* goes to Blanch, Susan, Martha and Agnes. Jane is owed £4 3s 0d by William Evans and this she asks to be put towards paying her debts which, along with her funeral expenses, amount to £10 10s 0d.

So it would appear that while Jane Upton was a comparatively well-off woman as the owner of the leases of two properties and the rental from two others, with a large family and no man bringing in an income her fear that her children could become a burden on the parish was very real. It seems likely that Jane needed to increase her income by selling her milk butter and cheeses, probably at the market, or to the townspeople who would arrive with their jugs and bowls.

It would be good to know what happened to this family after Jane's death but no records remain that are conclusively theirs. Also, no clues have so far appeared as to where the absent John Upton was. His occupation is not given so there is a possibility that he did work that took him from home for long periods (maybe as a drover) or that he was in prison. Jane was right to make alternative arrangements in case of her daughter Mary's death, as her funeral takes place just two days after Jane's, Mary having been baptised in preparation for her death as recently as 25th March.

Maud Thomas – *who had a nuncupative will*

Maud Thomas owned a carpet! This would have put her in fairly select company in Abergavenny then. Carpets were status symbols which would have been laid on a table or chest for visitors to admire. She also bequeathed her '*best apron*' which would not have been like the workaday kitchen apron which housewives and servants

owned, but would have been a more elaborate garment decorated with embroidery or beadwork.

The burial records show that Maud Thomas was buried on 11th December 1667 and her marital status is not indicated so it must be assumed that she was a spinster. She did not make a formal will but 'on or about' the 29th November a memorandum was taken saying that she was '*sicke in body but of pfect mynde and memory made and declard this her last will and testament Nuncupative*' in the presence of Richard William David, William Lewis John Watkin, Henry Watkin John Daug Esq and Elizabeth Jones. This meant that Maud did not sign the will or make her mark. A will nuncupative was a system allowing a dying person to express their wishes even if time was limited or they were not capable of making a will despite being 'of sound mind'. The lack of formality did not appear to cause problems with probate being granted and Maude's will was granted probate on 12th March 1667/8.

Looking at Maud's will, you can see that the memorandum was re-written in more legible handwriting at a later date. You get the impression from the first memorandum that she poured out the names of the 15 or 16 beneficiaries (one name appears twice) and the money or belongings they were to receive in a great rush. Amounts of money bequeathed ranged between £4 that went to Thomas Jones, an infant, to the three shillings that went to Nathaniel Lewis, Richard David and Elizabeth Lewis. Nine of the beneficiaries received goods in the form of clothing, bedding, items of furniture and kitchen implements. Darcy Watkin received Maud's best apron. Elizabeth Jones is listed twice and as well as forty shillings and twenty shillings 'to bury Joan Jones' she received '*two platters one bowle and one feather bedd, one bowlster two blankettes one Chest one Canvas sheete one brass Crocke, one Table one Carpett one pillow and pillowcase, one redd peticoate, one rugg.*' In all, Maude gave monetary gifts totalling 15 pounds 9 shillings which was an unusually large amount of cash to have in hand. There is no mention of any money she was owed or which she owed to others. Neither is there any mention of how her funeral costs were to be paid. None of the beneficiaries belong to the Thomas family but Maud must have had a circle of friends and relations she cared about. Maud's will contains no clues as to where her income came from but as her belongings indicate a comfortable level of living, one possible scenario was that she was a spinster in a moderately well-off family and in receipt of an allowance. Joan Jones may have been an old friend who was unwell and unlikely to live for long after Maud. The gift of 20 shillings for Joan's funeral would have ensured that she was buried in a respectable manner. Maud would probably have wanted Joan to have at least as respectable funeral as her own must have been. Maud's gift of 40 shillings to Joan's daughter, as well as the range of goods including a carpet which would have been valuable, indicate a special importance of Joan and Elizabeth in Maud's life.

Margaret Skenkell - *a seller of wine or spirits*

Margaret Skenkell, widow, was buried 'in templo' (inside or near the church) at St. Mary's church on 7th February 1669/70. Her will is dated January 3rd 1669 and she made a mark that looks like MS. The assessors made the inventory of her belongings on 17th February. Margaret seems to have been comparatively wealthy. She owned lots of good quality bedding as well as a signet ring and another gold ring and a 'penne chest'. Margaret makes bequests only to her family, mainly to her son Thomas and daughter Anne Gough. There are two other sons, William and Edward who are left quantities of bedding. Thomas receives the contents of a shop in Butcher Row as well as malt and grain and household items and Anne receives, among other items, a

gold signet ring, Margaret's clothing and the rights to mortgaged properties (situated somewhere in Monmouthshire).

The contents of the shop consist of a quantity of glass and earthen bottles, a pewter pestle and mortar and some 'wooden trumperye'. It is unlikely that the family were living on the proceeds of selling bottles so the bottles were probably filled with some sort of liquor. If Thomas owned barrels found in the shop, they would not have appeared on Margaret's inventory. The liquor could have been wine, purchased from an importer in Bristol, or a home-made liquor. It could be that Thomas also owned a still and that the family made and sold gin. If we are to follow this line of thinking, the presence of the pestle and mortar suggests the grinding of spices or sugar, as both were added to wine and spirits in the seventeenth century, and were also used in making metheglin.

At that time people would have taken jugs or leather flagons to liquor shops to have them filled. But it was also becoming fashionable to lay down wine in glass bottles following the maturation process in the barrel, so the sale of bottles in the shop would have encouraged buying more liquor than was needed for immediate needs. Sir Kenelm Digby (*The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelm Digbie*) invented the process of making bottles from strong, green or brown glass in the 1630s which was far less fragile and more durable than earlier glass. Designed to hold wine, these bottles would have been the onion shape we associate with that period and which were sometimes laid down vertically with their necks through holes cut in shelves. Glass bottles were also used to store spirits and sometimes cider. The earthenware bottles were also onion-shaped and might be used for any of the same purposes as the glass ones, but were probably cheaper to buy. Corks were a fairly new import so wooden bungs covered in wax-soaked fabric were commonly used.

Catherine (or Katherine) Phillipps - an inn keeper

Catherine Phillipps was a widow who was buried on 21st December 1670. What makes her will different is that Catherine, before any other bequests, bequeathed several items of good quality clothing to women, who we imagine were her friends, that she specifies must be delivered to them immediately after her decease. So her best scarf, best gown and best petticoat go to three friends and the rest of her 'wearing apparell' was to go to another friend, also on the day of her death. Her other apparel was to be distributed according to the executor's discretion. The inventory is not dated so we cannot know whether the inventory of her goods includes the items sent immediately to friends or whether the £2 10 shillings value on her apparel is just for the remaining in the house after the day of her death.

Catherine comes across as an educated and relatively wealthy woman and her will is signed with a 'K'. She bequeaths a large quantity of good quality household goods, including a lot of bedding, table linen, a quantity of pewter, brass cooking equipment, a wainscot screen and wool and linen yarn. There are seven bedsteads and that number with the large quantity of bedding means that quite a lot of people could have slept under her roof. The house has a cellar with barrels "chissells" (these were possibly bungs) and eleven flagons.

Catherine's total goods are valued at £41 12s 5d with one pound in cash. This is the highest valued will of all the wills in this investigation and it can probably be assumed that Catherine Phillipps' income came from her role as an inn keeper.

Elizabeth Jones - a smallholder

Elizabeth Jones, widow, was buried on 24th February 1671/72 but her will had been written on 1st April 1671, which she signed with a mark based on an E. It is very

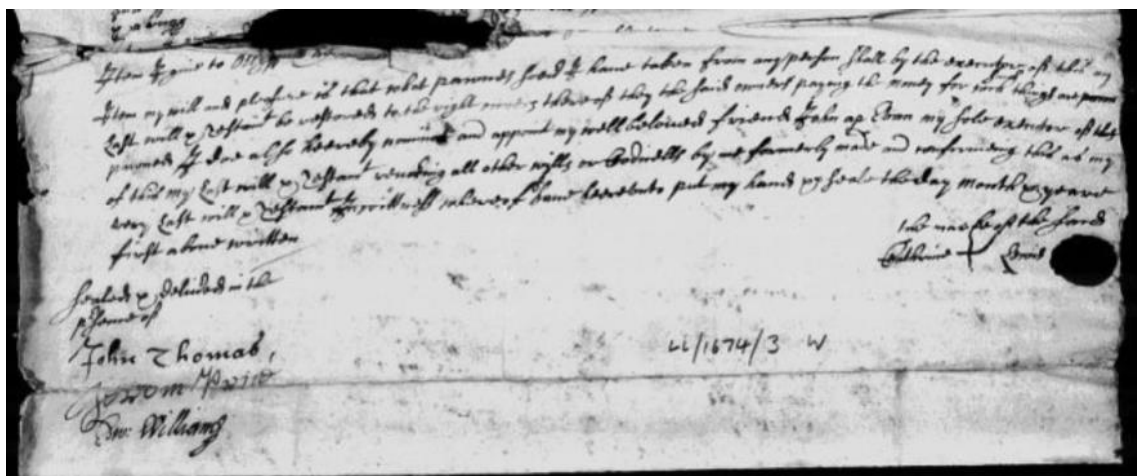
unusual for a will to be written so long before the death of the writer, so she must have recovered from her affliction of 1671.

She bequeaths sheep and cattle to two spinsters, Alice Jones (possibly her sister) and Mary Boddy. She must have rented land as she has corn, oats and peas, wheat, barley and hay listed as being outside the house. There are also pigs, horses and fowl included in the inventory. She owns a silver spoon worth three shillings and has five shillings in cash. Her kitchen has an iron grate and an iron and pewter warming pan and she has bedding for at least three people. All this indicates a reasonable standard of living which she appears to have maintained from her farming. Her debts are to “Mr Lewis Boddy Mr Christopher Price, Anchor Jones Wm Humphry and others” but we do not know what they amounted to. Apart from the bequests of sheep and cattle she asks that everything she owned should be sold to pay her debts and to cover the cost of her funeral.

Katherine Lewis – a pawnbroker

Katherine Lewis, the “relict of Thomas Thomas” was buried on 4th April 1674 and her will was made over a month earlier on 28th February. Sadly, the paper the will is written on is torn and damaged and the writing is even more difficult to read than most of the other wills studied so deciphering this is problematic in places. The inventory is in better condition but does not show anything of value and totals three pounds, four shillings and tenpence, which would indicate that the bequests listed had left the house before the inventory was made.

Katherine leaves a cupboard to Ann Thomas and Olyff Thomas, but there seems to be some confusion as, so far as it is possible to make out, this to become the property of Valentine Thomas on the payment of forty shillings a year after Katherine’s death. Jane Bevan, Elizabeth Jenkins and Ann Thomas are to receive some bedding and the wife of Walter Jones Katherine’s “best petycoat & wascoat & a greene Apron”. Probably the most significant part of the will is where Elizabeth says “my will and pleasure is that what pawnds soever I have taken from any person shall by the execution of this my Last will & Testament be restored to the right owners thereof they the said owners paying the mony for such things are pawnd”. Katherine Lewis was apparently earning money as a pawnbroker.



We cannot guess the value of the pawned goods she held but at 5% interest she is unlikely to have made a great deal of money from the neighbours and friends who probably made up her customers and it is likely that she was actually offering a much needed service that was preventing the need to ask the parish for poor relief.

Mary Hughes - *who had an independent income and was a distiller*

Mary Hughes, widow, was buried 1st November 1676 and had made her will the previous day. It is not signed. She comes across as a pious lady who has possibly fallen from better times and been living in increasing genteel poverty during this period of rising prices. In her will she gives 4d to Llandaff Cathedral and she bequeaths an annuity and rents to her son along with all her belongings which have the value of £3, fourteen shillings and sixpence with almost no individual item of any value. Whether it was possible for Mary's annuity to be transferred to her son is uncertain, but he would probably have been required to pay tax on this gift. Among Mary's belongings listed in the inventory are a still and a quantity of aniseed water. It appears that she could have been making an additional income from distilling and selling aniseed and other herb 'waters' which would have been used for medicinal purposes. The making of herbal waters and medicines would have been part of a gentlewoman's education, with young girls being taught by copying out recipes from their mothers' stillroom book.

Jane Parry – *a wealthy widow*

Jane Parry, widow, was buried on 19th October 1680 and made her will two days before her funeral in the presence of five witnesses. She appears to be the wealthiest of all our will-writers. Her belongings are very good quality - her clothes are made of wool, silk and "lousting" (lustring was an especially glossy sort of silk fabric). Her belongings include a bible and three prayer books – the only books to be mentioned in any of these wills. She also owns two looking glasses and a pin cushion. Her tables and beds are covered in damask and we feel that the beds must be filled with feathers even though this is not specified. There is also a warming pan displayed in the well-equipped kitchen.

She owns a small gold ring, two silver bowls, a little silver wine bowl and six silver spoons so her table must have shone in the candle light. All of this luxury adds up to £11 10s.

She owns £35 in bonds and bequeathed gifts of £10 each to her two nieces, Elinor and Elizabeth Amberfile and to her nephew Willam Amberfile. She also leaves £5 towards her funeral expenses. The will and inventory are brief and business-like and leave us with little additional information about Jane Parry, but it is pleasing to imagine her checking her hat and gown in front of a mirror, or sewing with her pin-cushion beside her.

Gwenllian Watkins – *a married woman who owned property*

Gwenllian Watkins was a woman of property, but despite this she only wrote her will with the permission of her husband Edmund Watkins, a yeoman. She was buried on 18th March 1681/82 and had made her will on 12th January. Her property included two messuages with gardens and outbuildings in Tudor Street which she bequeaths to her son William Edmund. She also gives him half the messuage in which she is living. Her daughter Elizabeth Robinson, a widow, receives the "*Tenemt: & gardeine wherein the sd Walter Jones dwelleth*".

Her son is also left "*two feather beds, one Ruge, or Coverlid, two paire of sheets, two feather boulsters, one long Table in the hall, one Bedsteede & one Cubboord in the Chamber over the Hall three pewter platters, one pewter Gun, one Pewter Tankerd, one brass Cettle, & one little brass pott four pewter porrengers, or dishes, & one wooden Chaire that's in the Hall*".

Her daughter is left “*one feather bed, & feather boulder one Rugges or Coverlid, one paire of course sheets, & one paire of Blanketts if shee happens to come for her selfe to the Country*”.

Gwenllian’s husband receives “*my new feather bed, & boulder one Pillow & Pillowbeare, one Chaffe bed, & boulder, two Ruggs, two paire of sheets, one iron pott, one brass new Kettle, three pewter platters, one pewter flaggon one pewter tankerd, & one brass Candlestick*”, all of which seem to indicate some concern for his comfort and welfare when she is gone. All the rest of her possessions were left to her daughter Elizabeth Robinson who was also left ten pounds in cash and was appointed executor. Reading her will, we feel that Gwenllian Watkins was a caring wife and mother.

Conclusions

By looking at these wills we get a glimpse into the lifestyles of these nine women. Because they are untypical of the generality of women of their time, in that they wrote wills, we cannot assume that their lifestyles are similar to those of most other women of their time. But it is tempting to believe that they are typical of the sort of spirited and enterprising women who can be found in examples throughout history.

What is most striking about the information shown in these wills is the diversity of ways in which their incomes are made. While five of the nine owned property and received an income from rental, some of these five needed to top up their income from other sources. A sixth appears to have had a private income. Only Catherine Phillipps the innkeeper, Elizabeth Jones the smallholder and Katherine Lewis the pawnbroker had no income from property or some other implied source, but made their livings wholly from their own work.

It is easy to feel admiration for these resourceful women who, until they succumbed to their final illnesses, seem to have been living productive and rewarding lives in difficult times.

Sue Smith

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Gobannos – The Return of the Celtic Smith God

Abergavenny is built over the site of a Roman fort called *Gobannium* – a Latinised version of an original Celtic place-name **Gobannion*.¹ The root of the name is the ancient Celtic word **gobann-* or **gobenn-* (“smith”).² When the famous linguist Kenneth Jackson first analysed the name in 1970, his primary interpretation of the meaning was “the place of **Gobannos*”.³ At the time, **Gobannos* was an entirely hypothetical word-form and there was no independent evidence for any ancient person or deity by that name. However, since 1970, a great deal of new evidence has come to light for a powerful Celtic smith-god called *Gobannos* and it is now certain that the meaning of *Gobannium* is “the place of the god Gobannos”.



The earliest evidence for the cult of Gobannos is an inscription on a zinc tablet found in 1984 near the Iron Age oppidum (fortified centre) at Bern, Switzerland, dating to the 1st century BCE.⁴ The inscription on the tablet is in Gaulish written in a mixture of Greek and Roman lettering and reads:

ΔΟΒΝΟΡΗΔΟ
ΓΟΒΑΝΟ
ΒΡΕΝΟΔΩΡ
ΝΑΝΤΑΡΩΡ

Dobnoredō
Gobano
Brenodor
Nantaror

“To Gobannos, the world-traveller (or “world-charioteer”), dedicated by the people of Brennoduron in the Arura Valley.”

The tablet demonstrates the antiquity of the divinity. Gobannos also appears in Gallo-Roman inscriptions from Fontenay-près-Vézelay,⁵ and Aquitania Novempopulania in south-west France.⁶ There is also a very fragmentary dedication from Canterbury which reads “GOBAN . . . OGVLP . . . ANTIS . . . VS” but has so far defied full interpretation.⁷

During the Second World War, a hoard of objects dedicated to *Mars-Cobannus* was discovered between Annecy and Annemasse in eastern France.⁸ The hoard consisted of three bronze statuettes of the god dating to the period 125-175 CE, a bronze deer of the early 1st century CE and a bronze bucket or situla of c. 100 CE. Also present were two portrait busts of youthful males dating c. 60-70 CE and an *arca* or offering box of c. 130-180 CE in the form of a six-sided building.⁹ The objects are now on display

at the J. Paul Getty Museum¹⁰ and the Shelby White-Leon Levy Collection in the USA.

It is now clear that the latinized *Cobannus* and *Gobannus* are one and the same and the hoard suggests the presence of a sanctuary of Gobannos among the Aedui tribe of central and eastern Gaul from the 1st to 3rd century CE.¹¹ Gobannos was a genuinely pan-Celtic deity venerated in Switzerland, Britain and across large parts of south-west and central Gaul.

There is widespread evidence for the veneration of a native Celtic smith god in Roman Britain.¹² He usually appears – especially on pottery - in the guise of the Classical deity Vulcan. He is elderly and bearded, wearing a tunic covering only the left shoulder and a leather apron and carries the tools of his trade – a hammer and long-handled tongs. In eastern Gaul, he often appears with a stag, symbolising the annual cycle of life. Gobannos is a complex chthonic deity very closely associated with the Underworld the dead and rebirth.¹³

This chimes well with his appearances in later Irish and Welsh tradition as Goibniu and Gofannon. Goibniu fashions magic weapons for the gods of the Tuatha Dé Danaan.¹⁴ In the tale of the *Second Battle of Magh Tuired*, he promises that “no spearpoint which my hand shall forge shall make a missing cast. No one which it pierces shall taste life afterwards”.¹⁵ When the battle begins, the Formorians, the enemies of the Tuatha Dé, send Ruadán, son of Brígh (Brigit) to kill Goibniu, who is his uncle. He wounds the smith-god in the leg with a spear but is slain in revenge.¹⁶

Goibniu also presides over the Otherworld Feast of Immortality known as *fled Goibnenn* – the Feast of Goibniu.¹⁷ When the Tuatha Dé Danaan retreat into the hills and fairy regions, Manannán mac Lir institutes the feast and gives his pigs, who can be killed each night for the feast but appear alive again the next day.¹⁸ Goibniu serves the Tuatha a strong drink that preserves them from age and death. This element of fertility and hospitality in Goibniu’s character is also reflected in tales of his ownership of a miraculous cow *Glas Ghoibhneann* (“The Grey of Goibniu”) that provides a never-ending supply of milk.¹⁹

In the Welsh tradition, Gofannon is one of the divine Children of Dôn. In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, one of the tasks set for the hero by the giant, Ysbaddaden, is to clear and plough land to provide food for the wedding feast. The giant demands that Gofannon must come “to the edge of the land to set the plough. He will not undertake the work willingly save for a rightful king, nor can you force him.”²⁰ In the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Gofannon slays his nephew, Dylan Eil Ton, the son of Arianrhod and “that was one of the Three Unfortunate Blows”.²¹ This is probably similar to the story of the death of Ruadán at the hands of Goibniu.

Amazingly, we can see how archaeological research since the 1970s has resurrected Gobannos - the lost smith-god of the Celts. In Abergavenny, it has also returned a forgotten local god to his rightful place!

Frank Olding

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Sir Zachariah Wheatley The War Mayor of Abergavenny (1914-1919)



Sir Zachariah Wheatley
Signed John Wheatley 1919
(Monlife Heritage)

Sir Zachariah Wheatley, aptly dubbed ‘The War Mayor’, was the sixteenth and longest serving Mayor of Abergavenny having held that office from 1914 to 1919.³⁴ He was also a successful businessman with a passion for sport. In 1919 he was awarded a bardic title, followed by a Knighthood in 1920, both for services to the public.

Family Background

Zachariah Wheatley, born on 28 March 1865³⁵ in Coventry, Warwickshire, was one of six children. His parents were Zachariah, a ribbon weaver, and Mary Ann Wheatley, a silk winder. He had two older sisters, Frances (b. 1854) and Elizabeth (b. 1857), two older brothers John (b. 1859) and William (b. 1861) and one younger brother David (b. 1870). The family lived at 17 Yardley Street, Coventry³⁶ but had moved to Gilbert Street by the time of his baptism at St Peter, Coventry³⁷, later attending the church school there³⁸. At the age of 17, Zachariah was employed as a bricklayer, living at 45 St John Street, Coventry, with his older brother John (an elastic web weaver), his older sister Elizabeth, (a housekeeper) and his brother William (a watchmaker).³⁹ The Gloucester Citizen Newspaper⁴⁰ reported a surprising event in 1884 when Zachariah was found by the cemetery superintendent after hearing groans. The crown of his hat had been torn off and pieces of his clothing scattered around. He had been struck by lightning while closing a grave, and he was taken to hospital in a

³⁴ ‘Abergavenny’s War Mayor’ *Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser* 12 November 1915 p. 8. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4121506/4121514/115/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed: 6 February 2024.

³⁵1939 Register, Hove, Archive reference: RG/1012516D/027/14. Sch: 345. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 18 February 2024.

³⁶ Census Records England, Wales & Scotland. Coventry (RD). 2 April 1871. WHEATLEY Zachariah (Head) RG10/3180. Sch 31. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 8 January 2024.

³⁷1865 Parish Records of St. Peter, Coventry, Warwickshire, No. 1986, p.249. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 8 January 2024.

³⁸ AC

³⁹ Census.

⁴⁰ Gloucester Citizen. *Violent Storm: A Boy Killed by Lightning*. 9 July 1884, p. 3. Available at: <https://findmy past.co.uk>. Accessed: 8 January 2024.

critical condition. No other details have been found as to what he was doing at that time.

Fortunately, Zachariah survived because he married Martha Lavers on 20 October 1890 in Bridgend.⁴¹ Martha was born on 26 March 1870⁴² in Maesteg, Bridgend, Glamorganshire to her parents John Lavers (b. 1833), a coalminer from Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, and Mary J. Lavers (b. 1832), a dressmaker from Neath Glamorgan.⁴³ After their marriage, Zachariah and Martha lived at 26 High Street, Bridgend, Glamorganshire. Martha has no occupation recorded, but Zachariah was a watchmaker and jeweller in 1891⁴⁴ (watchmaking and the silk industry dominated Coventry - from where he had moved- at that time⁴⁵.) Zachariah had served in the Knighton Company 1st Herefordshire Volunteers after transferring from the 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Volunteers.⁴⁶

The couple moved to Abergavenny and lived in the flat above a fishmonger's shop at 15 High Street,⁴⁷ where their two children were born, namely John Lavers, born on the 23 January 1892⁴⁸ and Frances Ellen, born on the 18 September 1895.⁴⁹ Also living at the address were Cassie Lewis, an adopted daughter, Cecilia Vaughan, a visitor from Maesteg, Glamorgan and Eliza Cowley (b. 1887) from Blaenavon.⁵⁰ Zachariah probably opened his jewellery and opticians business next door at 13 High Street then⁵¹. The initials M.O.S appear on the shop front of the advertisement and they stand for the Manchester Optical Society, established in 1898. This society, together with the London Optical Society, offered tuition, examinations, and certification in Manchester between 1898 and 1900⁵². As well as qualifications, the opticians had also established their own journal⁵³, to assert their competence in the face of the attempt by medical practitioners to control and exclude opticians. This building was occupied by Bidmead Cook & Waldron Estate Agents from approximately 2013 to July 2023⁵⁴. At present this property is occupied by Squeezing (organic juice bar), as seen below.

⁴¹ Superintendent Registrar, Registration Service Manager, Bridgend County Borough Council. Available at: registrar@bridgend.gov.uk. Accessed: 15 March 2024.

⁴²1939 Register, Hove, Archive reference: RG/101/2516D/027/14. Sch. 345. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed 18 February 2024.

⁴³ Census

⁴⁴ Census.

⁴⁵ Stephens, W. B. (ed.) (1969) *The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries, modern industry and trade, Watchmaking in A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 8, the City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick*. London: Victoria County History, pp:162 – 189. British History Online. Available at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warksvol8/pp162-189#h3-0008>. Accessed: 25 January 2024.

⁴⁶ AC

⁴⁷Abergavenny Local History Society Street Survey. Available at: www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk/15high-street. Accessed: 12 February 2024.

⁴⁸National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870 – 1914. Pontypool. WHEATLEY, J. 1904. Archive reference: CERC37/B1, p. 17. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 10 January 2024.

⁴⁹ England & Wales Births 1837 – 2006. Abergavenny. WHEATLEY Frances Ellen 1895. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 10 January 2024.

⁵⁰ Census.

⁵¹ ALHS/SS

⁵² Almond, G. "Vision Testing in Late Nineteenth – and Early Twentieth-Century Britain: Opticians, Medical Practitioners and the Battle for Professional Authority" *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 35, Issue 1, February 2022, p. 252. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/shm/article35/1/2376444260>. Accessed: 23 February 2024.

⁵³ Ibid p 243.


⁵⁴ ALHS/SS



15 High Street, Abergavenny, 2025

By 1911 the family were living at 13 High Street, Abergavenny, possibly moving there in 1904.⁵⁵ The occupants included Zachariah, a watch dealer, shopkeeper and silversmith, Martha an assistant in the business, his nephew William Lee (b. 1893), employed as a watchmaker dealer, assistant shopkeeper, and silversmith. Frances, aged 15, was attending school and Winifred Jenkins, aged 18 (from Pandy, Monmouthshire) was a domestic servant.⁵⁶ Perhaps a thriving and prosperous business enabled the family to move to this larger accommodation above the shop. Advertisement for Zachariah Wheatley's Shop at 13 High Street, Abergavenny in 1903.

Z. Wheatley, m.o.s., 13, High Street, Abergavenny.

N.B.—13, High Street is marked by a cross  on the Street Map opposite.

**Practical
Watch-
maker,
Silver-
smith
and
Optician.**

Sole Agent for
*W. H. Goss's
Ivory Porcelain
with all Local
Coats of Arms,
etc.*

Telegrams:
WHEATLEY,
ABERGA-
VENNY.



Z. W. keeps
one of
the finest
selected
Stocks of
Watches,
Clocks and
Jewellery
in the
county,
at all prices
to suit all
classes.

Sole Agent
for
*Henry
Lawrance's
Spectacles.*

Z. W. Designed and supplied the Borough Mace and Loving Cup, Herbert Smoker's Companion, Pennefather Plate, Licensed Victuallers' Challenge Cup, etc., etc., etc.

13 High Street Abergavenny 1903

The Official Handbook to Abergavenny, Crickhowell, Raglan and Usk, Burrow's 'Royal' Series of Illustrated Handbooks and Official Guides 1903.

⁵⁵ALHS/SS

⁵⁶ Census.

Since 2016 these premises have been occupied by Santander Bank,⁵⁷ as shown below:



Shop front of Santander Bank, 13 High Street Abergavenny, 2024

Zachariah's son John was a successful artist, an Associate of the Royal Academy⁵⁸ with many prestigious academic appointments in South Africa, Sheffield and London, dying in November 1955⁵⁹. His sister Frances married Ralph Hawksworth, a dentist, at St Mary's Church, Abergavenny⁶⁰ in October 1920, but the couple lived in Nelson, Lancashire.

Zachariah's Political Life

Zachariah Wheatley was active in politics from 1899 to 1922, six of which were served as mayor of Abergavenny during World War 1 and one the following year. His political views may have been influenced by his father who had been active amongst the silk workers.

From 1765 to 1857 the silk industry dominated Coventry. During the nineteenth century, competition and the Free Trade Act 1860 brought about unrest in the industry. A small section of factory manufacturers (known as the 'undertakers' or 'go-betweens') undercut the home-workers who were paid through an agreed price list.⁶¹ Under the Free Trade Act 1860, duty free imports entered the country, including cheaper silk from France, resulting in a fall in demand for English made silk,⁶² causing plummeting wages and unemployment within the industry.⁶³ This resulted in strikes and the formation of trade unions and associations, such as the Coventry Silk Manufacturers Association established in 1858.⁶⁴ In 1860, during these

⁵⁷ ALHS/SS

⁵⁸ <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/name/john-wheatley-ara> accessed 2 April 2024.

⁵⁹ Art UK. Available at: <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/wheatley-john-18921955>. Accessed: 13 December 2023.

⁶⁰ 'Lack of Foresight' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 18 October 1920 p. 2. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed 7 January 2024.

⁶¹ Stephens W. B. (ed.) 'The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries, Modern industry and trade, Ribbon Weaving' in *A History of the County of Warwickshire: Vol 8, the City of Coventry and the Borough of Warwick*. London, 1969, pp. 162 – 189. London: Victoria County History. (British History Online. Available at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol8/pp162-189#h3-0007>. Accessed: 25 January 2024.

⁶² Silk – Coggeshall Museum Available at: <https://coggeshallmuseum.org/silk/>. Accessed: 23 January 2024.

⁶³ Stephens, W. B. (ed.) (1969) 'The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries, Modern industry and trade, Ribbon Weaving' in *A History of the County of Warwickshire: Vol 8, the City of Coventry and the Borough of Warwick*. London: Victoria County History pp. 162 – 189. British History Online. Available at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol8/pp162-189#h3-0007>. Accessed: 25 January 2024.

⁶⁴ Stephens, W. B. (ed.) (1969) 'The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700, Early to the mid-19th century in *A History of the County of Warwickshire: Volume 8, the City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick*. London, pp. 222 – 241. London: Victoria

turbulent times, Zachariah's father presided over a large meeting of silk weavers, who 'strongly condemned the factory system'⁶⁵ and, at another large meeting, he recounted his visit to London to raise funds.⁶⁶ In March 1871, Zachariah's father, secretary of the Coventry weavers, received a gift of a 'silver watch guard, with a locket and cross attached' from the Congleton weavers in recognition of his support during their strike.⁶⁷

Zachariah Wheatley Junior's political career began in 1893, when aged 28, he stood for election as an Improvement Commissioner for Abergavenny but failed to gain enough votes.⁶⁸ An undeterred Zachariah tried again when the newly created Abergavenny Town Council came into being on 1 November 1899.⁶⁹ He was nominated as a Liberal candidate⁷⁰ for the position of Councillor for Castle Ward⁷¹ and was duly elected, for he attended the funeral of General Gillespie as a Councillor.⁷² He remained the unopposed Councillor for Castle Ward throughout his political career. In November 1903, as required in Abergavenny, he was elected first as a Councillor and then as an Alderman and by 1914, he was a Senior Alderman.⁷³ Aldermen were created in the nineteenth century reformation of English local government. Under this legislation Councillors (elected by the voters) and Aldermen (elected by the Councillors) formed the members of the borough, municipal and county councils. Aldermen undertook legislative, administrative and some judicial functions. Judged to be undemocratic, the position was abolished in the 1972 Local Government Act.⁷⁴ Interestingly, for the years 1908, and between 1911 and 1913, research found no political information about Zachariah in the newspapers. However, from 1914 there is ample written about him when he was unexpectedly catapulted into the post of Acting Deputy Mayor and then Mayor of Abergavenny.

Alderman Wheatley's Mayoralty

Having previously declined the office of Mayor, the outbreak of WWI on 4 August 1914 changed everything for Alderman Wheatley. When the current Mayor, Lieutenant - Colonel J. H. Gilbert Harris and his Deputy Mayor, Major J. G. Bishop, were called up for war service, Alderman Wheatley accepted the Mayor's request to take on the position of Acting Deputy Mayor, declaring he was 'ready and willing at the call of duty to give of his best for the service of the town and of the King and Country'. On his appointment he immediately opened a Relief Fund. In an unprecedented move he was entrusted with the King's and Regimental Colours and the 3rd Monmouthshire Regiment's silver bugle. After only three months as Deputy Mayor on 21 October 1914, in a unique move for Abergavenny, Alderman Wheatley was sworn in as a permanent Chief Magistrate (Justice of the Peace) for the County

County History British History Online. Available at: https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol8/pp_222_-_241. Accessed: 25 January 2024.

⁶⁵ 'Silk Weavers' Strike' (1860) *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette Coventry* 21 July 1860 p. 8. Available at: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 23 January 2024.

⁶⁶ 'Monday' *Coventry Standard* 10 August 1860 p.2. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 23 January 2024.

⁶⁷ 'Mark of Respect' *Coventry Standard* 26 May 1871 p4. Available at: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 23 January 2024.

⁶⁸ 'Abergavenny Election of Improvement Commissioners' *South Wales Daily News* 15 September 1893 p 6. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3729780/3729786/148/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed: 10 January 2024.

⁶⁹ Abergavenny Town Council. Available at: <https://abergavennytowncouncil.gov.uk/about-us>. Accessed: 10 January 2024.

⁷⁰ AC

⁷¹ 'Municipal Elections Abergavenny' *South Wales Daily News* 21 October 1899 p.7. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3744104/3744111/107/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed 22 December 2023.

⁷² 'Funeral of General Gillespie' *South Wales Daily News* 28 December 1899 p. 3. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3744617/3744620/14/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed: 10 January 2024.

⁷³ AC

⁷⁴ 'Alderman'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/alderman>. Accessed: 10 December 2023.

and at the same time, accepted the Mayoral office. Finding a new Mayor in 1915 proved again to be difficult for the Abergavenny Town Council, so Alderman Wheatley agreed to continue in the role and was re-elected and installed as Mayor on 9 November 1915.

Unusually, with the continuance of the War, Alderman Wheatley was re-elected and installed as Mayor for a *third* term on Thursday 9 November 1916. This year was tinged with sadness, for his nephew Private William Lee, serving in the Machine Gun Section, Royal Welch Fusiliers, was killed in action. William, regarded as an adopted son, had lived with the family, worked in the jewellery business, and was earmarked to take over the business. He was buried in the 'Allies' ground on foreign soil'. Apart from William, another of Zachariah's nephews had been wounded in Gallipoli and two others were serving in France. As the War dragged on into 1917, the Mayoral election arose again. Once more, a reluctant Alderman Wheatley accepted, resulting in his re-election and installation as Mayor for a fourth term on 9 November 1917. On 14 October 1918, Alderman Wheatley, the 'energetic and sympathetic' man, as described in the press, accepted the Mayoralty for his fifth consecutive year, declaring that he felt he should see this through to the end, just like those men he had recruited. He was soon to be a Peacetime Mayor when hostilities ended on 11 November 1918. On this momentous day, Zachariah Wheatley received the official telegram at around 10.50am. The Town Council had already decided to run down the town clock so that it continually chimed, alerting the people to something important. As the crowds gathered, Zachariah read out the telegram and instructed the town's businesses to close for the afternoon. There was cheering, applause and singing of the National Anthem, in restrained remembrance of those who would not be returning home. The bells at St Mary's Church also rang out, despite the Chief Constable informing Zachariah that official permission from the military authorities was needed beforehand. A misunderstanding had arisen between the two gentlemen, resulting in Zachariah being threatened with prosecution for prematurely ringing the church bells. Happily, the issue was soon resolved. A packed Thanksgiving Service was held in St Mary's Church in the afternoon.⁷⁵

Zachariah then concerned himself with commemorating those who had made the ultimate sacrifice and arranging peace celebrations. Firstly, the Council proposed erecting a temporary shrine to the fallen, along with a permanent one to be constructed later. The temporary war shrine, made of wood and containing a printed list of almost 190 names of local men who had died in the War, was unveiled at a memorial service on Sunday 5 January 1919. Secondly, the Council decided to involve the townspeople in the decision-making process for the permanent memorial, particularly as they would be asked to contribute towards its construction.⁷⁶ The permanent memorial, to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the 3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment, was designed by Gilbert Ledward and is still sited in Frogmore Street. It portrays a soldier leaning on a Lee Enfield rifle, his uplifted head facing into the town. Thousands of people attended the unveiling by Major General Lord Treowen in October 1921. Every year Abergavenny's Remembrance Sunday ceremony takes place here.⁷⁷ Thirdly, Zachariah Wheatley instigated a Roll of Honour. Every home was canvassed to collect information about the men and

⁷⁵ AC

⁷⁶ AC

⁷⁷Wakley, G. *Monmouthshire Regiment Memorial Abergavenny* Available at: <https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=monmouthshire-regiment-memorial-abergavenny>. Accessed: 31 January 2024.

women who had served in His Majesty's Forces and the 'mercantile marine' (Merchant Navy) during the War.⁷⁸ Today the Abergavenny and District War Memorial, a white marble plaque financed through public subscription, is situated on the righthand wall in the entrance to the Market Hall. Many of the soldiers served in the 3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment.⁷⁹ Fourthly, a public meeting was to be arranged to discuss the form of the peace celebrations.⁸⁰

Nineteen-nineteen, the final year of Alderman Wheatley's Mayoralty, was taken up with events and celebrations, such as arranging tea and entertainment for approximately 1300 children of the relatives who had served or were still serving in the Army or Navy and visiting each of the various venues across the town and attending a large fancy dress dance for the St Dunstan's Blinded Soldiers' Childrens' Fund. The 28th of June 1919 proved to be a momentous day, for at 3.20pm Zachariah received a telephone call informing him of the signing of the Peace Treaty. This prompted a chain of events. After immediately hoisting the Union Jack over his shop premises, he ordered the Town Hall to do the same, he telephoned the Abergavenny and Crickhowell sub post offices and then went straight to St Mary's Church to personally ring the tenor bell. Alerted by the news, the townspeople, in celebration but also in remembrance, responded with a cacophony of noise and flag waving.⁸¹

August 1919 was an auspicious month for Zachariah, for he was awarded the prestigious bardic title of Maer Hedd Y Fenni (meaning Peace Mayor of Abergavenny) by the Archdruid of Wales at the National Eisteddfod Wales in Corwen, Denbighshire, for being 'a tireless and efficient servant of the public during the last four strenuous years'.⁸² A Knight Bachelor (KB) award followed on 25 June 1920⁸³ also for his services to the public. The Knight Bachelor peerage is the oldest of the knighthoods, dating back to Henry III in the thirteenth century. It was originally awarded to those who fought in battle, but today it is usually awarded for public service. Although it ranks below the chivalric orders, it is still conferred by the monarch.⁸⁴ With the War finally over, Alderman Wheatley could at last hand over his Mayoral responsibilities to another when, in November 1919, Lieutenant - Colonel Joseph G. Bishop OBE was elected and installed as Mayor.⁸⁵

War had featured prominently in Zachariah's early political life. Between October 1899 and May 1902, the Second South African War (referred to as the Boer War or Second Boer war) raged between Great Britain and the two Boer (Afrikaner) republics, namely the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State, with the British succeeding.⁸⁶ During this time, Councillor Wheatley was Chairman of the War Fund Committee which raised funds. He was instrumental in organising a commemorative memorial to those who served in South Africa. In 1905, a brass

⁷⁸ AC

⁷⁹Wakley, G. and Senior, M. *Abergavenny First World War Memorial*. Available at: <https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=abergavenny-war-memorial-fw>. Accessed: 30 January 2024.

⁸⁰ AC

⁸¹ AC

⁸² AC

⁸³ Britain, Knights Of The Realm & Commonwealth Index Great Britain. Zachariah Wheatley in 1920. Available at: <https://www.findmypast.com>. Accessed: 16 March 2024.

⁸⁴'Knight Bachelor'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.co./topic/knight-bachelor>. Accessed: 13 February 2024.

⁸⁵ AC

⁸⁶'South African War'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War>. Accessed 8 February 2024.

memorial was unveiled by Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, V.C. in St Mary's Church.⁸⁷ It is the third plaque displayed in the right aisle of the Church. Essentially, those experiences had helped him to guide the town through WWI.

He was a strong advocate for children and their education. In 1901 he was elected to the first School Board for Abergavenny⁸⁸ and was appointed as a manager of the Old British School.⁸⁹ In 1904, he was appointed assistant master at Hereford Road School⁹⁰ and was a manager of the Girls' County Intermediate School in 1914. As a prominent member of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Castle Street, he was Superintendent of the Sunday School for some years and a leading Chapel official and trustee. In 1902 he was appointed the Mayor's Auditor and subsequently re-elected to that role. He also sat on various committees such as the Markets and Park Committee, the Streets, Buildings and Improvements Committee and the Finance and General Purposes Committee.⁹¹

During WWI, he was the local Recruiting Officer and Chairman of the Recruiting Committee, Chairman of the Relief Committee and administrator of the National Relief Fund. During his six-year Mayoralty he actively recruited men from Abergavenny, brought troops to the town, attended various functions, such as tea parties and dances to raise war funds, supporting and providing gifts and toys for Abergavenny's dependents and welcoming Belgian refugees to the town⁹². For this, he was awarded the Gold Palms of the Order of the Crown of Belgium. His last wartime duty was to welcome home the prisoners of war. Alongside these responsibilities he conducted town and council business, oversaw his own jewellery business, as well as being a family man. As he saw the town through the arduous war years, he was praised in the press for his 'consistent energy, thoroughness and attention to detail', as well as being 'always accessible to the townspeople', and at 'the beck and call of the town'. Often his shop was overcrowded with the relatives of soldiers seeking help and advice.⁹³ Throughout these difficult times he was supported by his wife Martha, the Mayoress, as she undertook some of his business commitments as well as her own Mayoral duties.⁹⁴

Zachariah the businessman and jeweller

Exactly when he entered the jewellery trade is unknown, but in 1891 he was working as a watchmaker and jeweller. On moving to Abergavenny, Zachariah established his jewellery business at 13 High Street. All jewellers are required to register their Maker's Mark. Since 1363, to prevent forgery, Maker's Marks (originally in the form of a pictogram) were required. These were replaced with the maker's initials in the

⁸⁷ 'Lord Roberts' Visit to Abergavenny' *County Observer and Monmouthshire Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus* 2 September 1905 p. 5. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4238268/4238273/69/ZachariaWheatley>. Accessed: 22 December 2023.

⁸⁸ 'Abergavenny School Board Election' *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus* 16 November 1901 p. 5. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4236486/4236491/55/ZachariaWheatley>. Accessed: 8 February 2024.

⁸⁹ AC

⁹⁰ 'Abergavenny School Board' *County Observer and Monmouthshire Advertiser and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus* 12 March 1904 p. 5 Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4237575/4237580/61/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed: 4 March 2024.

⁹¹ AC

⁹² AC

⁹³ AC

⁹⁴ AC

seventeenth century.⁹⁵ On the 22 August 1895, Zachariah registered his Maker's Mark, a lozenge enclosing his initials 'Z. W.', with the Sheffield Assay Office.⁹⁶ He designed and supplied many pieces of silverware, most notably the Borough mace and a loving cup, as Zachariah publicised on a letterhead dated 9 May 1901⁹⁷ and the shop front advertisement (see page 48). Although the exact date of manufacture is unknown, the mace was presented to the Council on 9 November 1900. The mace, 'of most chaste design and workmanship', is constructed of sterling silver and gilt with intricate decorations. The lower part of the stem is decorated with the embossed emblems of the four nations, the enamelled words "Mace of the Borough of Abergavenny", various enamelled shields, of which one displays the inscription "This mace was presented to the Corporation by the above subscribers (engraved on the mace), November 9th, 1900". The centre of the stem carries the inscription "First Council elected November 1899". The Royal arms and monogram surrounded by the Garter decorate the top of the stem, whilst a full-sized arms of Wales, including dragons and plumes, a portcullis, fleur-de-lis, a Welsh leek and a coronet, supports the head of the mace. The head consists of a large crown, featuring two figures and ornate decorations, including the borough arms (the fleur-de-lis). A central flat surface displays an enamelled copy of the borough seal surrounded by the names of the Abergavenny Mayor, Aldermen and burgesses.⁹⁸

The burnished silver loving cup, its whereabouts unknown today, was fashioned from an old Irish design, and stood on an ebony pedestal. A central portcullis adorned a gold chain. Additionally, twelve ruby red and white Nevill roses were attached by chains to shields displaying the enamelled letter "A". An oval badge bore the Nevill motto "Ne vile velir", of which the raised enamelled centre contained the Borough Arms. He designed and produced medals for the Abergavenny Eisteddfod⁹⁹ and the officers of the 3rd Mons commissioned him to design and create a solid silver statuette to commemorate the men who had died at Ypres in May 1915. The names of the 11 Officers and 335 non-commissioned officers and men were engraved on the pedestal, along with one empty space for a missing officer.¹⁰⁰

Cycling and athletics

On arriving in Abergavenny, Zachariah formed and directed the first Cycling corps in Wales, a position he relinquished due to an accident.¹⁰¹ In April 1894 he was appointed as a judge for the National Cyclists' Union (N.C.U.).¹⁰² In 1897, he founded and was the secretary of the Amateur Abergavenny Athletics Association, known as

⁹⁵ Online Encyclopedia of Silver Marks, Hallmarks and Maker's Marks *British Hallmarks Guide Number 5 Maker's Marks*. Available at: https://www.925-1000.com/british_marks.html. Accessed: 12 January 2024.

⁹⁶ Online Encyclopedia of Silver Marks, Hallmarks and Maker's Marks *Firms Working in Wales in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Zachariah Wheatley pp. 4 - 5. Available at: <https://www.925-1000.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=38520&start=80>. Accessed: 12 January 2024.

⁹⁷ Monlife Treftadaeth Heritage. Abergavenny Museum. Available at: [https://www.monlifecollections.co.uk/collections/search/?s=wheatley&q\[keyword_reference_type\]=0&q\[partner\]=&q\[title\]=&q\[person\]=&q\[place\]=&q\[subject\]=&q\[format\]=&q\[identifier\]=&q\[date_from\]=&q\[date_to\]=&cba v=2&cbadvsear chquery=Accessed 24 January 2024](https://www.monlifecollections.co.uk/collections/search/?s=wheatley&q[keyword_reference_type]=0&q[partner]=&q[title]=&q[person]=&q[place]=&q[subject]=&q[format]=&q[identifier]=&q[date_from]=&q[date_to]=&cba v=2&cbadvsear chquery=Accessed 24 January 2024).

⁹⁸ AC

⁹⁹ 'Abergavenny Eisteddfod' *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus* 15 April 1902, p. 8. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4236666/4236674/96/ZachariaWheatley>. Accessed: 23 December 2023.

¹⁰⁰ AC

¹⁰¹ AC

¹⁰² 'National Cyclists' Union' *South Wales Daily News* 26 April 1894 p. 5. Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3731481/3731486/107/zachariah-wheatley>. Accessed: 21 December 2023.

the Four A's.¹⁰³ By 1899, he was joint official timekeeper for the N.C.U.¹⁰⁴ and by 1904 he was an official judge, timekeeper and secretary for the N.C.U.¹⁰⁵, as well as joint secretary and treasurer of the Abergavenny Cycling Club.¹⁰⁶

However, the year 1908 featured highly in Zachariah's diary, as the Mayor at that time, Mr Samuel Deveraux, announced that Alderman Wheatley had 'received the honour of being asked to officiate at the forthcoming Olympic Games (held in London), the only Monmouthshire man to be asked'.¹⁰⁷ Sadly, these Games were tainted by dishonourable conduct, which resulted in standardising the track and field rules for future Olympics and the appointment of judges from different countries. Despite these scandals, Zachariah was reported as having conducted himself with 'professional decorum and sporting dignity'.¹⁰⁸

The year 1910 was another significant year for Zachariah, for apart from being appointed official timekeeper for the N.C.U. for South Wales, with a pending re-appointment as an official timekeeper for Wales,¹⁰⁹ he was appointed official timekeeper for the Royal Automobile Club and the Royal Aero Club, established in 1901 for balloonists and eventually included 'all private and sporting flying'.¹¹⁰ He held this position for 'cycling, motoring and aerostation'.¹¹¹ In a totally different sport, Zachariah was elected vice-president of the Pigeon Flying Club for the year.¹¹² However, his active life was soon to become quieter.

The Retirement years.

In 1922, citing 'Martha's poor health' and 'other personal reasons', Sir Zachariah retired as an Alderman and businessman¹¹³ and moved to Ty-Hedd, 49 Westbourne-villas, Hove, Sussex.¹¹⁴ His interest in sport, exercise and healthy living remained important to him though. For instance, writing for National Cycling Week in the Nottingham Journal, one hundred years ago, he believed that the bicycle was 'the greatest invention of all time' which enabled people to enjoy the 'beauties of Nature' and foster the 'wonderful camaraderie between wheelmen'.¹¹⁵ Similarly, he expounded the 'physical and mental' benefits of exercising to music.¹¹⁶ He also captained the Hove Bowling Club.¹¹⁷ However, with the outbreak of WWII and Brighton becoming a 'blitz target',¹¹⁸ in May 1940 Zachariah and Martha moved to

¹⁰³ AC

¹⁰⁴ 'National Cyclists' Union, South Wales Centre' *South Wales Daily News* 17 March 1899 p.6. Available at:

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3742430/3742436/127/ZachariaWheatley> Accessed: 21 December 2023.

¹⁰⁵ 'Athletic Gathering' County Observer and Central *Monmouthshire Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus* 28 May 1904 p.5 Available at:

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4237674/4237679/65/Zachariah-Wheatley>. Accessed: 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁶ 'Abergavenny. Cycling Club' *South Wales Daily News* 18 March 1899 p. 6. Available at:

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3742529/3742535/141/Zacharia-Wheatley>. Accessed: 20 December 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Butters, T. (2018) *A - Z of Abergavenny Places - People - History*. Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, page 94.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* page 96.

¹⁰⁹ AC

¹¹⁰ The Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom. *History and Origins*. Available at: https://royalaeroclub.uk/?page_id=96. Accessed: 16 February 2024.

¹¹¹ AC

¹¹² AC.

¹¹³ 'Sir Zachariah Wheatley Approaching Retirement from Public Life' *Western Mail* 22 March 1922 p. 5. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed 18 January 2024.

¹¹⁴ 'A "Rotten Row" for Plymouth' *Western Evening Herald* 20 December 1924 p. 4. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 18 February 2024.

¹¹⁵ 'See your Own Country' *Nottingham Journal* 30 May 1923 p. 3. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed 18 February 2024.

¹¹⁶ 'A "Rotten Row" for Plymouth' *Western Evening Herald* 20 December 1924 p. 4. Available at <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 18 February 2024.

¹¹⁷ AC

¹¹⁸ AC

Ty-Hedd, Grange Avenue, Barrowford, Lancashire, just a ten - minute walk¹¹⁹ from their daughter Frances and her family living at Maindiff, Ribblesdale Place, Barrowford, Lancashire.¹²⁰ Sir Zachariah (aged 75) and Lady Wheatley (aged 70) celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1940¹²¹ and remained together until Martha's death on 27 January 1948.¹²² Although apparently healthy, she collapsed and died suddenly at their home. Her wish was to be buried in Abergavenny, amongst the people and place she loved. She was conveyed to the Methodist Chapel in Castle Street by road¹²³ and was laid to rest in Llanfoist Cemetery.¹²⁴ Sir Zachariah Wheatley died on 6 June 1950 at Nelson, Pendle Borough, Lancashire after a serious illness lasting about six weeks. After being transported from Lancashire by road,¹²⁵ he was buried with his wife in Llanfoist Cemetery.¹²⁶

Many accolades have been paid to Sir Zachariah Wheatley during his twenty-three years as a public servant by colleagues and townspeople alike. Originating from humble beginnings, this remarkable, energetic, and indefatigable man, supported by his wife, also from modest origins, gave his all to Abergavenny and his country throughout his years as a politician, businessman and his enthusiasm for cycling and athletics. He richly deserved his bardic title and Knighthood in recognition of his public service.

Marilyn Diosi

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Notes on abbreviated endnotes:

Census Records England, Wales & Scotland were consulted on <https://findmypast.co.uk>

ALHS/SS = Abergavenny Local History Society/Street Survey was consulted on www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk

AC = The newspaper, Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser, has been used as a source for most of the news items. Reference 1 has been given in full as an example of the source for those who wish to look at the original newspaper articles, some on-line, others on microfiche in Abergavenny Library.

¹¹⁹ Google maps. Available at: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@52.405331,-4.1599484,8z?entry=ttu> Accessed: 25 February 2024.

¹²⁰1939 Register Barrowford UD. HAWKSWORTH, F. Archive reference: RG1014707E/007/31. Sch. 100. Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 18 February 2024.

¹²¹ 'Married 50 Years' *Western Mail* 19 October 1940 p. 3 Available at: <https://findmypast.co.uk>. Accessed: 18 January 2024.

¹²² Find A Grave. Available at: <https://findagrave.com/memorial/246794843/martha-wheatley>. Accessed 26 November 2023.

¹²³ AC.

¹²⁴ Find A Grave. Available at: <https://findagrave.com/memorial/246794843/martha-wheatley>. Accessed 26 November 2023.

¹²⁵ AC

¹²⁶ Find a Grave. Available at: <https://findagrave.com/memorial/246794489/zachariah-wheatley> Accessed 26 November 2023.

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