The Ballads of George Thomas of Llandyssil 1786-1859

“Montgomeryshire’s best ballad writer was undoubtedly George Thomas. He lived through the exciting times of Montgomeryshire’s industrial boom, the introduction of the Poor Law and the Chartist arming and rioting. In mock heroic poetry he has recorded all the Montgomeryshire events from the adventures of the Yeomanry in Ireland in 1798 to the Mormon campaign of the Mid-Victorian era”, so wrote A. Stanley Davies.¹ More recently Patrick Thomas² wrote that his verse “is of considerable interest to the social historian, and much of it is also still extremely entertaining”. A biography of George Thomas appeared in Volume 97 (2009) of the Montgomeryshire Collections, P101-121. The following provides a more detailed examination of his 3 surviving published ballads and additional compositions:

“The Otter Hunt” c.1817 (which also contains “The death of Roman”)

“Welsh Flannel” c.1830

“History of the Chartists and the Bloodless Wars of Montgomeryshire” c.1840.

Address to John Glynne Mytton³ and his bride on their arrival in Llandyssil.

“Last Lines composed by George Thomas” in 1859.

The gravestone epitaph to Charles Dike of Mainstone, which is possibly also by him.

Two further ballads are lost; “The Death of Rowton” c.1829, “An eccentric character of Cefnycoed, Llandyssil”⁴ and “The Extinction of the Mormons” or “‘The Coming of the Mormons’ written as a counterblast to the preaching and ‘missionary’ work of a number of Mormon ‘priests’ who at this period came into Montgomeryshire. Thomas seized the occasion with great zest to attack them in verse. He went for them horse, foot, and artillery, and where they went he followed to read his vitriolic poem...”⁵

“The Otter Hunt”

“The Otter Hunt” or “Sporting Disasters” and “The Death of Roman, A Famous Hound, Who fell dead in chasing a Hare”, which were published in one volume, describe a hunt owned by Mr John Lloyd 1771-1829 of The Court, Abermule.

Two editions survive:

¹ The Ballads of Montgomeryshire – Life in the 18th Century, 1938, P4.
³ Son of Revd Devereux Glynne Mytton 1807-57, Rector of Llandyssil
⁴ The Ballads of Montgomeryshire, P5.
⁵ Montgomery County Times 26 December 1931 by “JMP”.

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Printed by J Waidson of Welshpool, 1817. The 3 known copies are in the Bodleian, the Newtown Public Library and in the National Library of Wales (NLW).

Printed and sold by J. Salter of Newtown, undated; but c.1832. It is certainly after 1829, as on the title page it described Roman as “The Property of the late John Lloyd, Esq., Court”. The one known copy is in the Stanford University Library, California.

The Waidson version contains a dedication to Charles Dike of Mainstone, whose mother was from Llandyssil. He died aged 45 on 17 March 1825 and was buried in the churchyard at Clun. The following epithet is on the gravestone, and is possibly by George Thomas:

Joyous his birth; wealth o’er his cradle shone,
Gen’rous he prov’d, far was his bounty known;
Men, horses, hounds were feasted at his Hall,
There strangers found a welcome, bed and stall;
Quick distant idlers answered to his Horn,
And all was gladness in the Sportsman’s morn.

But Evening came, and colder blew the gale,
Means, overdone, had now begun to fail;
His wine was finished, and he ceas’d to brew,
And fickle friends now hid them from his view.
Unknown, neglected, pin’d this man of worth,
Death his best friend, his resting place the Earth.

The Salter version, appears to be a more accurate text, and is reproduced below, with 3 exceptions (see below).

DEDICATION.

To Mr. Charles Dike,

Sir,

When I had last the pleasure of seeing you, you kindly condescended to become the foster parent of the following production, which was then in embryo; and which I feared to break cover with from the thickets of obscurity fearing to be hunted down by the keen-nosed and deep-mouthed hounds of criticism. The terrors

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6 Unbound, inscribed “Roger Charles Blakeway” (presumably of Wootton Hall, Shropshire).
7 Unbound, presumably the copy mentioned in the Catalogue of ...the Welshpool Free Public Library, 1888.
8 Presented to the author by Dr J. D. K. Lloyd in 1977.
of this remorseless pack have hurried to the flames many trifles of my fondest nurture, which might not have offended the most reflecting moralist. I have now ventured to unkennel, and should I be tally-ho’d by the voice of scrutiny, I humbly beg my pursuers to consider that I have never walked beside the luxuriant streams of Cam or Isis; my only school was the commercial traveller’s room, and the uneven and trying world the ground on which I have quested for experience.

Offering the following humble production to your notice, intended for your amusement, as a remembrance of that gay and gallant occasion which gave it birth,

I remain, Sir,
With the greatest esteem and respect,
Yours,
GEO. THOMAS.

THE

OTTER HUNT;

OR,

Sporting Disasters,

A COMIC TALE

TO WHICH IS ADDED

THE DEATH OF ROMAN,

A WELL KNOWN HOUND

The Property of the late John Lloyd, Esq. Court,

That fell Dead when Hunting a Hare.

By George Thomas.

“May the tale which good humour has harmlessly penn’d,
“Not the poor, nor the rich, nor the titled offend,
“No mortal I mean to insult or abuse:
“I seek but in writing my friends to amuse;
“For their kindness I tender all gratitude due,
“And reader I hope that I’ve not displeased you.”

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THE

OTTER HUNT:

OR,

SPORTING DISASTERS.

SOME sport on the land, and some sport on the water,
The tale that I tell of is hunting the Otter,
An amphibious beast that on fishes does prey,
Each night seeking plunder, and hides in the day.
As the owl from her covert a mouse-hunting fled,
Her screams ’woke the huntsman who rose from his bed,
Adieu bade his wife, saying, “it’s time to be going,
“For day-light appears, and I hear the cock crowing,”
She reply’d “John, ’tis dark, and the owlet you hear,
“For the cock has not crow’d, nor does day-light appear;
“For sure your passion for hunting despises all bounds,
“When you love not your wife half so well as the hounds.
Said the huntsman “old wench stop thy rattle I say,
“For I like thee some times well enough in a way;
“But never yet lov’d parents, children or woman.
“Like the Radnorshire hound the famous old Roman”
As he spoke, to the kennel he straight took his way,
Where, caressing the hounds he remain’d till ’twas day;
When his noise rous’d the lords of the hall and the hamlet,
And landlords and tenants set off to the Camlet,
Each firmly resolving to find and to slaughter
The wily, the ravenous fish-killing otter.
Like an army of lancers the hunters appear,
For each otter-hunter did carry a spear;  
The gay and the ragged together did meet,  
And some came on horseback and some on their feet;  
There were lawyers and doctors, and some titled sirs,  
Hounds, shepherds’ dogs, pointers, and mastiffs and curs.  
The hounds were named Minister, Toper and Trueman,  
Harlot, Lady, and Gamester, and Regent, and Blueman,  
Together with Damon, and Angel, and Ranter,  
And Fiddler, and Harper, and Luter, and Chanter,  
And Rockwood, and Ringwood, and Thunder, and Jewel,  
And Riot, and Rally, and Glory, and Cruel,  
And Trojan, and Spartan, and Tidings, and Tatler,  
And Roman, and Grecian, and Bellman, and Rattler.  
From a pack so harmonious, so gallant and fine,  
There was a music expected both rare and divine.  
Pious soul-mending parsons in sackcloth there came,  
Both to join in the chace and take tithe of the game;  
And the blacksmith for mirth and for hunting inclin’d,  
Left his bellows and hammer and pincers behind;  
And the carpenter scorning at home to remain,  
Did aside throw his axe and his saw and his plane;  
And the grocer thought hearing old Ringwood’s deep chop,  
Would be far more delightful than minding his shop;  
And the lime-man he vow’d that to hear the pack chime,  
Would be better than burning or selling of lime;  
And the wheelwright away to the otter hunt flew,  
Disdaining his felloes to shave or to hew;  
And the joys of the chace made the maltster forget  
To give the exiseman a notice to wet.  
In the midst of the hunters the taylor appears,  
With his bag full of cabbage, his sleeve-board and shears,  
And the sexton who puts men to bed with a spade,  
In the midst of his work left the grave-digging trade,  
And in search of the hounds to the Camlet he sped,  
Declaring the dead might go bury their dead;  
And an Irishman came in a trowsers of blue,  
So big that the hounds in full cry might run through;  
May the genius of war grant this cossack-breech’d wight,  
May never be forced to seek safety in flight,  
Or his death he may meet in a manner more rare,  
Than Prince Absalom did, who was hung by the hair;  
For in forcing his way through the briar and stubs,  
He may hang by his breeches and so feed the grubs.  
One that groaning lay sick of lumbago and gout,  
And had long kept his bed and declin’d rising out,  
For in terrific shape the blue devils assail’d him,
Death grinn’d in his face and his kinsmen bewail’d him,
Made his will, and bequeath’d when his bones were interr’d,
To his sweetheart his lap-dog, his tom cat and bird,
At his door, “come away” loud the huntsman did bawl,
And frighted grim death, the blue devils and all.
Up the sick man arose to chace with delight,
And he hunted the day through, and drank all the night;
And when with good liquor his noddle was heated,
He told the parson and sexton he’d cheated;
And the fees they’d have charg’d for enturfing him in,
As banks were unsafe he invested in gin.
He that hunted the hounds was call’d Pepper-away,
He his name did acquire in a fisticuff fray,
Pepper’s stature was tall and his dark visage thin,
And his nose did bend downwards and upwards his chin,
His long hair uncurl’d and of sable its hue,
And his beard seem’d a shoe-brush for long it had grew.
With his voice hoarse from shouting, his eyes wild and keen,
In a rimless round cap was old Pepper now seen,
And a gay scarlet jacket too Pepper did wear,
Such as yeoman put on when they beggars would scare.
To behold this keen sportsman the village boys stole,
For some thought him a Turk, or a Jew, or a Pole;
Others thought (from the length of his beard and his lance)
Him a Cossack returned from the conquest of France;
Still of all British sportsmen old Pepper’s the best,
Since the days of Tom Moody whose bones are at rest.
Down the precipice steep through the fen or the brake,
Neck or nothing brave Pepper will gallantly take,
Deepest rivers he’ll swim and o’er fences he’ll fly,
By the music impell’d of the hounds in full cry.
Pepper’s eyes brightly blaze and stern age quits his face,
When exulting he sings the delights of the chase.
If his wife and his children were laid on a bier,
And he mourning behind could the merry pack hear,
“Hark away” he would cry, and be off like the wind,
And old nick may take those who stay lagging behind.
To whip forward the hounds came a little lame fisher,
To his rival the otter no very well-wisher,
His shirt fell his waistcoat and waistband between,
And like a Scotch petticoat round him was seen,
And a cravat once white around his neck ti’d,
Which now with the juice of tobacco was di’d.
That flow’d from the quid of pigtail that he chew’d;
And his chin and his ’kerchief and waistcoat bestrew’d.
He had orders received to gaze firm on the brook,
Should the otter be rous’d to see which way he took,  
For the centinel longest on duty will stay,  
Whose legs are unable to bear him away.  
A descendant of Anac, a huge auctioneer,  
Who a license takes out to tell lies by the year,  
Exclaim’d, as his pad by the brook side he trots,  
“Have at him, he’s here for here’s kennels in lots,  
“An old guinea I’ll bet to a modern half crown,  
“If the otter’s put up he’ll soon be knock’d down”  
But the otter he prov’d for the giant too knowing,  
And forth from his kennel declin’d to be going,  
At a water rat’s den there some puppies did bay,  
And their treacherous tongues deceiv’d Pepper-away,  
“Hark forward, hark! hark boys!” enraptur’d he cries,  
“Hark forward to Glory! odds curse your old eyes,  
“Yoix, un kennel him boys, and if I come near him,  
“By Nimrod I swear that I’ll through the guts spear him.”  
Pepper hung down his head when he found himself wrong,  
And instead of hark, hark, “get away” was his song;  
He now said he “could hunt hares or foxes on land,  
“But those sly water cats he did not understand.”  
Persevering and keen did the gallant pack try,  
But the scent of an otter they never came nigh;  
Huntsmen, horses and hounds all by hunger oppress’d,  
Call’d at Marton to eat, and to drink and to rest;  
When the village they entered destruction begun,  
For they empty’d the cellar and drank down the sun,  
And to starve out the natives each method was taken,  
For they ate all the bread and the cheese and the bacon,  
A more hungry, more thirsty, or more jolly crew,  
No hunting or racing together e’er drew,  
When their heads were grown mellow with Marton’s good ale,  
Then around went the jest and the song and the tale.  
A squire that in snuff and in grey hounds delighted,  
The limeman to course for a wager invited,  
He asserted his dogs could all others outvie,  
Which the heart of the limeman did burn to deny,  
Blazing hot he said his dogs could “fly he’d declare it,  
“And his faithful old servant was willing to swear it.”  
A gay Scotch linen draper that chanc’d to be there,  
That from John o’Groats came or the devil knows where,  
Said “in Inverness town all the people fed pigs,  
“With nectarines, peaches and raisins and figs;  
“That Scotland for valor and learning and science,  
“And climate could set, the whole world at defiance.”  
An old sportsman reply’d, he “could wrestle or fight,
“But in balderdash books he had ta’en no delight,
“He a hare could espy, or a fox he could trace,
“Or knock down a woodcock, or join in the chace;
“But latin and learning should always despise,
“For the one was all nonsense, the other all lies.
“There was dog latin lingo he’d heard people say,
“But for hounds the best language was, hark! gone away!
“And if plenty existed the Scotch side of the Tweed,
“He wonder’d why Scotchmen came southward to feed,
“And like asses in England toil under a pack,
“But to Scotland in glory refuse to go back.”

When the barrels were empti’d, and finish’d the meat,
The hunters commenced their disastrous retreat,
As the maltster returning did lead the advance,
He got lam’d in the leg by some awkward mischance,
And the court of Exchequer humanely thought fit,
To threaten to fine him or send him a writ;
And the limeman too daring did nigh meet his fate,
As his old horse and he made a leap at a gate,
Horse and rider fell down and severe was the shock,
For they lit’ on a pavement as hard as a rock.
Towards home limp’d the limeman his bones to get cur’d,
And he’ll ne’er leap again till his neck is insur’d,
And the smith must in pain his fortunes bewail,
For he’s lam’d in the shoulder and can’t drive a nail.
Honest barebones the Butcher beside the highway,
Saw a tinker and wife both engaged in a fray;
The good woman call’d “rogue” and a thousand names more,
And the tinker he kick’d her, and called her a “whore.”
Murder! murder! she scream’d in so piteous a tone,
As would even have melted an adamant stone.
The brave butcher rush’d forward the fair one to aid
And ungrateful his kindness by her was repaid:
She said, “Barebones, thou scoundrel, what is it to thee,
“If my husband and self did by chance disagree.”
With her talons expanded at Barebones she fled;
From the wound of each talon the butcher’s cheek, bled.
“Damn you madam,” said he, “I’d surely indict you
“But I’m a brave man so turn out and I’ll fight you.”
When the brave son of slaughter had ended his speech,
The black tinker did give him a kick on the breech;
And as follows he spoke in a voice load as thunder,
“Those the priest ti’d together let none put asunder.”
The butcher sneak’d off saying, “a couple so civil
“Had surely been ti’d by some priest of the devil;”
And he’ll doubtless remember the rest of his life,
The keen talons of Charlotte the black tinker’s wife.
An old silver-hair’d sportsman o’erloaded with grog,
Was will-o’th’-wisp led in the midst of a bog,
Which he thought was his bed-room so drew off his clothes,
And then laid himself down in the mud to repose;
Where he slept till his limbs were grown stiff with the cramp,
And awaking cri’d “wife the bed feels very damp.”
But what pencil, what pen shall his feelings pourtray,
When he found not in bed but in mud he did lay.
Nearly perish’d with cold and besmear’d with the dirt,
That had stuck to his carcase, and stuck to his shirt,
He to put on his clothing arose from the mire,
And in anguish exclaim’d “a misfortune most dire.
“O my breeches are lost! heavens where shall I hide me!
“For my neighbours and schoolboys will mock and deride me!”
As is ever the case, he that hideth can find,
So he grop’d in the mud where his head had reclin’d,
And beneath his cold bolster his clothes did discover,
Daub’d inside and outside, and drenched all over.
He now dress’d him, curs’d hunting if such were its joys,
And went home the back way just to cheat all the boys.
After many good biddings the huge auctioneer,
Was sold and knock’d down by the fumes of strong beer;
And his brother who sought approbation to gain,
In trying to leap over, leap’d into a drain.
And the bed of the saddler was novel and hard,
On a grave-stone he slept in a village church-yard,
As for hunting his sire went towards his abode,
In the midst of a wasp’s nest he carelessly rode;
The wasps fled at his steed and most dreadfully stung him,
Vain the old man cri’d “wo,” Dobbin kick’d till he flung him.
Dobbin gallop’d off home, and the streets did resound
With the news that the old man in Camlet was drown’d.
And a little fat fellow of taxes assessor,
Something like Sir John Falstaff, but shorter and lesser,
Had set off in the morn when he rose from his sleep,
To hunt for the otter that ravag’d the deep,
His height was four feet, and his breadth something wider,
And in shape he resembl’d a hogshead of cider;
His legs being short, as a hedge he clim’d o’er,
Some thorns held him fast as his breeches were tore,
As beneath his black coat his shirt peep’d through the hole
He appear’d like a sweep that a flour sack had stole,
And hid it behind him for fear of detection,
But still it peep’d out as if courting inspection.
The chace it being o’er and the day at an end,
He sent to the tailor his breeches to mend,
He paraded the streets and protested and swore,
That the teeth of the otter his garment had tore.
“I slew him,” said he, “and more feats have I done,
“Single-handed I vanquish’d a village nam’d Clun.”
Said a wag, “tis but seldom it cometh to pass,
“That there dies an exiseman, assessor, or ass,
“Or the teeth of the otter had ended your peeping,
“And have plac’d you along with your forefathers sleeping.”
It was late when the parson his dwelling did reach,
So he hired a clerical proxy to preach;
His proxy got ready, and look’d like, when mounted,
To Gilpin whose journey in song is recounted:
Save that Gilpin rode fast, and the proxy rode slow,
For Gilpin’s horse went whether John would or no;
And that Gilpin a bottle on each side him bore,
Which were slung on a belt that around him he wore,
And the steed was well corn’d that plac’d Gilpin in danger,
Whilst the horse of the priest saw none in the manger,
But to imitate Gilpin this clerical prig,
Wore a handsome cock’d hat and a cloak and a wig;
When the temple he reach’d he took wonderful pains,
His sermon to drive in his auditors’ brains,
And a jolly good fellow whose name I'll not tell,
Swore the deputy parson preach’d “devilishly well.”
Now the otter hunt’s o’er and each found home their way,
They vow’d never more from their dwellings to stray,
But from hence stay at home their callings to mind,
Nor again seek otters or wild geese to find.
May the tale which good humour has harmlessly penn’d,
Not the poor, nor the rich, nor the titled offend,
No mortal I mean to insult or abuse;
I seek but in writing my friends to amuse;
For their kindness I tender all gratitude due,
And reader, I hope that I’ve not displeased you.

The Salter version has:

Line 136 – But those sly water rats he did not understand.
Line 190 – And the tinker he kick’d her, and called her a “w__e.”
Line 202 – The black tinker than gave him a kick on the breech;

Line 20 – The Camlet or Camlad, a stream that rises near Bishop’s Castle, and enters the Severn at Forden, said to be the only stream with its source England which flows into Wales.

Line 107 – “To whip forward the hounds came a little lame fisher...”: 
QUERIES – A NEWTOWN PISCATOR. – In the Cambrian Quarterly Magazine for July, 1830, Vol. 2, p. 386, the following death is recorded – “Mr. Henry Williams, the Isaac Walton of Newtown, Montgomeryshire.” Was Williams in any way remarkable? The fact of his death being recorded in the Cam. Quar. does not prove it, because from the number of nobodies whose deaths are announced one would be led to suppose that the obituary was a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. TAFFY.¹⁰

REPLIES – A NEWTOWN PISCATOR (Jan 30, 1878). – Henry Williams, whose death was announced in the Cam. Quar. Mag for 1830, was a well-known character in the district, though not, I should have thought, a man of sufficient mark to figure, even when dead – a time when men’s virtues are often discovered for the first time – in a quarterly serial. Williams figured in a local poem called The Otter Hunt, by George Thomas… The poem was printed by Mr. Jackson Salter, of Newtown, who… when he read the above passages to the hero of it, Williams, before he had finished, exclaimed, rather forcibly “Why, he means me!” S. J¹¹

The Death of Roman

A FAMOUS HOUND,

Who fell dead in chasing a Hare.

OLD Roman is dead, the brave Radnorshire hound,
A better-bred dog never hunted the ground,
When Autumn appear’d, and the corn fields were shorn,
The morn was proclaim’d by the heart-cheering horn,
Then no hound was like Roman, so eager and gay,
For dearly he lov’d the glad call “come away,”
But no more shall the horn call old Roman the brave,
For the earth is his bed, and his kennel the grave.

Whene’er Roman quested his game he soon found,
Though it swam in the water or ran on the ground,
Sly Reynard in vain climb’d the mountains so steep,
Or the otter for safety div’d down in the deep;
The speed of the hare against Roman was vain,
For when Roman hunted his foes must be slain,
But no more shall the horn call Roman the brave,
For the earth is his bed, and the kennel his grave.

The strings of the harp nor the nightingale’s song,
Could vie with the music of the old Roman’s tongue,

¹¹ Bye-Gones, 1878-9, P40.
Nor could the proud steed though well trained for the race, 19
Match the speed that old Roman display’d in the chase, 20
And when he gave tongue to him each hound would fly, 21
For well the pack knew that he ne’er told a lie; 22
But no more shall the pack hark to Roman the brave, 23
For the earth is his bed, and the kennel his grave. 24

One morning a hare in the woodlands was spi’d, 25
With rapture the joyful tantara! was cri’d, 26
As old Roman in glory the gallant pack led, 27
He fell on the turf that now pillows his head, 28
And the grass on the mead that was verdant before, 29
With crimson was stain’d by the brave Roman’s gore, 30
For the stout heart had burst of old Roman the brave, 31
Now the earth is his bed, and the kennel his grave. 32

The sweet tongue of Roman for ever is mute, 33
Which was loud as the horn, and as soft as the flute, 34
And dim are the eyes that once vivid did glow, 35
And crimson the skin that was black as the slow. 36
The huntsman stood weeping, and hung down his head, 37
When he saw that the spirit of Roman was fled, 38
And the hands that had often fed Roman the brave, 39
In the meads of Brynderwin now dug Roman’s grave. 40

May we my good friends, when the last bugle sounds, 41
To call us away both from horses and hounds, 42
Be spotless as Roman, and fearless to die, 43
And to injure our neighbours have ne’er told a lie; 44
As long as we live we’ll to friendship incline, 45
And discord we’ll drown in the juice of the vine, 46
And drink in remembrance of Roman the brave, 47
And be mellow the turf that lies over his grave. 48

Line 37 – “The huntsman” who “stood weeping, and hung down his head” was John Bywater.12

Line 40 – Brynderwin or Brynderwen (165954), near Abermule; the site of the kennels.


“Welsh Flannel”

Both surviving copies of “Welsh Flannel” are in the NLW and are from the second edition

WHERE the Welsh hills aspire to meet the skies, 1
The wilds of Nature greet the pilgrim’s eyes; 2
Down the cleft rock the foaming torrent pours, 3
And the deep dell re-echos as it roars, 4
Delighted man beholds the timid sheep 5
Climb the tall cliffs that overhang the deep, 6
Or gaily frolic o’er the mountain green, 7
Where daisies spring to grace the lovely scene; 8
Blithe soars the lark to greet the orb of day, 9
At heav’ns high portal chants his mellow lay. 10

13 The Ballads of Montgomeryshire, P5.
The peaceful shepherd takes his distant round,
Sees his flock safe, then sleeps upon the ground,
The faithful dog his master’s step attends,
At strangers barks, bids welcome to his friends.
The sleeping shepherd little dreams or knows
The wealth these hills on careful man bestows:
Their silver streams machinery impel,
Enriching vales when foaming torrents swell;
With Severn’s flood the new canal now feeds,
And this the merchant and the farmer speeds:
Cherish’d with lime rich crops are waving o’er
Extensive fields that sterile were before,
And fair Sabrina finds a double way
To roll her waters to the mighty sea.
Her antient course flows to Bristolian tides,
And the new branch to meet the Mersey glides.

When od’rous roses blossom on the thorn
The beating Flocks are driven to be shorn,
Round goes the song, the jest, and merry tale,
And care is drown’d in mugs of amber ale.
Soon all the magic pow’r of music feel,
The lasses dance, and lads begin to reel;
The swain admires his nymph, the nymph her swain,
And pleasure mingles with the shepherd’s gain.
Kings who command, and subjects who obey,
Brought nothing here, nor aught can take away.
Man in all stations, either young or old,
By the poor sheep is shelter’d from the cold;
Heav’n kindly teaches man the fleece to shear,
And to the “lamb hath tempered the air.”
To Newtown mart the fleece is brought for sale,
And now begins the burden of my tale:
The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,
And Newtown rose the busy Leeds of Wales.
Where cattle fed and meadows once were green,
Wide streets are form’d, and swarms of people seen,
Indust’rous artists, seeming all to thrive,
All useful bees in the commercial hive;
Each in his station useful as the great,
Who, troubled guide the gilded wheels of state.
Oft with their wares the freighted vessel sails,
And brings Columbia’s wealth to peaceful Wales.

First in his place, with keen attentive eyes,
To part the fleece the patient sorter plies;
The picker next makes clean each mossy lock,
The pitch cuts off that mark’d the shepherd’s flock;
Soon thro’ the willow’s fangs the fleece is sent,
Here o’il’d and toz’d in countless pieces rent:
Next thro’ the scribbler’s teeth must pass the whole,
And then the carder forms the perfect roll;
The piecer then exerts his infant skill
To join the rolls, and feed the slubbing bill;
The rolls half twisted by the slubber’s art,
The skilful spinner next performs his part.
He little thinks, while round each spindle plays,
How soon his threads would compass earth and seas;
Nor does he think amidst the busy crowd,
Those self-same threads perchance may form his shroud.
The winder next in order does appear,
And then the warper forms the lengthen’d beer;
The warp in loom, and strengthen’d well with size,
Quick thro’ its folds the weaver’s shuttle flies.
The Flannel wove, the motes are pluck’d away,
And then ’tis cleans’d with soap and fuller’s clay;
Now wash’d perchance in the same silver tide
The harmless flock contented fed beside.
Fair seems the web, the work of toiling man,
As the rich plumes that deck the snowy swan.
Welsh Flannel far does all the rest excel,
It’s downy-soft, without offensive smell.
All others do a grating feel disclose,
And sulph’rous scent, offensive to the nose.
When wash’d, the merits of the whole are known,
“Hur rivals shrink, but Shenkin stands hur own.”
Its use and cheapness all who wear it know;
The sick-man’s friend, none but the doctor’s foe.
As goblins fly the sight of blushing morn,
So flies disease where grateful Flannel’s worn.
Soon as the feeble babe the light beholds,
Its tender limbs its nurse in Flannel folds.
As the hen’s wings give vigor to her young,
So Flannel makes the growing infant strong.
The fair displays the best and truest taste
Who Flannel wears around her slender waist.
It soon allays gout’s agonizing pain;
The quinsey checks, and cures the blacken’d sprain.
Oft has consumption yielded to its pow’r,
And joy return’d where sorrow dwelt before.
Where’er ’tis worn weak palsy hangs her head,
And shiv’ring ague far from thence is fled.
The victim of intemperate disease,
Its kindness seeks to renovate his days.
Those who in tepid baths their bodies lave,
Or those who frolic in the colder wave.
Both their wash’d forms in downy Flannel fold,
The one it warms, the other keeps from cold.
In distant climes its sterling worth is known,
Both in the torrid and the frigid zone.
Where the sun’s heat does sweaty drops distil,
This mild absorbent keeps out icy chill.
Or where the bear roams o’er the frozen sea,
And sombre night usurps the place of day,
In ice becalm’d where meagre famine dwells,
And nought is heard save monsters’ horrid yells,
The hardy tar in Flannel wraps his form,
And braves the pelting of the polar storm.
’Gainst midnight vapors seeks a woollen shield.
Flannel its pow’r with healing med’cine joins
To drive lumbago from the toper’s loins.
Man owes a double debt to Flannel white,
His vest by day, his blanket warm by night.
The prop of life in each succeeding stage;
The nurse of youth, and comforter of age;
His first best garb when hurri’d from the womb,
And his last robe, to shroud him in the tomb.
He that had purchas’d thousands, little thought,
The purpose of the latest piece he bought:
Blooming in health, and eager seeking gold,
His glowing eyes glanc’d quick o’er ev’ry fold;
The thoughtful muse in sorrow seeks to tell,
His choice was luckless, for he chose too well:
Death sudden call’d, and quick the solemn bell.
With awful sound rung loud his parting knell.
The feeling hand, the tongue that oft approv’d,
And keen the eye that o’er the Flannel rov’d,
And doom’d to slumber thro’ eternal night.
Touch’d by the threads he fondly sought to buy,
Yet cannot feel that those same threads are nigh;
One garment only wears he in the grave,
Who nations clad beyond the distant wave;
And few indeed choose with their vital breath
The robe that decks them in the house of death.
“Peace to his manes” who Cambría's thousands fed,
He brought her woollens, and she mourns him dead.
Long may the sails of commerce be unfurl’d
And Flannel wafted to the distant world.
Commerce to Britain is like gentle rain
From heaven dropping on the rip’ning grain.
Commerce assist the lab’ring plowman’s toil,
Her children buy the produce of the soil:
Where honest industry erects her throne,
Chains seldom clank, and felons seldom groan.
And where her sons can earn their daily bread,
Rebellion pines and factions hides her head.
Long may the staple trade fell war survive,
And long its friends in ev’ry climate thrive.
May he that guards us erring mortals all,
Who not unheeded “sees a sparrow fall,”
Direct the wheel, and guide the weaver’s blows,
And Cambria flourish whilst her Severn flows.

FINIS

Line 127. “He that had purchas’d thousands, little thought,” “He” is the late Richard Scott, Esq; of Betton, near Shrewsbury. [Printed in the original].

In a souvenir brochure\(^\text{14}\) produced for the Opening of the Royal Welsh Warehouse at Newtown on 3 October 1879, Pryce Jones quoted lines 19-20 and 41-53, followed by:

“So sings the poet Laureate of the Welsh Flannel trade, and he so blends the useful with the ornamental in his “poem” that it goes against our hearts not to reproduce it. Until we read it we must confess to a very hazy notion of how flannel was manufactured, but here all the secrets of the trade are revealed, and, moreover, we are told far more than even we knew as to what flannel, and especially Welsh flannel was good for!”

Followed by lines 79-106.

A further, Royal Welsh Warehouse brochure\(^\text{15}\), quoted 12 lines from the sixth edition (from “Taught by her pow’r Dear Cambria’s sons essay’d” to “And brings Australia’s wealth to peaceful Wales”, see below) and lines 121-6, 147-8 and 153-6.

At least one copy of the sixth edition survived until relatively recently, published by Salter and Sons, in 1835\(^\text{16}\), and was apparently reprinted by Thomas Cliff in 1852.\(^\text{17}\) An extract from this sixth edition appeared in Montgomeryshire Collections Vol 5 (1872) P 42-3 in the “Parochial History of Llanidloes” and was also reproduced in “The Industrial Revolution in North Wales”

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\(^{14}\) NLW ref Powysland Club (1982 deposit) 5/54. See also Mail Order Retailing in Britain: A Business and Social History by R. Coopey, S. O’Connell and D. Porter, 2005, P140 and P168 Note 3, which quotes “the busy Leeds of Wales” and “bees in the commercial hive” from Royal Welsh Warehouse advertising material.
\(^{15}\) Booklet, thanking customers for their patronage, 1887, Powys Archives ref M/D/PJ/W/4. I am grateful to Mark Lucas of the National Wool Museum for drawing this document to my attention.
\(^{16}\) “Articles presented… to the Powys-Land Museum and Library” Montgomeryshire Collections Vol 13 (1880) P XXXIII.
\(^{17}\) The Ballads of Montgomeryshire, 1938, P46.

The following combines the quotations identified above, partially recreating the sixth edition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Edition</th>
<th>Sixth Edition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Newtown mart the fleece is brought for sale,</td>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale:</td>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
<td>Whilst the harp slept. The Sun of Commerce rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
<td>To bless the arts, and banish Cambria’s woes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
<td>Taught by her pow’r Dear Cambria’s sons essay’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
<td>To drive the wheel, and start the flannel trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
<td>Check’d in their course, the streams that idly ran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
<td>To gold were turned by this prolific plan:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
<td>The blessings spread adown the grassy vales,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
<td>And Newtown rose the busy Leeds of Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
<td>Where cattle fed and meadows once were green,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
<td>Wide streets are form’d, and swarms of people seen,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
<td>Indust’rous artists, seeming all to thrive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
<td>Each in his station useful as the great,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
<td>Who, troubled guide the gilded wheels of state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trading marts is brought for sale,</td>
<td>Oft with their wares the freighted vessel sails,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now begins the burden of my tale.</td>
<td>And brings Columbia’s wealth to peaceful Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,</td>
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<td>Industrious artists, seeming all to thrive,</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the “Parochial History of Llanidloes” version “Taught by her pow’r Dear Cambria’s sons essay’d” appears as “Taught by her power, Llanidloes’ sons essay’d”. The same wording appears in “The Severn valley” by J. Randall, 1862 and in “When Newtown was the ‘busy Leeds of Wales’”, by E. V. Jones, 1971. The 4 lines starting from “Whilst the harp slept”, also appear in “Llanidloes a History” by Dr D. Stephenson, 2010, P38.

Lines 79-84 and 121-6 appear in “Montgomeryshire Worthies” by Richard Williams, second edition, 1894, P297 and in “Epitaph for an old windmill” by L. Payne, which appeared in Country Quest 30/1 (1989), P5. Lines 121-6 are also quoted in “The Textiles of Wales by A. Sutton, 1987, P69, which states they are reproduced “from a leaflet issued by Pryce Jones’s Powysland Mills, Welshpool” which appeared in 1878.

Part of the same section appears in a “History and Description of the County of Salop” by Charles Hulbert, 1837, P54 and reproduced in “Bye-Gones”18, with minor differences which are probably merely transcription errors:

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18 *Bye-Gones*, 1876-7, P164, 6 December 1876.
The harp had slept when commerce bless’d the vales,
And Newtown rose the busy Leeds of Wales.
Where cattle fed and meadows once were green,
Wide streets are form’d, and swarms of people seen,
Indust’rous artists, seeming all to thrive,
All useful bees in the commercial hive;
The harp had slept, and commerce bless’d the vales,
When Newtown rose, the busy Leeds of Wales.
Where cattle grazed and meadows once were green,
Fair streets are formed, and crowds of people seen,
Industrious mortals seeming all to thrive,
All useful bees in the commercial hive.

In addition to the lines discussed above, “The Industrial Revolution in North Wales” on P229 quotes lines 53-64 and 69-78.

A further variation appears in “A Brief History of The Ancient Church and Town, The Pryce of Newtown Hall, and The Present Church and Modern Town of Newtown, Montgomeryshire” by B Bennett Rowlands, Newtown, 1914, with, on P140, five additional lines:

A few years hence and famed Newtown
Was but a village small,
With here and there a mud-built cot,
Most mean and comical.
The tide of commerce roll’d down her grassy vales,
And Newtown rose the busy Leeds of Wales.

“History of the Chartists and the Bloodless Wars of Montgomeryshire”

There are 3 surviving copies: 2 in the NLW and 1 in Cardiff University Library. The ballad of 900 lines is divided into 5 parts; The History of Toolly Loolly, The Battle of Abermule, The Battle of Heniarth, The Battle of Caersws, The Battles of Newtown and Llanidloes

“Toolly Loolly” was almost certainly Isaac Jones who “was Trumpet Major in the Ancient British Light Dragoons on Sir Wms. Wynn's troop in Ireland”.

Abermule. Dates vary for this incident. “At the end of June... the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry... were for the first time embodied to help the civil power... Throughout the night of June 30 and again of July 10, the Yeomanry remained on duty” or “the 12th of July [1819] a call was made on the Regiment to suppress a riot at Abermule”.

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19 One was presented to the Powysland Museum and Library by S. Salter. NLW ref Powlnd82 Box17.
20 See the Welshpool 1800 baptism entry for Jane Jones, MGS Welshpool Baptisms MR/C/11, 2003, P84, No 1962. See also TNA ref WO 13/4017. Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn raised a troop officially called ‘the ancient British Light Dragoons’, but also known as ‘Wynn's Lambs’.
22 The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, P401.
23 The Historical Records of the Yeomanry and Volunteers of Montgomeryshire 1803-1908 by Lieut-Col R. W. Williams Wynn, 1909, and Montgomeryshire Regiments... by B. Owen, 2000, P76.
“The courage of Welsh sergeant Webb”. In Bye-Gones24 DH stated that the gentleman satirised, and who asked that if there was no fish he might have herrings, settled in Oswestry, and was a well-known character in the town. Minshull, the Printer, burlesqued his lamentable English in a famous letter addressed to “Griffy Mawr, Squire”.25

Heniarth. In 1837 officials went to Llanfair Caereinion to introduce the new Poor Law and were met by a hostile mob. The meeting had to be abandoned and, when it was reconvened, the Yeomanry were called out to wait at Heniarth in close support.26 There was a standoff between the chartists and yeomanry, but the miller who owned the prospective battlefield sent over his servant with the message “Master says he won’t have no battle on his land, and you’re to go home!”27

Caersws.28 The “Battle” occurred on Christmas Day 1838.

“They preach’d New Harmony was heav’n”. “The community in Indiana built by German Rappists in 1815, and purchased by [Robert] Owen in 1823 as a site for putting into practice his New View of Society”.29

The Battles of Newtown and Llanidloes.30 In April 1839, following representations to the Home Secretary, three London policemen were sent to Llanidloes. They attempted to make some arrests, as a result the Trewythen Arms Hotel was stormed by a mob.

“To learn to the way to march and fight”. John Ingram of Llanllwchaiarn, was subsequently transported for “drilling the mob”.

“A burgess of a once fat borough”. Thomas Edmund Marsh 1803-61, ex-Mayor of Llanidloes.31

“The works of Hetherington and Brien”. Henry Hetherington 1792-1849 and James Bronterre O'Brien 1805-64, an Irish Chartist leader. Henry Hetherington addressed meetings in Llanidloes and Welshpool in 1839.32

“And Vincent’s Western Vindicator”. Henry Vincent 1800-70, a leading Chartist, he established the Western Vindicator, based in Bath.33

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24 Bye-Gones, 1876-7, P175-6, 10 January 1877
25 Possibly William Webb 1771-1852, who served 1792-1816 in the Grenadier Guards, and was at the time of the 1841 census living in Bailey Street, Oswestry
26 “Llanfair Caereinion in the early Nineteenth Century” by Charles H. Humphreys Montgomeryshire Collections 48 (1944) P149.
27 “The Lloyds of Montgomery” by Dr J. D. K. Lloyd, Montgomeryshire Collections 49 (1945-6) P257 note.
29 The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, P410 note.
33 See www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Vincent
“Found fire would not unite with Frost”. John Frost 1784-1877 a leader of the British Chartist movement in the Newport Rising.34

“Babylon” “A cant Name for Llanidloes”. [Printed in the original].

“The helmet fell off yeoman Cart”. “Sergeant Major Cart35 ‘lost his Schacko & one of the scales from his shoulder”.36


J. E. Samuel cited the History of the Chartists as evidence that Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn entered Llanidloes in 12 June 1839 with the Yeomanry.37

“Address to J G Mytton and his bride”38

On the approach of John Glynne Mytton, Esq. and his amiable bride to Llandyssil on Thursday 31st ult., the horses were taken from the carriage, which was drawn by the populace to the Rectory, when a band of music, with numerous flags bearing suitable mottos, followed by forty gentlemen and yeomen on horseback preceded by a noble ox drawn by four beautiful grey horses; then followed the children of the Sunday School, and hundreds of other pedestrians neatly dressed; besides thousands of spectators who came to share the festivities of the day. Having halted in front of the Rectory, Mr. Mytton was addressed as follows by Mr. G. Thomas, one of his parishioners: – “Reverend Sir, I am deputed by my neighbours to congratulate you on the happy event which has recently taken place in your family, namely, the marriage of Mr. John Glynne Mytton to the amiable and accomplished Miss Davies, a lady whose worth the surrounding country has borne corroborative testimony; happy are we, and thrice happy is he that has made so judicious a choice. Nature, Sir, has bound all her children together with a tie more strong than iron, and more precious than gold, that tie is sympathy, which prompts man to shed a tear for the misfortunes of his fellow-creature, and to rejoice in his well-doing; pitiable is the weakness of that being, be his situation in life what it may, who boastingly says he “cares for nobody.” All here are Conservatives who fear God and honour the King, and all that are put in authority under him; men who are willing to yield tribute where tribute is due; men wanting no visionary or speculative changes, and men who knew, before the schoolmaster came abroad, that tithes cannot become the property of the tenant. Our offerings should have been less humble had not Sir Robert Peel deprived us of the benefit of a paper currency, and then extracted from us

34 The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, P410.
37 Weekly Mail 28 June 1890, following up an article (31 August 1889) and a letter (8 February 1890).
38 North Wales Chronicle 16 February 1836. John Glynne Mytton married Charlotte Davies, at Forden, on 8 December 1835.
heavy contributions in gold to build a splendid prison at Montgomery, which we trust will crumble to a shapeless ruin ere one Llandyssil man shall be cooped within its walls. We thank heaven, that whilst the demon of spoliation has been exerting his baneful efforts to desolate the fairest portions of the kingdom, the standards of crime or rebellion have not reared their guilty heads in this our peaceful hamlet; the burglar, the assassin, and the coward incendiary dwell not here; our doors may remain unlocked, and our linen on the hedges, without fearing the plunderer’s approach; our peasantry are patient, industrious, and well-employed; but there are mightier reasons than these for their good conduct, they have mentally marched half a century in advance of the peasantry of most English counties, and know there duty to God and their neighbour; the watchword of Christianity is peace on earth and good will towards men, and today the rich and poor meet together, and the Lord is the keeper of them all. In conclusion, Sir, we say as the boys will to-morrow morning:

“We wish you a merry Christmas
And a happy new year;
A pocket full of money,
And a cellar full of beer.”

To which Mr. Mytton replied… The following glee was then introduced:

“Here’s health to the bride that Glynne Mytton has won,
Whose beauty all other surpasses;
No worthier creature dwells under the sun—
All hail to the fairest of lasses.
Here’s a health to the fair, and a health to the pair,
Come merily fill up the glasses;
And, when he comes, here’s a health to the heir—
Come neighbours see quick the toast passes.”

The song, the jest, and the merry tale went round
Til chanticleer proclaimed the coming day, and his clarion was responded to in the words of Scotia’s Bard—

“The cock may cra, the day may da,
But still we’ll taste the barley bra;”

And not until the hour “the ploughman drives his sturdy team afield,” did sons of harmony separate.

“Last Lines”

George Thomas died on 29 August 1859. A printed copy of his “Last Lines” was reproduced in Montgomeryshire Collections Vol 97 (2009), P120-1.

Frazer Thomas 12 April 2017