

Marmaduke Gwynne (1691-1769) *A Methodist Squire*

Introduction

At the very beginning of the Welsh religious revival, when Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland were themselves just beginning to piece together their own radical and risqué religious views, support and encouragement for their cause from the local gentry was unheard of. The gentleman of the realm were expected follow, defend and nurture the Anglican Church. Many Catholics had felt the consequences of breaking with this tradition in times not so distant. And for many years Independent congregations had been unfairly treated by the church, the state, and their agents. Yet, in 1737, just two years after Howell Harris had been changed and enlightened by a fiery sermon delivered at Talgarth, a well-respected Gentleman named Marmaduke Gwynne became a loyal follower. His dramatic conversion at the feet of Howell Harris marked the beginning of his defence of the Welsh Methodists. His support proved invaluable during the embryonic stage of the movement and his readiness to break with tradition, to shun lifelong friendships and disregard his own reputation, in order to defend the controversial principles of Methodism, is quite remarkable.

The National Library of Wales holds the archives of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists – an extensive collection of printed and manuscript material dating, generally speaking, from the early 18th to the late 20th century. Amongst the earliest and most valuable records within these archives are the letters of Howell Harris, known collectively as the Trevecka Letters. A superb calendar of the letters has been compiled by Dr Eryn White and B. S. Schlenther, which is a great help to researchers wishing to explore the collection, which contains around 3340 letters. Eighty of these relate either directly or indirectly to the Gwynne family of Garth near Builth and there are thirty-nine correspondences between Harris and Marmaduke Gwynne himself. This is a substantial amount of material, if we consider that far fewer letters survive to or from Daniel Rowland or John Wesley. It is almost double the number of correspondences between Harris and his other, slightly later, influential sponsors, the Countess of Huntington and James Erskin M.P. This is perhaps some indication of the importance of Marmaduke Gwynne's friendship and his sponsorship of the fledgling movement.

The second resource of value for this particular study is the diaries of Howell Harris. He was a prolific writer and over the course of his long life he wrote extensively in his diaries. He documented his travels and his trials both physical and spiritual, providing us with a first-hand account of his day to day life and the birth of Methodism in Wales. The diaries are available on microfilm at the National Library and are now freely available for readers to consult, although researchers should beware, Harris' spidery handwriting can often take a good deal of time to decipher.

These records, together with the Library's unrivalled collection of published resources form the backbone of this study, exploring the little known story of one of the first truly Methodist squires in Wales.

The early years

Marmaduke Gwynne, the oldest of seven, was baptised at Llanafan Fawr church, Breconshire, on the 1st day of January 1692 to Howell and Mary Gwynne. His father Howell Gwynne of Bryniou, in that parish, was of a cadet branch of the ancient and powerful Gwynne family of Glanbrân, near Llandovery. His mother was the daughter and eventual heiress of Judge Marmaduke Gwynne of Garth House near Builth. Despite sharing the same surname the two Gwynne families were, previously, completely unrelated.

His ancestors' aggressive self interest in times of political, social and religious upheaval had insured their status amongst the foremost families of Wales and by the time of his birth, late in 1691, the world that greeted Marmaduke Gwynne very much favoured the fortunate few. This was the golden age of the gentry. A time when powerful county families, the length and breadth of the principality, were hastily tearing down their old homes and erecting in their place modern palatial mansions more fitting of their new found riches. The intrepid few bought out their lesser neighbours giving rise to an age of vast estates inhabited by power hungry squires set on replicating the luxuriance enjoyed by their wealthier English counterparts. Young Marmaduke would have quickly learned that it was the duty of the rich to care for the poor under their umbrella, to maintain law and order, to represent the people and to serve both Church and Crown. He would also have observed that some squires were far more sensitive to these duties than others.

There can be no doubt that his Grandfather, Judge Gwynne of Garth, was a towering figure in his childhood. The Judge was a corrupt and fickle character who deceived and plotted in order to further his own interests. He was eventually stripped of his position as Second Justice of Anglesey amid allegations that he was an active Jacobite.¹ Yet some good may have passed to young Marmaduke. For example, he showed signs of his grandfather's legal competence, his readiness to defend his religious beliefs regardless of the risks, and his skilled financial management. No doubt the most influential figure during Marmaduke's early years was his father Howell Gwynne of Bryniou, a man we know frustratingly little about. If we are to believe his epitaph then we can be assured that he was a worthy, virtuous, benevolent and pious man. Beyond this, we have little information with which to build a portrait. We know even less of the boy's mother, and do not even know where he and his brothers were schooled, although the most likely venues were the grammar schools at Brecon or Carmarthen.

Despite the lack of evidence on this matter, we can be quite sure that Marmaduke would have been given a firm religious grounding at school and at home. Sackville Gwynne, the squire of Glanbrân would have been a particularly influential figure during Marmaduke's early years. Some 20 years his senior, Sackville took a keen interest in his young cousins and with good reason - he was childless and now looked to them for an heir to Glanbrân. He was a particularly charitable and spiritual gentleman. He had a new church built at Tirabad entirely at his own expense and actively supported the publication of religious literature in the Welsh language. Later in his life he became a patron of the noteworthy clergymen and author Theophilus Evans. As he made the transition into manhood we find Marmaduke involved in similar schemes, mirroring Sackville's religious allegiances and there can be little doubt that the squire of Glanbrân played an important role in galvanizing Marmaduke's own religious and social habits. At Bryniou life was far more measured than at Glanbrân. When Marmaduke's father passed away in February 1708, aged 40, he was a man of modest means. For example, the extent of his silverware was just 4 spoons and a pair of tankards. The total value of his goods amounted to little over £300, and most of that was accounted for by the value of his livestock and farming apparatus. That said, it was still easily within his means to send Marmaduke and his brothers to Oxford to further their education. In 1710 Marmaduke matriculated at Jesus College, Oxford, aged 19. He spent just a year there, for that was all he needed to gain entry to the Inns of Court. He seemingly hoped to emulate his grandfather by pursuing a career in law. But the old Judge

was soon dead. His only son had died without issue and Marmaduke was now set to inherit his entire estate. At the age of just 21, Marmaduke Gwynne was thrust into the role of a wealthy country gentleman. He abandoned his studies and returned to Wales to take up residence at Garth house, a powerful young man.

Equipped with all the instruments of fortune and privilege, the pious young squire was well placed to find a wealthy suitor. It was a young lady from Lampeter in Cardiganshire who attracted Marmaduke's attention and eventually won his hand in marriage. Sarah Evans was one of four surviving daughters of Daniel Evans of Peterwell, and his wife Mary, one of the last of the Herbert's of Hafod Uchtryd. The Evans family had enjoyed much success since the Civil War and Peterwell had become a little bubble of sophistication and wealth in an otherwise unruly land. As such, Sarah Evans developed a somewhat critical view of those of inferior birth. Many years later her own granddaughter would admit to her 'strong prejudice of birth and fortune' and stated that she was a 'violent enemy to all Presbyterians'². Yet, she and Marmaduke were of the same ilk, and shared the same religious values. Financially too the match suited both parties. Provisions made by the old judge ensured that Sarah would have a jointure of £600 a year for life and in return, Marmaduke would have a dowry worth £30,000. The couple was married on the 27th of July 1716 at Lampeter.³

With his inheritance secured Marmaduke's position in society was further solidified. The privileges, to which Sarah had been accustomed at Peterwell, were in no way diminished by her move to Garth House. There, she and her husband kept a staff of twenty servants and seldom entertained fewer than fifteen guests. They also kept a full time chaplain so that they, their guests and servants could benefit from a daily service. His heightened status saw Gwynne appointed as High Sheriff of Radnorshire in 1718 and soon afterwards he became a Justice of the Peace, a position he would hold for most of his life.

Around this time Sackville Gwynne of Glanbrân also died without an heir. Marmaduke was the natural successor, but given his position at Garth, the Glanbrân estate passed to Roderick, his younger brother, so that between them the brothers controlled vast swathes of countryside across south Wales, from the Pembrokeshire coast all the way to the English border. Marmaduke tried to secure a seat in parliament in 1722 and again in 1727 but was kept out by the obnoxious Sir Humphrey Howorth of Maesllech and the powerful Duke of Chandos.

Despite Gwynne's failure to break into the world of politics, the flurry of correspondence produced by his campaign highlights his closest friends and most powerful allies at that time. They included prominent churchmen like Adam Ottley, the registrar of the diocese of St David's, his deputy Charles Lewis of Brecon, and William Gwyn-Vaughan of Trebarried, himself the grandson of a Bishop.

By now another of Marmaduke's closest friends was the Rev. Theophilus Evans. From a young age the Cardiganshire priest had established himself as a revered historian and an ardent defender of the Anglican faith. His grandson, the celebrated historian Theophilus Jones described him as

'one who had perhaps as much of the milk of kindness as any man who ever lived: Of the value of money he knew little, books were his only treasures'⁴

By 1727 the young priest had already published his most celebrated work, 'Drych y Prif Oesoedd' (E. Mirror of the Primitive Ages) in which he presented a combination of fact and legend in an attempt to justify the independent origins of British Christianity, thus giving legitimacy to the Church of England. Marmaduke and Sackville were avid supporters and patrons of his patriotic, pro Anglican rhetoric. In 1728 Marmaduke subscribed to his 'Gwth i Iuddeu' (E. Persecution of the Jews) and another of Evans' publications was dedicated to his patron, Sackville Gwynne of Glanbrân.

Theophilus Evans' account of Welsh history was distinctly medieval, but his religious views were shared by many of his contemporaries. He was a virulent defender of the established Anglican Church and he tirelessly opposed the 'heretical' and 'arrogant'⁵ independent and Methodist separatists whom he, and many others, saw as a very real threat to the stability of the Church and the monarchy. Evans openly attacked Harris, Rowland and the other early Methodist preachers, exclaiming that he loathed 'the venom of their pernicious and heretical notions'⁶. He was of the opinion that their natural tendencies in voice, gesture and expression was enough to make people mad. Marmaduke stood side by side with Evans on these issues and actively supported his work. From 1727 onwards, the Reverend Evans was even employed as a private chaplain at Garth. There he would often preach twice a day. With this in mind there can be little doubt that his renunciation of the

unorthodox doctrine of the dissenters was a view point that became engrained on the Gwynne family and their many servants.

The conversion

By the late 1730s the Methodists, who campaigned for reform within the Anglican church and preached for greater awareness of Christ's suffering and a more 'methodical' adherence to the principles set forth in the Bible, had a voice in England, Wales, Scotland and beyond to Europe and the American Colonies. Until now Marmaduke Gwynne had not encountered them, nor did he have reason to fear them, but with the summer of 1737 came the news that Howell Harris intended to preach at Llangamarch not far from Garth. As a magistrate Gwynne was the King's representative in those parts, and he was both alarmed and distressed by these unheard of irregularities. We can only presume that his passionate chaplain and his equally ardent wife both encouraged a swift and heavy approach to dealing with this matter. To them, Howell Harris was no more than a dissenting madman, an unordained heretic. Many years later Marmaduke's granddaughter Sally recalled in detail the events that followed.

*'When Mr. Howell Harris began his itinerant preaching in South Wales, Mr. Gwynne was alarmed at reports of an innovation in the church; and imagining that this Howell Harris might hold the tenets ascribed to the Independent Dissenters under Oliver Cromwell's reign, and be an incendiary in Church and State, he, being a Magistrate, determined to put an end to these portentous irregularities. For this purpose he sallied out one day; but said to his Lady on going, 'I will hear the man myself before I commit him.' Accordingly he made one of the congregation, with the Riot-Act in his pocket. The sermon was so truly evangelical, so calculated to arouse the careless, to alarm the wicked, and to encourage the penitent, and the Preacher's manner was so zealous and affectionate, that Mr. Gwynne thought he resembled one of the Apostles. He was so convinced of the purity of his doctrines, and of the benevolence of his motive, that, at the end of the discourse he went up to Howell Harris; shook him by the hand; told him how much he had been misled by slanderous reports; avowed his intention of committing him, had they been true; asked his pardon; and, to the amazement of the assembly, entreated him to accompany him back to Garth to supper.'*⁷

Marmaduke Gwynne had gone forth intending to reprimand Howell Harris using the Riot Act but, much in the same way that Harris had been awakened and set to task by the words of his pastor, he was enlightened. The theatrical, evangelical and often terrifying sermons of Howell Harris thrust many listeners into an ecstatic trance. That day something certainly awoke within the middle-aged squire that could never again be laid to rest, despite the certainty that his family and friends would be riled.

At Garth, the family awaited Marmaduke's return, keen to learn the fate of the ghastly preacher. Imagine then, the confusion and utter bewilderment as Harris and Gwynne arrived at the house side by side, totally at peace. The family and the servants initially thought that Marmaduke had completely lost his senses. Harris was invited in and, in the presence of the whole family Marmaduke entreated his forgiveness, acknowledged his errors and paid Harris as much respect as he would the Bishop. His wife was disgusted. According to her granddaughter's account she retired to her room and refused to come down until after supper and until Howell Harris had departed. To further compound her despair, her brightest and most promising daughter, Sally, warmed instantly to the curious house guest. An impressionable eleven year old, filled with intrigue, she soon became as devout a follower as her father. Whilst it must have pleased him greatly to have his daughter at his side, it caused the girl's mother utter heartache and she passed much of the following weeks in tears at the infatuation of her family.⁸

The family chaplain was equally unsympathetic to his master's great awakening, and it would seem that his services were hastily withdrawn. Two years later he retired the living of Llanllywenfel completely and moved on to pastures new. His friendship with the Squire of Garth was forever severed.

Defender of the faith

The majority of the Garth household refused to hear Howell Harris in the months after Marmaduke's dramatic awakening. His wife continued to despair and most of his children teased their sister Sally about her increasingly theological persona. Although he was not insensitive to his family's objections, Marmaduke was unmovable. He had become firmly rooted to the promotion of this pure and simple form of Christianity in the honest belief

that the preacher's message would enrich the lives of his followers, rejuvenate the spirituality of the people and save them from the fiery underworld.

The Methodists were despised by many, and Marmaduke would have been acutely aware that by declaring in their favour he would thereby alienate himself from many of his friends and allies, let alone elements within his own family. As a social class, the gentry were initially opposed to, what they perceived to be, a spiritual rebellion. At the time of Marmaduke's conversion, a handful of Welsh gentry might have quietly agreed with the Methodists, a few more were indifferent to their activities but the vast majority were ready to persecute them at every given opportunity. Gwynne was one of the first, if not the very first, truly influential gentleman in Wales to openly and actively support the cause. Before his conversion Howell Harris' most powerful ally had been John Williams of Ysgrin, but his rather superficial support gradually waned until Harris proposed to marry his daughter, at which time he turned completely against him. The only other notable Welsh gentleman to embrace and support Methodism in these very early days was Robert Jones of Fonmon Castle in Glamorganshire. He was converted by the English preacher Charles Wesley in July 1741, but died just a year later. Therefore it was incredibly bold of Marmaduke Gwynne to openly declare his support for Harris and his ideology.

The first known correspondence between Marmaduke and Howell Harris was sent from Garth on the 28th of January 1738. The Squire used the opportunity to flatter Harris and to offer him a gift of old Welsh books. 'You will be able to distribute them with much greater benefit than I can', wrote Marmaduke in his neat, uniformed handwriting. He went on with considerable charm:

'I sincerely wish you success in your pious endeavours, and if our Bishop had he the same opinion as I have of your talents, you would soon be admitted into the order of Deacons and Priests, and have a large flock to oversee'⁹

Unfortunately, Marmaduke's idealism never came to fruition. Harris was never ordained a priest and far from reforming the established Church, the ideas that he pioneered ultimately brought it to its knees. Marmaduke's words also confirm that he had not turned his back on the Church which he had encouraged and admired for so many years. Instead, his hope was that the Church could be reformed and reinforced by enthusiastic,

serious and inspiring preachers such as Howell Harris. Had he anticipated the seismic shift in religious power that would one day emerge from the movement he would almost certainly have been far more restrained in his support of Harris and the other early figureheads. 'No worldly motives can ever tempt you to quit the Church of Englande'¹⁰ asserted Marmaduke in a letter to Harris in 1740. Lured by the independents, Harris had indeed been tempted to throw off the shackles of his Church allegiances around this time but he was reluctant to act and for some time to come the Methodist societies of Wales continued to operate under the reluctant umbrella of the Church of England.

When preaching in the fields and the church yards around Builth, Harris became accustomed to Marmaduke's cloak of protection. Elsewhere on his travels he rarely enjoyed such a luxury. His ability to rouse a crowd was a double-edged sword and protesters at his meetings often became so angered that he was put in fear of his life. During the depths of winter, in January 1741, Harris found himself facing a possible prison sentence, and Marmaduke's allegiance faced its first real test. In late summer Harris had descended upon a revel in Radnorshire where locals had gathered to drink, dance and to be merry, but whilst preaching to the throng about the 'folly, vanity and danger of these ways'¹¹, he and his companions were apprehended by two magistrates and carried away. It was claimed that one of his fellow exhorters threw a punch when set upon, further fuelling the magistrate's charge of riotous assault.

After an initial postponement of his case Harris was put on trial. He was resigned to imprisonment, should that be the will of God, but Marmaduke was far more concerned with seeing justice done, standing firmly on his principles. He would have been acutely aware of the impact Harris' imprisonment could have on the momentum of the movement and of the repercussions of a successful prosecution against the Methodist for inciting a riot. He was determined to see Harris freed and returned to his flock as a matter of principle.

The trial was held at Knighton on the 14th of January. Harris was still en route when he heard the news that the Squire of Garth had already arrived at court, at which he 'felt ease coming on'¹². It was just past midday when the preacher climbed the long staircase from the throng of the street to the old court house. For nearly four hours he endured the corrupt pomp of the court, waiting for his case to be heard. Then the court was adjourned to the Duke's Arms - as was the custom in Knighton - where the gentlemen drank and

feasted. During this time Marmaduke offered Harris his counsel. 'There,' wrote Harris in his diary,

*'I met the Christian still having the fear of God before his eyes. He advised me to go to an attorney, but I did scruple it, going among the ungodly'*¹³

The preacher's refusal to 'lean on an arm of flesh' led the pair to pray together until the court was reconvened and the magistrates set forth their charges.

They accused Harris and eight of his companions of going to the revel at Llandegle in Radnorshire by force of arms and of 'beating, wounding and abusing a Justice of the Peace, in a riotous manner, so that his life was despaired of'. As Marmaduke had foreseen, the court asked Harris to appear through an attorney, but he was steadfast in his refusal, so Marmaduke himself stepped forward and assisted his friend in denying the charges. He set out his testimony against the prosecution in an effort to temper their barrage, but this served only to infuriate them further. 'What a providence that Mr Gwynne was here', wrote Harris, 'Else I would have been swallowed up quite by them'¹⁴.

The accusations and defence continued. The prosecution insisted that the peace had been breached, and that the preachers had kept the people away from the church. But Harris was always mindful not to disturb Church services and the accusations were deemed preposterous given the time of day that they were found preaching. Harris was then accused of being responsible for the actions of the man who threw the punch, and when the man in question was called on to give evidence, the court contrived to prevent him. Such corruption and misdirection was common in 18th century courtrooms and, more often than not, an ill-favoured defendant stood little chance of justice. However, very few defendants enjoyed the support of an influential magistrate. Marmaduke's knowledge of the law, his years of experience at court, and his weighty purse were invaluable to Harris and clearly hampered the prosecution. The buffetings proceeded long after nightfall but Harris' stubborn rebuttal of all the claims and the legal expertise freely dispensed by Marmaduke Gwynne, kept him out of prison. However, much to his frustration, his sentencing was delayed until the following morning.

Beyond the doors of the court room lay another menace. A local mob had gathered at the top of the courtroom steps, intent on throwing Harris to his death as he left the

building. Unaware of the impending threat, the preacher opened the door to a sea of clutching arms and a chorus of vile threats. Engulfed by the mob and in fear of his life he demanded peace, exclaiming 'What do you think you have in hand - a fool?', to which they replied 'Yes'¹⁵ and carried him to the edge. Then, as he later recalled, Marmaduke and his brother Roderick Gwynne were able to reach him and pull him out of the jaws of death.

They took him at once to their lodgings, but a little later, when Harris made for his own bed, the mob rose up again, and chased him through the narrow streets. They caught up with him close to his lodgings and took hold of him again. Filled with fury, they grabbed at his arms and pulled at his coat, 'then' he recalled,

*'I escaped again as a bird from the fowler's net...if the door had not been open or if my foot had slipped, I had been in the midst of them, but though the Bulls of Basham came about me and touched me, it was not permitted yet to hurt me'*¹⁶

The following morning the bruised preacher finally took advice from a lawyer and in light of the evening's events was more determined than ever not to submit. His lawyer advised that he should plead guilty and ask for pardon. Marmaduke concurred, although he was quick to add that if that would not do, then he should let prosecutors proceed and he would see him have justice in another court. Marmaduke then invited Harris for breakfast where he and his brother Roderick immersed themselves in a discussion about the forthcoming election - it was Roderick's turn to take on the deeply rooted Howorth as part of the Gwynne's ongoing battle for the Radnorshire parliamentary seat. Their troubled guest had no time for such material matters and as he sat in court later that day, listening with despair to cases of petty theft, he bemoaned,

*'There were nothing but election affairs, saw the cunning of men, going beyond each other and plotting schemes. O the perplexity of this world. Mr. Gwynne would spiritualize but should not. They stand much on honesty and honor, but what will that avail to justify us? Sure our Nation is sinking to ruin in courts of justice, swearing, calling rogues, no justice given, the guilty cleared and the innocent condemned. All my concern is what is to God's glory'*¹⁷

Gwynne's position as a prominent gentleman, Lord of the Manor of Builth and a Justice of the Peace, bound him to many practices and indulgences that Harris saw as ungodly or unnecessary. Harris surely accepted that Gwynne and his other wealthy supporters were not able to simply give up their livelihood in order to please God, but he was still troubled when their shortcomings became plainly apparent, as highlighted in his thoughts above.

When Harris' case finally came up Marmaduke again offered his assistance and it was gratefully accepted despite the preacher's objections to the tone of the morning's conversation. Harris again refused to admit causing a riot but after much counsel he eventually agreed a concession and asked pardon for the lesser charge of 'behaving in a riotous manner'. He was fined eleven shillings and sixpence and set free. The sympathetic Clerk of the Peace even offered to investigate the riots of the previous night but Harris said he forgave them all. He left Knighton full of pity for his persecutors but inwardly joyous at seeing an end to the whole ordeal.

The entire trial had been a sham, but had Marmaduke not been there to guide Harris, or indeed, to free him from the clutches of the mob, the outcome could easily have been far more painful for the preacher. If Harris had been successfully prosecuted then not only would he have been temporarily silenced but it would have opened the floodgates for others to prosecute the Methodists on similar terms.

A changed man

Over the coming weeks and months, this most unusual alliance between gentleman and itinerant preacher flourished. Their correspondence became more colourful and informal, and Marmaduke's obsession, more time consuming. 'By you' wrote Marmaduke to Harris around this time,

*'as God's instrument, I was much enlightened to see myself as the chief of sinners. I give glory to the triune God for bringing me out of self and enabling me to see my wretched nakedness, - to be covered with my dear saviour's robe of righteousness that I may appear in it before my heavenly Father, being made meat for the holy city. - there you and I, and all Gods people, shall join with the heavenly choir In singing hallelujah to father and son, and the Holy Ghost, for ever without interruption'*¹⁸

Marmaduke became visibly enthused and full of love towards his fellow man¹⁹. In October 1741 Harris wrote in his diary that he had met dear Mr Gwynne so full of love that he could not help embracing him. He regularly ventured out on horseback to hear the local preachers, who clambered aloft old tomb stones or ramshackle platforms to dispense the word of God to their enraptured audience. Much to the disliking of Mrs. Gwynne, the famous hospitality of Garth was thrown open to 'any of the children of God'²⁰, or so said Francis Pugh, a sprightly young convert, who was always received with a warm welcome at the lofty old house below Garth hill. On one of his passing visits to Garth, he introduced Marmaduke to Benjamin Dutton, a prominent Baptist Minister. His wife was Anne Dutton, an intensely religious lady, revered for her spiritual and theological writings. She published poems and hymns along with many of her correspondences with the movers and shakers of the English Methodist scene, such as John Wesley and George Whitefield. Marmaduke greeted Dutton with great enthusiasm, just as he did with any preacher or religious activist who might have the good fortune to come by Garth.

Another notable Methodist to have been welcomed to Garth was the Rev. Edward Godwin, one of Whitefield's disciples, a dissenting minister and the author of many religious works. Marmaduke clearly left his mark on the man, for he later dedicated a volume of hymns in the squire's honour.

'To Marmaduke Gwyn, Esq

Sir,

*Those opportunities in which I have been favour'd with your agreeable company; I always observed your particular fondness of joining hymns, to praise the beneficent Jesus, who has displayed his glories in your heart. This, Sir, together with your requesting me to translate some of these Hymns, when last at your House, has embolden'd me to dedicate them so particularly to your service.'*²¹

The Rev. Whitefield himself was among those to benefit from the opulence and security of Marmaduke's home during his travels. He was accepted with open arms by Mr. Gwynne who very much enjoyed his 'heavenly conversation'²². After an agreeable visit to

Garth, Marmaduke rode with his guest to Llanwrtyd where they heard Daniel Rowland of Llangeitho deliver one of his rousing sermons.

Marmaduke had now become far more than a casual convert. He had assumed the unlikely role of an activist and a patron to the cause. He defended the Methodists whenever he could, freely dispensing legal advice and, in Harris' case, assisted financially, paying legal fees and even gifting him a horse. By the standards of the day he was already an elderly gentleman, yet his enthusiasm and energy seemed limitless. In his youth his friends and allies had been high ranking clergymen, devout Anglicans and wealthy sophistocrats. However, he now complained that those who had not been saved were 'very shy of conversing'²³. Instead he increasingly found himself in the company of middle class evangelists. Many viewed these radical preachers as extremists, intent on destroying Church and State, yet Marmaduke refused to bow to the establishment. He followed his own judgment against all adversities, much to the benefit of the Methodists.

As the summer of 1741 gave way to autumn, there was no let up for Sarah Gwynne. A steady stream of Methodists now came to Garth, where once they were mocked and persecuted, to converse with the sympathetic gentleman. We can join Francis Pugh as he rode up to the hospitable mansion one day that autumn, finding Marmaduke 'very full of love'²⁴. The pair spent much of their time dissecting a letter sent from Howell Harris to his love interest Anne Williams of Ysgrîn. Marmaduke saw the suitability of the match from the outset and on this occasion he told Pugh that he planned to speak his mind when he next saw Miss Williams.

That weekend, Marmaduke and Pugh travelled to Llanwrtyd where Brother Rowland had come to preach. The following day being Sabbath, Marmaduke joined Francis Pugh, Daniel Rowland and others at the parish church for the day's service. Since the resignation of his living at Llanllywenfel, this had been Theophilus Evans' parish and it was he who took to the pulpit to deliver the sermon. Despite the great chasm that now divided them, Marmaduke evidently still held a certain amount of respect for his former chaplain. On this occasion he hung to his every word, becoming carried away by the intensity of the sermon. However, Francis Pugh took a very different view of proceedings, claiming that the Devil had made the preacher

'as bold as a lion...calling the ministers of Jesus Christ false prophets, hot-headed fools and such like expressions'

The squire's overt enthusiasm during a sermon that clearly ruffled the feathers of hardened Methodists like Francis Pugh was, perhaps, a sign of his doctrinal naivety, or simply a show of respect for the man who, until quite recently, had been his trusted chaplain. That as it may be, as Evans addressed the congregation, Marmaduke Gwynne became totally caught up in the moment, taking out a book and reading certain passages out loud. His behaviour caused great amusement amongst the congregation and even Francis Pugh, a deeply serious and sombre man, found it difficult to refrain from laughing. Pugh described the occasion to Howell Harris as thus:

'Mr Gwinn being there took his book out to read and sometimes speaking out loud with spirit...I was by Mr Gwinn and the Devil had so much power over me that I was like to break out lafing by reason of his speaking by my side although my heart was ready to break at the same time'²⁵

Such was his heightened sense of spiritual love that the impassioned squire appeared unmoved by the sniggering congregation and he continued to preach to his friends as they rode home later that day.

Family tensions

Gwynne's commitment to Howell Harris and his associates still caused dissent within his family. Many had now accepted the Methodist ideals which were being championed by the head of the house, including all his daughters (to varying degrees), most of the servants and the family nurse Grace Bowen. Marmaduke had also succeeded in drawing some members of his extended family into the fold. For instance, his sister Joan Gwynne and his niece Molly Leyson both became supporters. Of his sons, Roderick was still just a child and young Duke was quite indifferent on the matter. Of all the children, only Howell was truly opposed to the family's denomination.

Sarah Gwynne may have been beginning to see the good in her husband's 'enlightenment', the obvious effects upon his spirituality, and his loving concern for others, but she still detested Howell Harris and the dissent he seemingly impelled. As such, their inevitable encounters were often fraught. A vehement protester of Harris' ideals, once wrote him the following,

*'I have heard of your unparalleled assurances (it deserves a worse name) at Garth, and the rude behaviour toward the good Lady there, in denying your own words against 3 or 4 witnesses. Strange assurance'*²⁶

Resistance to Methodism at Garth was also demonstrated by Howell, who remained steadfast in his disapproval of the whole ordeal. He had become a jaunty young man with high aspirations of a career in politics and appointments in royal offices. His family's association with the Methodists only served to hinder his somewhat whimsical progress. He was prone to episodes of irreverence and ill temperament, and when he was at Garth he frequently mocked and tormented his pious sisters over their religious leanings. In later years he would row viciously with his sisters, his mother, and with Charles Wesley.

Faced with differing opinion throughout the family at Garth, Marmaduke was dealt a blow from his own brother. Roderick had remained loyal to the Rev. Theophilus Evans and wanted nothing to do with Methodism. Despite having saved Harris from almost certain death at the clutches of the mob at Knighton he became a cruel oppressor of the cause. In 1742 matters reached a head. Marmaduke complained that he had been 'threatened' by his

‘poor miserable brother’²⁷. Harris offered him kind counsel and suggested that God would eventually ‘melt his stubborn heart’²⁸. But the following spring Marmaduke again became distressed by his brother’s behaviour when he learned that he had rudely interrupted Howell Harris at Llandovery, only to be ‘set upon by others’²⁹.

As Gwynne’s spiritual crusade marched on even his wife’s family at Peterwell were drawn into the fold. The squire who now occupied that flamboyant and over stated house on the Teifi, was Mrs Gwynne’s brother in law, the ageing Walter Lloyd of the doomed Maesyfelyn clan. Young Howell Gwynne had struck up a friendship with his cousin Herbert Lloyd, Walter’s second son. The friendship must have been a cause for concern for Marmaduke, since, despite his young age, Herbert Lloyd had already developed a reputation as a vulgar, feckless despot.

Even in 1741, Marmaduke was becoming concerned by the tales of young Herbert’s wickedness. His response was to press the youngster to hear Howell Harris, perhaps with the hope that he might experience some kind of spiritual awakening, a life altering event, just as he himself had done four years earlier. By January 1742 Gwynne’s persistence had paid off. Herbert Lloyd did hear Harris at Lampeter and it seems, surprisingly, as though he was in some way touched by the theatrical nature of the occasion. Afterwards he explained to Harris that he had come at the express request of Mr Gwynne and that he had very much enjoyed the service. Although Harris always welcomed the prospect of further gentry support, he was keen to point out to Gwynne that his nephew had come to Lampeter with ‘three or four young ladies’³⁰. Lloyd may well have been entertained by the unusual spectacle, but he was by no means evangelised.

Marmaduke persisted. He convinced Harris to write to Master Lloyd at Foelallt. ‘Hearing you would not have taken it unkind to have a line from me’ wrote Harris, ‘I intended much sooner but had no direction till I met your dear and worthy uncle Mr Gwynne’³¹. Harris then launched into an impassioned plea, urging Lloyd to lead a good and virtuous life, to seek out ‘the pearl of great price’ and to renounce the pleasures of this world. In terms of reforming Lloyd’s personality, all efforts were utterly and hopelessly in vain, but Marmaduke and Harris’ activities did ensure that the Methodists no longer needed to fear the forbidding Lloyd’s of Peterwell.

So in March of 1743, when a local Methodist counsellor named Morgan Hughes was set upon and beaten by a Cardiganshire mob at Fair Rhos, the Lloyds were innocent of any involvement, and when they did get involved, it was in support of the victim.

The catalyst for that violent outburst was Richard Stedman of Ystrad Fflur near Tregaron, Herbert Lloyd's future father in law. Having been beaten, Stedman had the preacher hauled away to Cardigan Gaol. Alarmed by the news, the frantic and industrious Howell Harris rallied to the aid of his 'Brother'. 'If he is stopped our liberty will be taken from us alike'³² raved Harris to Brother Rowland. Stedman held the prisoner on trumped up charges of being a vagrant, and of keeping unlawful assembly, similar charges to those that Marmaduke had himself once intended to use against the Methodists. The cry for help soon arrived at Garth: 'I know it shall be a matter of prayer with you and you'll give directions what is right to do'³³. The prisoner's trial was to be at Cardigan, so Marmaduke was at once compelled to write to Herbert Lloyd's older brother John, at Peterwell. 'I told my nephew' reported Gwynne to Harris,

*'that if there was not some method found to put a stop to such illegal proceedings of magistrates, I feared a heavy judgement would fall upon the nation...O Lord, hasten, if it is thy will, that happy time, that thy children may rejoice'*³⁴

The Lloyd's allegiance proved true. As Foreman at the trial, John Lloyd abruptly halted proceedings, much to the dismay of Stedman. The case was thrown out and, ever on the trail of justice, Marmaduke then advised that Stedman himself be tried for false imprisonment, but Harris thought it best to show him the Christian spirit.

'A friend of the Highest Value'

In 1744 Marmaduke's support for Howell Harris reached its climax. Early in that year the defiant preacher made public his desire to marry Anne Williams of Ysgrîn. At the risk of causing descent amongst his followers and under no illusion that the Church would fight him every inch of the way, Harris announced his plans to marry. Even before the Church began to stall proceedings, Harris had Anne's family to contend with. Despite his early approval of

Harris, her father John Williams was now a tireless objector to the ‘blatant heresy’ of the itinerant preachers. Such was the strength of her family’s opposition to the union that her aunt even offered her £1500 not to go through with the marriage, but offering a bribe of material luxury to a devout Methodist was always a doomed scheme.

Harris’ knight in shining armour – or else his pawn – waded in, interceding with the squire of Ysgrîn³⁵. Once again Marmaduke’s penchant for persuasion was put to good use and the angry squire of Ysgrîn was settled. At any rate, the father was soon powerless to stop the marriage. Having thrown her inheritance to the wind, all Anne needed in order to proceed was a marriage licence. Once this could be procured, all would be well.

Marmaduke had always favoured the match between Anne Williams and Howell Harris and by May he was at the pinnacle of the fight to obtain the marriage licence, which the Church was naturally reluctant to issue. Flurries of correspondence to registrars and clerks left Garth in the weekly mail coach. A stern letter arrived with the rector of Aberedw, demanding that he write an approbation to the deputy registrar so that the marriage licence could be obtained. ‘She is twenty seven or 28, not an heiress and therefore no reasonable objection can be made to this request’³⁶, asserted Gwynne, who eventually obtained the necessary paperwork and personally guaranteed the £500 Bond. By the 19th of May, Harris was able to write to his beloved with good news.

‘Yesterday I saw the dear and valuable Mr Gwynne – a friend of the highest value – he wrote to Mr Thomas James of Brecon to act as proctor to take out a licence at next Bishops court which is next Thursday...’³⁷.

Marmaduke personally paid the proctor’s fees and before the month was through, Harris had his bride, and he blessed God that Marmaduke had espoused his cause.

‘May all the glory of the Lord Jesus shine on your blessed soul...go on dear sir and the glory of the Lord shall surround you!’³⁸

But it wasn’t only his assistance with matters of matrimony that provoked Harris’ colourful praise. At the same time that Marmaduke was busy pursuing the marriage, Harris’s enemies

launched a bold attack. Using tactics commonly employed to persecute Methodist exhorters, one of his most trusted brothers was singled out by the 'Press Gang'.

Honest, hardworking educated men were not usually targeted by the Naval Press Gang but their power gave Anglicans a weapon against the Methodists who increasingly became targets. On the 8th of May an alarmed Howell Harris was forced to seek help from his most powerful allies, namely the Countess of Huntingdon, the wealthiest patron of English Methodism and a dedicated Calvinist, James Erskine, the Scottish M.P., and Marmaduke Gwynne. News of the abduction soon arrived at Garth. 'The day of trial is come...Dear James was taken from off his work at our house at Trefeca'³⁹. The abducted man was James Ingram, a native of Cefnlllys in Radnorshire. He fell under Harris' spell as a boy and became a prominent member of the society. By now he was Harris' *amanuensis*, his trusted travelling companion and the copyist of many of the 'Trevecka Letters'. It was imperative to Harris and his supporters that such a valuable resource was freed as soon as possible.

At the next meeting of the county magistrates, Marmaduke secured a few tentative supporters and raised the matter with the Breconshire M.P. John Jeffreys, whom it would appear offered his support⁴⁰. As Ingram sat confined to Brecon gaol, preaching to his fellow inmates, Harris began to feel the tide turning in his favour. The pressure exerted on the establishment by the Countess Salina, James Erskine and the tireless magistrate, Marmaduke Gwynne, finally paid off. Ingram was released within weeks. At just 5ft 2 inches, it turned out that he was too short to be impressed after all. The successful defence of Ingram by Harris' patrons proved instrumental in preventing further use of the Press Gang to persecute the Methodists.

Legacy

Marmaduke Gwynne's remarkably forthright defence and sponsorship of the Methodists, and of Howell Harris in particular, was, as Harris himself said, '*a great means of furthering the work*'⁴¹. That said, we find that their unlikely friendship gradually dissolved as the 1740s progressed. Gwynne had met and joined forces with John and Charles Wesley, the leaders of the English 'Wesleyan' Methodists. This in itself caused Howell Harris some discomfort. When one of Howell Harris' own flock became curious about the Wesleys' views, he was

lectured by his master on the doctrines of Christian perfection and assurance, 'he having been tainted by poor Mr Wesley'⁴² and when Harris' own wife became inclined to follow the Wesleys' teachings, he confessed that he was 'sorely cut'⁴³. Harris was also beginning to suffer from the mental exhaustion that became a precursor to his separation from the mainstream Methodists and the rumours of his unusual relationship with Madam Griffiths of Cefnamlwch. Upon his return to Wales after a short tenure in Ludlow Gwynne became deeply concerned by the rumours of Harris' apparent derailment:

*'I believe it is above two years since I had the pleasure of seeing my truly respected friend Mr Howell Harris, but I have heard strange stories of him, which have given me more uneasiness than words can well express'*⁴⁴

These issues together contributed to a cooling of their friendship, although it was never fully extinguished.

In 1745 Marmaduke Gwynne was invited to the 2nd Methodist conference held by the Wesley brothers in Bristol. All the other attendees were active preachers, highlighting the regard with which Gwynne was now held in the Methodist community. In 1749, despite ferocious objections from his eldest son, Marmaduke's daughter Sally married Charles Wesley at Llanllywenfel parish church near Garth, forging a lasting tie with the pioneering evangelists. Sally became a powerful influence in English Methodism. Known for her admiration of George Whitefield, she helped steady the fragile friendship between the Wesleys and their Calvinist counterpart. She was widely respected in Methodist circles and after the death of her husband she even received a contribution towards her pension from William Wilberforce.⁴⁵

By 1745 Marmaduke Gwynne was nearly sixty years of age. Although he would provide assistance to the Wesley brothers in years to come his days as a servant to Welsh Methodism were over. Such was the momentum of the movement that he was no longer required; besides, Howell Harris had always been the vehicle for his involvement. With Harris' retirement to Trevecka he had very little sway with Daniel Rowland and the other leaders of the mainstream movement.

Gwynne and Harris had always been worlds apart in terms of wealth and status yet their passionate embrace of Christian evangelism tore through these social boundaries so

that, for many years, they enjoyed a close companionship. Gwynne used his wealth and power to defend the Methodist preachers and to further their cause. He should therefore be remembered as an important and influential figure in the early development of Methodism in Wales. Even after Harris' retirement amid rumours of an affair he and Gwynne came together one final time when they played their part in the foundation of the Breconshire Agricultural Society.⁴⁶

In his final years Marmaduke Gwynne suffered from poor health and when he died aged 77 in 1769 the memory of his valuable services to Christianity had already faded into obscurity. Howell Harris was casually informed of his passing by a local Vicar who wrote, 'Old Mr Gwynn of Garth was buried last Friday and Mr Howell Gwynn is very sad'⁴⁷.

Jason Evans

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