

## *Lady Llanover (1802-1896), ‘Gwenynen Gwent’\**

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It is no easy task to measure the historical significance of Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover (1802-96), often known by her bardic name of ‘Gwenynen Gwent’. She had what Professor Hywel Teifi Edwards has called a ‘genius for publicity’, which can be both dazzling and misleading.<sup>1</sup> Since she was the chief begetter of the ‘Welsh folk costume’, the organizer of a famous series of colourful eisteddfodau at Abergavenny from 1834 to 1853, and stubbornly went on patronizing the ancient Welsh harp throughout her long life, at a time when most Welsh people were going in for the piano and choirs, having more than enough wealth to indulge her whims and fancies, as Professor Edwards adds, to be rich enough to afford to be odd, she is in danger of being dismissed as a rich eccentric, whose role in Welsh culture was wholly decorative or ornamental. I hope to show that there was much more to her than meets the eye, and that her successes and failures were a good indicator of the ebb and flow of Victorian Welshness. Anybody who writes on Lady Llanover is deeply indebted to the articles of Maxwell Fraser (Mrs Edgar Phillips), who researched for many years for a full biography, but failed to find a publisher in the 1950s, and did the next best thing, by publishing her book in parts, in the *Transactions* of this Honourable Society,<sup>2</sup> but mainly in the *Journal* of the National Library of Wales.<sup>3</sup>

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\* Based on the presidential address delivered to the Honourable Society on 18 May 2006 at the British Academy, London, with Dr John Elliott, Chairman of the Council, in the chair

<sup>1</sup> H.T. Edwards, *Yr Eisteddfod* (Llandysul, 1976), 53.

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell Fraser, ‘Sir Benjamin Hall and the administration of London’, *Ante*, 1963, 70-81; idem, ‘Lord Llanover in London’, *Ante*, 1964, 69-92; idem, ‘Lady Llanover and her circle’, *Ante*, 1969, 70-96.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Fraser, ‘The Waddingtons of Llanover, 1791-1805’, *National Library of Wales Journal*, xi (1960), 285-329; idem, ‘The Halls of Pembrokeshire, ancestors of Benjamin Hall’, *ibid.*, xii (1961), 1-17; idem, ‘Benjamin Hall’s youth, 1802-1823’, *ibid.*, xii (1962), 250-64; idem, ‘The girlhood of Augusta Waddington, 1802-1823’, *ibid.*, xii (1962), 305-22; idem, ‘Young Mr and Mrs Hall, 1823-30’, *ibid.*, xiii (1963), 29-47; idem, ‘Benjamin and Augusta Hall, 1831-36’, *ibid.*, xiii (1964), 209-23; idem, ‘Benjamin Hall, MP for Marylebone, 1823-9’, *ibid.*, xiii (1964), 313-28; idem, ‘Sir Benjamin and Lady Hall, 1840-45’, *ibid.*, xiv (1965), 32-52; idem, ‘Sir Benjamin and Lady Hall, 1846-49’, *ibid.*, xiv (1965), 194-213; idem, ‘Sir Benjamin and Lady Hall at home in the 1850s’, *ibid.*, xiv (1965), 285-300; idem,

Her detractors often said that Lady Llanover was not Welsh, and even her own family taunted her for her Welsh enthusiasms when she was a child, but she was born Augusta Waddington at Tŷ Uchaf, Llanover, near Abergavenny, in 1802. Her father was a rich Midlands industrialist who had married Georgina Port, the niece of Mrs Delany, the famous bluestocking, who was the bosom friend of Queen Charlotte, a friendship which explains why Augusta was able to hobnob with royalty all her life. Indeed, Augusta in 1861-2 edited in six volumes the autobiography and correspondence of Mrs Delany. The original name of the Port family was Sparrow, and they were descendants of the Sparrows of Bodychen in Anglesey. No one could have been prouder than Augusta of a drop of Anglesey blood in her veins. Mr Waddington possibly came to Llanover in the early 1790s in order to be close to the new Monmouthshire canal, to profit from the economic opportunities it offered. He and his wife were friends of Sir Richard Colt Hoare and Archdeacon Coxe (author of a history of Monmouthshire), and they liked to take holidays in Edinburgh to take advantage of the intelligentsia of the Athens of the North. They also spent holidays in Europe once peace had returned after 1815, and in 1816 when in Rome, Augusta's sister Frances (eleven years her senior) married a young Prussian diplomat Charles Bunsen at the house of Berthold Niebuhr, the great scholar who was Prussian ambassador to Rome. Bunsen eventually became Prussian ambassador to London. Frances did not share her sister's Welsh enthusiasms, although she eventually learned Welsh, but her husband, usually known as Baron Bunsen, was a friend of German philologists and folklorists (such as the brothers Grimm) who were fascinated by Arthurian romanticism and by Celtic scholarship. The Bunsens acted as a link between the circle of Llanover and the larger world of continental scholarship.

In later life, Augusta said that what had ignited the flame of passion for things Welsh was one of her father's grooms, a Welsh speaker from the Abergavenny area, who took her out riding, lamenting as they rode the disappearance of Welsh from the district. Her first reaction was to give all her pets Welsh names, her dog was 'Ceidwad', her lambs and goats had names such as 'Pert Pert', 'Llygad Glas' and 'Neidwr'. Maxwell Fraser however emphasizes the influence upon Mrs Waddington (whom Augusta worshipped) of her friend Elizabeth Brown Greenly, Lady Coffin-Greenly, of Titley Court, just over the border from Presteigne. Her family had inherited lands in

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'The Halls at home in the 1850s', *ibid.*, xiv (1966), 437-50; *idem*, 'Sir Benjamin Hall in Parliament in the 1850s', *ibid.*, xv (1967), 72-88; *idem*, 'Sir Benjamin Hall in Parliament in the 1850s', *ibid.*, xv (1967), 113-26; *idem*, 'Sir Benjamin Hall in Parliament in the 1850s', *ibid.*, xv (1967), 310-24; *idem*, 'Sir Benjamin Hall in Parliament', *ibid.*, xv (1968), 389-404; 'Sir Benjamin Hall raised to the peerage', *ibid.*, xvi (1969), 23-42; *idem*, 'Lord and Lady Llanover, 1853-67', *ibid.*, xvi (1969), 105-22; *idem*, 'Lady Llanover's last years', *ibid.*, xvi (1969), 272-92.

Crickhowell and Cwmdru in Breconshire, and from visiting her tenants she evinced a deep romantic interest in the music and language of Wales, learned Welsh and entered the Gorsedd of Bards with the name of 'Llwydilas' (a pun on 'Brown Greenly'). Having met Iolo Morganwg in 1803, she paid a small annual subsidy to Iolo and his family from 1806 until he died in 1826. She also had a kindred spirit at Cwmdru, the vicar Thomas Price 'Carnhuanawc', the Welsh historian and leader of the eisteddfod movement in the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The interests and enthusiasms of Llwydilas and Carnhuanawc were so similar to those of Augusta that it must be assumed that they were the true begetters of her Welshness.

The Waddingtons were close friends with the Halls, another family of industrialists, who lived a few miles west up in the hills at Abercarn. Originally farmers from Daisyback at Gurfreston in Pembrokeshire, the Halls had risen in society during the eighteenth century, the Reverend Dr Benjamin Hall becoming Chancellor of Llandaff, and his son, also Benjamin Hall, becoming a London lawyer. Old Dr Hall had an interest in the Glamorgan canal, thereby becoming a friend of the great industrialist Richard Crawshay of Cyfarthfa, Merthyr. The younger Benjamin Hall married Crawshay's daughter, and the young couple were showered with gifts, lands in Ebbw Vale, Rhymni and Pontypridd and in 1808 the estate of Abercarn. Crawshay also bankrolled Benjamin Hall's political career as MP for Totnes and eventually for Glamorgan. Benjamin and his wife were in London when a son was born to them in 1802, and he was also given the name of Benjamin. Educated at Westminster and Oxford, the third Benjamin grew up without any real delight in industry, but wished to follow the political path taken by his father (who died tragically young). He sold off several of his industrial undertakings to finance his career as an MP first for Monmouthshire and eventually for St Marylebone in London, being given a baronetcy in 1838, becoming a minister in Palmerston's government, head of the Board of Health, then commissioner of the Board of Works in the 1850s and eventually ennobled as Lord Llanover of Abercarn. He was responsible for completing the great clock tower at Westminster, and since he was known in Parliament as 'Big Ben' because of his stature, the tower and clock were named after him. It was this able and spirited young man, and neighbour of the Waddingtons, who fell in love with Augusta and married her in 1822. Fortunately he shared many of his wife's enthusiasms, and there was never a cross word between them. He died in 1867, and her long widowhood lasted until 1896.

The young couple lived in various homes until Mr Waddington died in 1828, when they decided to take up residence at Tŷ Uchaf, Llanover, and having sold

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Williams 'Ysgafell', *The Literary Remains of the Reverend Thomas Price, Carnhuanawc* (2 vols, Llandovery, 1854-5).

off several industrial undertakings they used the money to buy up farms to create a landed estate. Tŷ Uchaf would be too small a house to welcome large numbers of guests, so they commissioned the architect Thomas Hopper (the architect of Penrhyn Castle and Margam Castle) to plan a new house (in a Tudor or Jacobean style) at Llanover which was not to be completed until 1837. People soon realized that the house parties would be rather unusual, for in addition to neighbouring gentry families and political friends from Westminster, they welcomed enthusiasts for things Welsh and Celtic. It is possible that Lady Greenly persuaded them to go in September 1826 to the eisteddfod in Brecon. This was held under the auspices of the Brecon Cymreigyddion, one of many such patriotic cultural societies which had sprung up, many of them in places such as Blaenafon and Nantyglo, since the end of the wars in 1815.<sup>5</sup> Augusta found herself bowled over by two things at Brecon, the passionately Welsh oratory of Carnhuanawc, and the harpistry of John Jones of Dolgellau on the triple harp. They appointed him as their household harpist, and when he died suddenly in 1844, he was replaced by Thomas Gruffudd of Tredegar. They went to many eisteddfodau all over south Wales, and when a group of friends and neighbours (under the aegis of Carnhuanawc) started the Cymreigyddion or Cambrian Society at Abergavenny in 1833, they became enthusiastic members.<sup>6</sup> Their purpose was to encourage the use of Welsh in education, and to hold eisteddfodau. Augusta at this point came to the attention of the Welsh at large, because she competed in the Cardiff Royal Eisteddfod of 1834, winning a prize for her essay on the importance of the preservation of the Welsh language and the wearing of national costumes.<sup>7</sup> Carnhuanawc seems to have been interested in national costumes, for example, in those of the Bretons. Augusta had for some time been collecting specimens of Welsh tweeds and woollens, and indeed had made watercolour sketches of women in various parts wearing their characteristic dresses. She now published her prize essay together with a set of illustrations of these costumes, arguing that costumes were a natural part of distinctive nationality and that wearing native woollen costumes would not only be picturesque but also discourage Welshwomen from importing cottons and calicoes from Lancashire or India or other parts.<sup>8</sup> She herself devised a homogenized version of these costumes which she presented as 'the national costume', which she herself frequently wore, of the woollen *pais* and *betgwn*,

<sup>5</sup> Sian Rhiannon Williams, *Oes y Byd i'r Iaith Gymraeg: y Gynraeg yn ardal ddiwydiannol sir Fynwy yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1992); idem, 'Y Gymraeg yn Sir Fynwy ddiwydiannol c. 1800-1901', in G.H., Jenkins (ed.), *Iaith Carreg fy Aelwyd: iaith a Chymuned yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1998), 187-223.

<sup>6</sup> Mair Elvet Thomas, *Afaith yng Ngwent* (Caerdydd, 1978) for the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society.

<sup>7</sup> Clive Betts, *A Oedd Heddwch?* (Caerdydd, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> Ffransys Payne, *Welsh Peasant Costume* (Cardiff, 1964), esp. 7-8.

together with a great red cloak and a tall black hat, and which she insisted that her female friends and guests should wear, and she would also give such costumes as prizes in the schools under her patronage. The devising of 'national costume' was an interest of several countries in the romantic age, in Sir Walter Scott's Scotland, in Switzerland and Germany, and in many Slavonic countries as well. It is remarkable with what swiftness this idealized 'Welsh costume' was accepted as a symbol of Wales. Even as early as the 1840s engravings and lithographs of versions of Augusta's costumes were being sold all over Wales.

The other feature which made Augusta well known in 1834 was her induction into the Gorsedd of Bards with the pseudonym of 'Gwenynen Gwent' (Bee of Monmouthshire). Most have supposed that the name referred to her industriousness, but maybe her enemies felt that it was from her ability to sting when necessary. She was frequently known as Mrs Hall or Lady Hall (and eventually Lady Llanover), – but the Welsh often referred to her as 'Gwenynen'. The other feature of her prize essay was its insistence on the importance of the Welsh language. She must have had help to translate her essay into Welsh, for although she spoke Welsh to her servants, she was not able to write it. She studied Welsh carefully and was an assiduous purchaser of all Welsh books, she and her husband founded bilingual schools, surrounded themselves with Welsh staff in the house and on the estate, indeed, imported monoglot staff from remote parts of Wales, making sure they had Welsh services either in the house or in a local chapel – she herself went only to the Welsh service in the church in the afternoon – and insisted on Welsh signs on public buildings such as the post office at Llanover. She ran her household on what she considered to be Welsh lines, celebrating old folk customs such as the Mari Lwyd, or decorating the graves on Palm Sunday, collecting Welsh recipes and serving things like leek soup and toasted cheese and Welsh cakes at table, getting the servants to dance the Llanover Reel – she was unique in her interest in preserving Welsh folk dances.<sup>9</sup>

The Cymreigyddion Society of Abergavenny, within a year of its foundation in 1833, had begun a series of eisteddfodau which were held more or less without a break annually until 1853, when the society came to an end. Here at last was a platform for Gwenynen Gwent's genius for publicity. She and her husband devoted great energy to the meetings, lavished over two and a half thousand pounds on prizes, and drew in the local gentry for miles around as patrons, Sir Charles Morgan of Tredegar for example was given the title of 'Ifor Hael' because descended from the medieval patron Ifor Hael of

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<sup>9</sup> W.S. Gwynn Williams, *The Llanover Welsh Reel* (Llangollen, 1944).

Gwernyclepa. She gave thought and care to the elaborate ceremonies, in particular the pageant of the opening of the festival. In 1848 there was a procession of over four hundred carriages bowling through Abergavenny, and in the last ceremony in 1853, the procession was headed by a huge metal leek, followed by floats with such displays as a printer at his press busily dashing off greetings to the president of the festival, and weavers busily turning out Welsh tweed, and all the horses caparisoned and footmen and runners all in the green and silver livery of the society. An immense hall (the largest public building in Monmouthshire) was built for the Cymreigyddion, and even then, Benjamin Hall as president had to squeeze in through a window, such was the throng.

There were prizes for folksongs and penillion singing and harp playing, for collections of native tweed patterns and Welsh beaver hats. The poetry gaining prizes at Abergavenny probably had little lasting value – Talhaiarn, for example, won a prize for an ode on 'The Beauty and Usefulness of Whitewashing Houses in Wales'. But many prize essays on Welsh affairs or history were published in journals such as *Seren Gomer* or *Y Traethodydd*, and several of the prize essays were pioneering works by Carl Meyer and Albert Schultz on the connexion between Welsh literature and that of the Continent. William Roberts 'Nefydd' of Blaina published his essay *Crefydd yr Oesoedd Tywyll* in 1852, a pioneering work of folklore study. Lady Greenly in 1837 offered a prize for a collection of folksongs which was won by Maria Jane Williams, 'Llinos', of Aberpergwm, which was published in 1844 under the title *Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morganwg*, dedicated to Queen Victoria. Llinos was worried lest a collection of Welsh words would be unacceptable to the Queen, but Gwenynen insisted upon them, and we may all be grateful to her for this, the first collection of Welsh airs with Welsh words to be published.<sup>10</sup> Just as epoch-making was the essay in 1849 by the young Merthyr chemist Thomas Stephens on medieval Welsh literature, published in 1853 as *The Literature of the Kymry*, which opened a new age in Welsh literary criticism.

One of Gwenynen's friends, J.C. Pritchard, had shown the definite connexion of the Celtic languages with the Indo-European family of languages, and so it was not surprising that she should have reflected this by inviting Indian writers to stay at Llanover for the eisteddfod, and perhaps the high point of the whole series was reached in 1838 with the arrival at Abergavenny of a Breton delegation (with the approval of King Louis-Philippe) led by the young Breton viscount Hersart de la Villemarqué. He was

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Huws, 'Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morganwg', *National Library of Wales Journal*, xv (1967), 31-54.

thrilled to be received into the Gorsedd of Bards – the *corn hirlas* or medieval style goblet which Gwenynen had designed to mark the occasion is still a prized possession of the Villemarqué family in Brittany – and he returned home imbued with a passion to publicize the traditional ballads or bardistry of his own country, published as *Barzaz Breiz* in 1839, a book which had an Ossianic fame across Europe, translated into many European languages.<sup>11</sup>

It is not clear why the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion came to an end in 1853. It is surely significant that Carnhuanawc had been a driving force, and had died in 1848. Her friend Sir Josiah Guest of Dowlais died in 1853 and his wife Lady Charlotte Guest, for whom Gwenynen had helped find John Jones, 'Tegid', as a Welsh tutor, someone who could help her produce her epoch-making edition of *The Mabinogion*, found herself running the greatest ironworks in the world single-handed. She then married her children's tutor, Charles Schreiber, and moved away to Dorset, cutting herself off from Welsh culture. Gwenynen found it hard to forgive such a desertion. But Gwenynen and her husband were spending far more time in London in the 1850s, with Benjamin Hall pursuing an important political career. Various eisteddfodau were founded which were rivals, and some of the society's work was being done by other societies (founded by Gwenynen and her friends) such as the Cambrian Archaeological Association in 1840; and the Welsh Manuscripts Society, founded in 1837, published several remarkable works.<sup>12</sup> But it may be that underlying its sad demise in 1853 was the growing tension in Welsh society, a growing strain in the relations of gentry and the lower orders, between Church and Chapel, and between the two languages. 'Nationality' was one of Gwenynen's watchwords, but her friend Vaughan of Courtfield had attacked 'Welsh nationality' even at an eisteddfod, and Augustus Morgan of Machen (brother of her friend Sir Charles) had attacked Welsh as a dangerous language aiding insurgency against the state.

One of the clearest indications of this tension was the furore over the publication in 1847 of the reports (government Blue Books) of the three commissioners on Welsh education, known as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* ('Treason of the Blue Books') from a satirical play on the commission written by Robert Jones, Derfel, in 1854.<sup>13</sup> The government commissioner for south east Wales had sneered at the Welshness of the schools founded by Gwenynen Gwent and her husband and those run by Carnhuanawc. Carnhuanawc, by

<sup>11</sup> Francis Gourvil, *Theodore-Claude-Henri Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815-1895) et le Barzaz Breiz 1839, 1845, 1867* (Rennes, 1959); and Donatien Laurent, *Aux Sources du Barzaz Breiz, la mémoire d'un peuple* (Douarnenez, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> For example, J. Rees (ed.), *Liber Landavensis* (Llandoverly, 1840) and S.R. Meyrick (ed.), *Heraldic Visitations of Wales (of Lewys Dwnn)*, (Llandoverly, 2 vols., 1846).

<sup>13</sup> Prys Morgan (ed.), *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (Llandysul, 1991).

then in declining health, counter-attacked vigorously. Another friend, the historian Jane Williams 'Ysgafell' published a searing attack on the commission entitled *Artegall*, published in 1848, another friend, Sir Thomas Phillips of Newport published a long and substantial attack in the form of an analysis of Welsh history and society in 1849, and yet another friend, Evan Jones 'Ieuan Gwynedd', a Welsh Independent minister of Tredegar who became a journalist in Newport, also attacked the commissioners with several hard-hitting booklets, and through his work for the Cardiff journal *The Principality*, attacked the commissioners with a series of satirical cartoons.<sup>14</sup> One of the aspects of the infamous 'Blue Books' which gave most offence was the attack on Welsh women for their immorality and slatternliness. To try to combat this, Gwenynen in 1850 paid Ieuan Gwynedd to set up a journal for Welsh women, *Y Gymraes*, which would teach them good morality and housekeeping. For the rest of her life she remained a stickler for hygiene and morality amongst her neighbours and tenantry. In the play *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* by the radical firebrand Robert Jones, 'Derfel', it is striking that while the gentry and nobility of Wales are in general pilloried as a class entirely lacking pro-Welsh feelings, an exception is made for 'Hall and Gwenynen Gwent', both of them loved by the Welsh, she in particular being admired for her angelic face.<sup>15</sup>

Hall and Gwenynen were tolerant low-church Whigs, who were prepared to give financial help even to dissenting chapels as long as they encouraged Welsh, but their most cherished hope was to create a powerful pro-Welsh lobby inside the Anglican church in Wales. George IV had founded a college at Lampeter in 1822 to provide a learned clergy, but the Halls despaired at the lack of any Welsh zeal, and were particularly angered by the hostility of Connop Thirlwall, Bishop of St David's, when they tried to set up a well-endowed professorship of Welsh at the college, with the money of a wealthy friend called (yet again) Thomas Phillips. Gwenynen then diverted Phillips's fortune from Lampeter, bought land at Llandovery, and in 1847, founded the 'Welsh Collegiate Institution' there, now known as Llandovery College, a boarding school in which Welsh would be a core subject in the curriculum.<sup>16</sup> Gwenynen did her best to appoint Welsh scholars to livings in Wales, and so was accused by her detractors of organizing a 'Llanover Party' within the church. In the same period Benjamin Hall was active in providing Welsh services for the London Welsh, buying the church of St Etheldreda's, Ely Place in 1844 for that purpose, and it remained in use until 1874 when services were

<sup>14</sup> Idem, 'Pictures for the Million of Wales, 1848: the Political Cartoons of Hugh Hughes', *Ante*, NS, i (1995), 65-80.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Jones Derfel, *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (Rhuthun, 1854), 50.

<sup>16</sup> W. Gareth Evans, *The History of Llandovery College* (Llandovery, 1981).



moved elsewhere. This fulfilled at last the dream of so many of the eighteenth-century Cymmrodorion for a Welsh church in the capital. Benjamin Hall decided in 1854 to provide a chapel of ease for his Welsh-speaking tenants on his estate at Abercarn, part of the vast mountainous parish of Mynyddislwyn.<sup>17</sup> He and Gwenynen designed a small Gothic church and also a vicarage which they called Persondy, and paid for an incumbent. By 1862, however, tensions had grown, and the church authorities insisted on some English services at the chapel. The Halls' reaction was sudden and decisive; the chapel was closed, Gwenynen handed it over to the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, on condition that they held services with a preacher wearing clerical dress and using a version ('The Use of Abercarn') of the Book of Common Prayer which she herself devised, and of course, all in Welsh. As if this situation were not odd enough, Gwenynen's only daughter Augusta became a Catholic on marrying John Jones of Llanarth, and after her mother's death in 1896 continued the patronage of the chapel.

It is striking that the Halls chose for the motto of their coat of arms the Welsh proverb '*Ni ddaw da o hir arofyf*' ('No good comes of long intending', or in short, 'don't dawdle'), and it should be remembered that while they were hard at work with all the projects mentioned above, they were active on other fronts. In 1853 they purchased from the widow of Taliesin ab Iolo (the son of Iolo Morganwg) Iolo's collection of manuscripts, including those of Iolo's own composition, and preserved them at Llanover Court, welcoming any scholar thither who wished to study them. One who took advantage of their welcome was the Revd John Williams 'Ab Ithel', who used Iolo's notes to prove his own bardic and druidic theories in several weird volumes. In 1865 they led a campaign for a national Welsh memorial to Prince Albert, and persuaded the authorities of Tenby to erect the statue (by their friend the sculptor John Evan Thomas) on the hill above Tenby harbour, where it still stands on a plinth carved with Welsh national motifs. Gwenynen was active as an author herself, editing in six volumes the works of her kinswoman Mrs Delany, and also editing in 1867 her own collection of recipes in *Good Cookery* – her recipe for Welsh salt duck is to be found in many recipe books today, but she also publicized Welsh cakes, which she called *Teisen Frau* – and she also helped Jane Williams 'Ysgafell' publish a book for children called *The Paper People*, Gwenynen providing the delightful illustrations. Her frenzied industry had always been a useful distraction, probably, from thinking of the death of both her sons, one at the age of nineteen, and now she had to find a distraction from the death of Benjamin Hall, Lord Llanover in 1867, as the result of a hunting accident. In a sense, she carried on, busy and active into old age, and yet one

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<sup>17</sup> The Welsh poet, William Thomas, 'Islwyn', was the son of the Llanover estate mineral agent, and it was Gwenynen who suggested to him his bardic name, from the parish name of Mynyddislwyn, hence the subsequent popularity of the forename 'Islwyn'.

is forced to the conclusion that perhaps from the mid-1850s, certainly from 1860 onwards, she was finding more and more resistance to her schemes of Welshness.

Her enemies in the Church had complained of the 'Llanover Party', and in a sense, there had been a Llanover Party running Welsh culture for several decades in the first half of the nineteenth century, literary and patriotic parsons and gentry, such as Carnhuanawc and Gwenynen Gwent, and their ideal was a romantic Wales where all classes lived in harmony, sustaining ancient traditions of continuity, and keeping the excessive influences of the modern world at bay. As a young married woman, Augusta had defended her Welshness by saying that the Welsh were good simple people, corrupted by mail coaches, canal boats, Irish vagabonds and industrial forges run by depraved persons.<sup>18</sup> With all its emphasis on picturesque costume and ceremonial, and encouragement of folk dances and traditional harp music, there is an inescapably 'Ruritanian' atmosphere in Gwenynen Gwent's Welshness. While it was acceptable and successful in the period from the 1830s to the 1850s, it was no longer so in the latter half of the century. Wales itself was changing very rapidly.<sup>19</sup> To put it simply, it was becoming an industrialized country, aware since the Religious Census of 1851 that it was becoming a Nonconformist country, political radicalism was advancing, and would make itself prominent after the election of 1868. After the outburst of nationalistic anger over the insults of the Blue Books of 1847 had died down, many of the Welsh realized that they were obliged, as subjects of the British Empire, to learn English in order to get on in life, and adopt English patterns of thought and action if they were to share in that Empire's undoubted progress. Hywel Teifi Edwards, in his study of the series of national eisteddfodau stretching from 1858 to 1868, has shown that positivism and progressivism became ruling forces even in Welsh native culture.<sup>20</sup> Gwenynen Gwent was furious at the new obsession with the pianoforte and choral singing, unable to comprehend the hostility of respectable opinion towards folk dancing, the triple harp and penillion singing. She tried to finance a national protest-eisteddfod at Neath in 1866, 'Eisteddfod y Cymry', offering a prize for a poem on '*Disgynyddion Dic Sion Dafydd*' ('The Descendants of Dic Sion Dafydd', that is, grovelling Anglophiles), but the eisteddfod was a failure. She also tried the following year to restore the old Celtic enthusiasm she had enjoyed in 1838 by sending a delegation led by her

<sup>18</sup> Maxwell Fraser, art. cit., *N.L.W.J.* xiii (1963), 29-47.

<sup>19</sup> Prys Morgan, 'Early Victorian Wales and its crisis of identity', in L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c. 1750-c.1850* (Manchester, 1997), 93-109.

<sup>20</sup> H.T. Edwards, *Gwyl Gwalia: yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol yn Oes Aur Victoria, 1858-1868* (Llandysul, 1980).

harpist to St Brieuc in Brittany, but this led to nothing. She always maintained to the end of her life her loyalty to the triple harp, fighting a rearguard action against the progressivists in the Eisteddfod world, organizing harp festivals at Swansea in 1883 and at Caerwys in 1886. By this period she appeared to many Welsh leaders as an irrelevance, something of an old nuisance, an eccentric survivor from an age long past.<sup>21</sup>

The old lady was despised even by the institutions she had set up. At Llandovery College in June 1875, they looked for a new warden, and Lady Llanover was expected to interview the possible candidates. A.G. Edwards, a native of Llanymawddwy, and later bishop of St Asaph and Archbishop of Wales, was sent to Llanover, having polished what Welsh he had as best he could. Towards the end of the interview, she asked him whether he would require refreshment, and he replied that he had already had some from the *penrulliad* (he recalled the name from the story of Joseph in the Old Testament), and since she was strangely ignorant of the Welsh word for 'butler', she was suddenly deeply impressed with his commitment to Welshness, and offered him the wardenship. Fatefully, his intention was to turn Llandovery into a model English public school, and within a few years all her work was undone, her prizes for Welsh cast into oblivion, and though she was incandescent with fury, she could do nothing about her own appointment. The story is symptomatic of the way Wales had changed between the 1840s and the 1870s. It is nevertheless true that she always welcomed new faces at Llanover and guests enjoyed themselves there throughout her life, and a 'second Llanover circle' as it were, gathered there, musicians such as Brinley Richards and Joseph Parry (despite their liking for piano and organ), the Calvinist Principal of Trevecka College, David Charles, the Celtic scholars Sir John Rhys and D. Silvan Evans – indeed, Gwenynen paid for the publication of several parts of Silvan's massive Welsh dictionary. She carried on trying to influence Welsh life, sustained by two lively companions, Betha Johnes of Dolau Cothi and Caroline Lucas of Uplands, Swansea. She successfully bombarded Mr Gladstone in 1882 with letters to browbeat him into appointing a Welsh-speaker to the bishopric of Llandaff in 1882.<sup>22</sup> But she herself had changed her Whiggish opinions a good deal, and by 1885 was advising her friends and tenants, that, although they had freedom to vote according to their own consciences, they should support the Conservatives in the election of 1885. In her 'proclamation' she said they should all defend the Established Church, and eschew all moves towards excessive education for the lower orders, and so support Mr Rolls of The Hendre in his candidacy. It was an

<sup>21</sup> Rachel Ley, *Arglwyddes Llanover, Gwenynen Gwent* (Bangor, 2001) is excellent on Gwenynen's contribution to Welsh music.

<sup>22</sup> W. Gibson, 'Gladstone and the Llandaff Vacancy of 1882-3', *Ante*, 1987, 105-12.

imperious policy which extended on the Llanover estate well into the 1920s and 30s.<sup>23</sup> Despite her support for the Church, she was always interested in popular and dissenting religion, and once, when staying in Abercarn, was anxious to hear Charles Haddon Spurgeon preaching to a vast open-air preaching convention on the mountain top above the Ebbw valley. Hundreds were standing, crowding around the famous preacher, with Lady Llanover sitting in her carriage, accompanied by grooms and footmen. Spurgeon is said to have come up to her, looked her straight in the eye, saying that he preached to men and women, and not to horses, staring fixedly at her until he forced her to alight and stand shoulder to shoulder with the vast crowd. It says much for him, but also for her, since she did as she was told.<sup>24</sup>

When she died in 1896, Betha Johnes wrote to Norman McColl to say that 'At the age of 94 she died as she had lived, a worker'.<sup>25</sup> She cannot but have been saddened to see the rapid disintegration of Welsh life in Monmouthshire under the impossible pressures of huge immigration into the industrial and agricultural areas from nearby English counties, Ireland, and elsewhere. It was a bitter disappointment to Lady Llanover that her daughter Augusta had married a Catholic, eagerly embraced Catholicism, but at least she in her turn maintained the Welsh traditions of Llanover into the twentieth century. It was she, for example, who paid for the publication of that bible of the art of penillion-singing, *Llyfr Cerdd Dannau* by Robert Griffith in 1902. Even after the death of 'Gwenynen Gwent yr Ail', her sons Arthur and Ivor Caradog Herbert (later Lord Treowen) also maintained the old traditions. They invited the National Eisteddfod to Abergavenny in 1913, holding the ceremonies of the Gorsedd of Bards at the stones in Llanover set there long ago by Carnhuanawc and Gwenynen. It was the briefest of Indian Summers for the romantic Welshness of Gwenynen Gwent. Lord Treowen was a keen supporter of the new National Library and in 1916 deposited the Iolo Morganwg papers in the Library, thus by chance enabling Griffith John Williams to start studying them there in 1917. Lord Treowen's heir Elidir Herbert was killed during the Great War – he is commemorated in the estate of houses at Tref Elidir in Llanover village – and, after Lord Treowen's death in 1934, the family decided in 1936 to demolish Llanover Court, having put most of its contents on sale. Although the Herbert family withdrew into the old house of Tŷ Uchaf (where Lady Llanover was born), many of the remaining furnishings of Llanover Court were put into a warehouse in Cardiff docks, where they were destroyed by a Nazi bomb in the Second World War. It was as if fate were determined to destroy everything associated with her.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Herbert Jones, *His Lordship's Obedient Servant: recollections of a South Wales Borderer* (Llandysul, 1987), 134-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell Fraser, art. cit., *Ante*, (1969), 170-96.

Yet she is not forgotten, and there is a *Cymdeithas Gwenynen Gwent* (the Gwenynen Gwent Society) devoted to the study of her life and work, which meets at Llanover and at Abergavenny, and there is also a *Cymdeithas Carnhuanawc* (the Carnhuanawc Society) which commemorates the work of Thomas Price, Carnhuanawc, and his work for Welsh history. On a purely picturesque and decorative level, Welsh schoolgirls don her 'Welsh costume' or a version of it, for Saint David's Day. But on a more profound level, her life repays examination because it typifies in many ways the enthusiasms of the age of romanticism in Wales, its love of the eisteddfod and bardism and Celticism, its attempt to encourage education in the Welsh language, and generally its love of history. By contrast, Lady Llanover's lack of success in her later years also illustrates in a negative way the quite different concerns of later Victorian Wales in the age of industrialism, nonconformity and radicalism, and its lack of concern for the reactionary romanticism typified by Llanover. But there has been a new enthusiasm for her achievement in the late twentieth century because of a revival of interest in things such as *Cymreictod gweladwy* ('Visible Welshness') as the Archdruid Robyn Léwis would put it; also in Welsh traditional harp music, and in Welsh education. Even in anglicized Monmouthshire, a Welsh school was opened several years ago at her home patch of Cwmcarn, and even one called *Ysgol y Ffin* ('School of the Border') on the borders of Gloucestershire near the Severn Bridge. Many of her concerns long ago are now seen as our concerns today.