

## Plas Beddowe(n): The Mansion of Owain's Grave

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The disappearance of Owain Glyn Dŵr in 1415 is probably the most celebrated unsolved mystery in the history of Wales. His revolt against the English crown and his struggle to establish an independent Welsh state with its own native prince, language, government, church and universities is well documented. R. R. Davies' comprehensive study of Owain in his historical context, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (1995),<sup>1</sup> is a magnificent sequel to Sir John Lloyd's seminal book of 1931.<sup>2</sup> However, when it comes to the death of Owain and the location of his final resting place there is practically no reliable contemporary documentary evidence.

The most popular account tells how Owain became a fugitive and eventually took refuge with his daughter at Monnington Straddel where he died and is buried.<sup>3</sup> This account is given some credibility because his daughter, Alice, did indeed marry John Scudamore and live at Monnington,<sup>4</sup> although this place has been confused with Monnington-on-Wye, a different village.<sup>5</sup> Other places claimed as the burial ground include Valle Crucis Abbey, the ancestral burial place of Owain's family, Bangor Cathedral, and numerous others. Sadly, it seems that no-one can provide incontrovertible documentary evidence for any of these places. A study of the sources published by J. R. S. Phillips in 1972 includes previously unconsidered fifteenth-century Welsh manuscripts in the National Library of Wales and the Bodleian Library.<sup>6</sup> These, quite independently of each other, record a tradition of very early date that Owain Glyn Dŵr died in September 1415, and the study concludes, 'there seems to

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- 1 J. E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower: Owen Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).
- 2 R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 3 T. Carte, *A General History of England from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1654* (London, 1747-55), vol. 2.
- 4 *Inquisitions and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids, 1284-1431* (London: HMSO, 1899-1920), vol. 2, p. 410.
- 5 G. Hodges, *Owain Glyn Dŵr: The War of Independence in the Welsh Borders* (Logaston: Almeley, 1995), p. 163.
- 6 J. R. S. Phillips, 'When Did Owain Glyndŵr Die?', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 24 (1972), 59-77.

be no evidence to make such a date impossible'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this is concordant with the offer of a royal pardon to Owain in July 1415<sup>8</sup> and a similar offer made to Owain's son, Meredudd, in February 1416 which, significantly, makes no mention of Owain.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, from internal evidence it can be deduced that one of the manuscripts (Peniarth MS 26) was written in the area around Oswestry, Owain's home district. But no mention is made of his burial.<sup>10</sup>

The other contemporary source is the chronicle of Adam of Usk, an ecclesiastical lawyer and a monk who, as a supporter of Owain, had ambitions to become Bishop of Llandaff when Owain was in power.<sup>11</sup> He was eventually granted a royal pardon at the instance of David Holbach, a descendant of the ancient princes of Powys who lived at Dudleston and was the founder of Oswestry School.<sup>12</sup> Under the year 1415 he makes the following entry:

After four years in hiding, from the king and the realm, Owen Glendower died, and was buried by his followers in the darkness of night. His grave was discovered by his enemies, however, so he had to be re-buried, though it is impossible to discover where he was laid.<sup>13</sup>

This statement suggests that only his closest followers knew the final resting place of Owain Glyn Dŵr and it follows therefore that this would be a carefully chosen spot in land held by one of them. The search has always been directed towards Owain's daughters, especially Alice, but as yet no other members of his family circle have been considered. It seems reasonable to assume, given that the first offer of a royal pardon was made to Owain and the second to his son Meredudd, that members of the family were sheltering them. The Hanmer brothers had been among Owain's most loyal supporters right from the beginning, which is not surprising when it is considered that their father, an eminent lawyer and justice of the king's bench, had made it possible for Owain to have the same legal training as his sons in London and had given him his daughter's hand in marriage.<sup>14</sup> Some indication of the strength of this family bond can be seen when, on the death of Sir David Hanmer in 1387, his family made Owain one of the feoffes (a trustee) of his estate.<sup>15</sup> Two of the

7 Ibid., p. 72.

8 *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry IV and Henry V, 1399-1422* (London: HMSO, 1903-11), p. 342.

9 Ibid., p. 404.

10 Phillips, 'When did Owain Glyndŵr Die?', p. 65.

11 *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. by C. Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

12 Lloyd, *Owen Glendower*, p. 139; *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society* (hereafter TSAHS), Series 1, 5, 238.

13 Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, September 1415.

14 Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, p. 137.

15 J. Conway Davies, 'Some Owen Glyndwr Documents', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 3 (1943-44), 48-50.

Hanmer brothers, Gruffudd and Philip, were at his side to proclaim him Prince of Wales at Glyn Dyfrdwy on 16 September 1400 and all three fulfilled the most trusted duties throughout the long campaign for Welsh independence.<sup>16</sup> John Hanmer and Gruffudd Young were sent as ambassadors to the King of France to conclude an alliance in May 1404,<sup>17</sup> and when John was captured in 1405 the single greatest fine (500 marks) of the entire war was imposed on him, reducing him, so he claimed, to poverty.<sup>18</sup> Even in Owain's final year, when all was lost, Philip Hanmer was in Paris pleading Owain's cause to the bitter end.<sup>19</sup> The Hanmers, then, are certainly strong candidates to have been among 'the followers', mentioned by Adam of Usk, who were responsible for the secret reburial of Owain. Another candidate would have been John Kynaston of the Stocks, brother-in-law to Angharad, Sir David Hanmer's wife, and, like Owain, descended from the princes of Powys.<sup>20</sup> John Kynaston was brought before the King's Bench for his part in the uprising of 1400, the record of which gives us the details of the proclamation by which Owain was given the title of 'prince' in September 1400.

Immediately afterwards, Owain and his hastily-assembled army proceeded along the border, reaching Oswestry on 22 September 1400 where they were joined by John Kynaston, 'arrayed in horse and armour for war, and a companion, William Hunte, likewise arrayed with a shield, sword, bow and arrows'.<sup>21</sup> Here they set fire to the suburbs of the town, and it is thought that this event is preserved in the place-name Pentre Poeth, the Burnt Hamlet.<sup>22</sup> John Kynaston was indicted in the Court of the King's Bench with aiding and abetting the rebellion of Owain Glyn Dŵr. He had been seen in 'war-like guise' at a number of places, including Oswestry, which evidently was at that time outside the jurisdiction of English law because Kynaston's plea to this effect was upheld. However, Kynaston was imprisoned in Windsor Castle until a number of his supporters, including the lord of the manor, raised £100 bail. The indictment was then changed to include Oteley, near Ellesmere, a place that, although over the border, was not one where Kynaston, although he had met there with Owain Glyn Dŵr, had broken the law. His plea was again upheld.<sup>23</sup> A manuscript in the Shropshire Archives states that the boundary of Wales was at that time marked with a stone on the Oswestry road three miles out of Ellesmere.<sup>24</sup> Later, Kynaston had to obtain a royal pardon for coercing

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16 The National Archives, *Coram Rege Rolls*, K827/560.

17 Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, p. 192.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 305.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

21 *Coram Rege Rolls*, K827/560 & 565.

22 J. E. Lloyd, 'Presidential Address', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 78 (1923), 195-210 (p. 206).

23 *Coram Rege Rolls*, K827/560.

24 Shropshire Archives, 6001/3.

the tenants of Ellesmere, Hampton and Colemere to support Hotspur at the Battle of Shrewsbury.<sup>25</sup> This act, in defiance of the lord of the manor's order, demonstrates not only his familial allegiance to Owain but also to Hotspur.<sup>26</sup> Other supporters from Ellesmere were later prosecuted for supplying Owain with provisions during the campaign.<sup>27</sup>

The estates of Philip and Gruffudd were both confiscated but John Hanmer and John Kynaston managed to recover theirs.<sup>28</sup> Between the ancient Hanmer estate and that of Kynaston at the Stocks, Welshampton, is a lowland area called Bradenheath overlooking which is the original site of the village, a high flat hill, still known as Old Hampton. Since the fourteenth century it had been in the lordship of the Lestranges of Knockin. Adjoining this, on a smaller steep-sided hill, is a farm known today as Bank Farm, but until the nineteenth century it was called Plas Beddowe. John Kynaston's house at the Stocks is clearly visible on one side and the Hanmer estate at Bettisfield on the other. Ancient tracks linking Plas Beddowe with the Stocks and Hanmer are still traceable through the fields.<sup>29</sup> The Hammers held Plas Beddowe at least as far back as the early fifteenth century and, if we accept that a feoffment (conveyance) for 'the chief messuage in Hampton' in the Bettisfield Manuscripts in the National Library of Wales, dated 1346, refers to the same place, probably a long time before that.<sup>30</sup> The terms 'chief messuage' and 'plas', usually translated as 'mansion', seem to be describing the same thing. The earliest rent roll (in the Shropshire Archives), dating to when the manor of Hampton came into the estates of the Earl of Derby by marriage in the early fifteenth century, instructs the agent, 'Sir Thomas Hanmer withholdeth my lord of a tenement named place Beddowe it be that the survey have found out [...] Search the auditors booke and other records how many Sir Thomas Hammers Ancestors pay for chief rent.' The result of the enquiry is recorded later:

The rent thereof was always in the Kynnastons tyme, when the same was Stuart there, payd to my lords officers handes and the sayd tenement called place beddowe was in old Mr Hammers hands that dwelt at Hampton and after inquiry hands of Sir Thomas Hammers brother or one of his name and so continued there.<sup>31</sup>

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25 *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1399-1422*, 27 September 1404.

26 [No author], 'Pedigree of the Family of Kynaston', *Montgomery Collections* 15 (1882), 1-26 (p. 3); Shropshire Archives 2879, p. 370, note 1.

27 E. G. Kimball (ed.), *The Shropshire Peace Roll: 1400-1414* (Salop County Council, 1959), p. 68 (no. 59).

28 Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, p. 312.

29 B. Hall and C. Thomas, unpublished information given to the author.

30 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Bettisfield MS 1675.

31 Shropshire Archives, 212/345/1.

Before the end of the century, John Hanmer was paying rent and a lease dated 1604 allows Lord Hanmer control over the tenancy of Plas Beddowe.<sup>32</sup> Thus we have a record of Hanmer occupation of Plas Beddowe back to Kynaston's stewardship of Maelor Saesneg and Ellesmere (John Kynaston regained this post after his pardon in 1404).<sup>33</sup>

The name Plas Beddowe is interesting in that while the usual translation from the Welsh is 'Beddow's Mansion' it could very possibly be 'Plas Beddowe(n)', i.e. 'Owain's grave'. The name first appears in connection with the Hanmers after Owain's death. Before that time it is identified as 'the chief messuage in Hampton' without any reference to a name. Then, as we have seen, the property remained in their control for centuries. This raises the question: what was Sir Thomas Hanmer's interest in a property that lay outside his own manor and across the border? Furthermore, the existence of the lease granting tenancy rights there in 1604 suggests that there was a reason for having it drawn up. One possible reason is that Plas Beddowe formed then, as it still does, a geographical link between the Kynaston and Hanmer estates.

Further investigation of the Hanmer/Kynaston connection with Welshampton reveals that during the turmoil of the Reformation a case was heard in the court of Chancery concerning the collection of tithes by the chaplain of Hampton and George Kynaston, the patron. Sir Thomas Hanmer, who acquired the patronage in the process, made representation on their behalf.<sup>34</sup> He presented a Welsh-speaking priest in 1636<sup>35</sup> and eventually the advowson of the chapelry reverted to Edward Kynaston of Oatley,<sup>36</sup> a direct descendant of John Kynaston of Stocks who had built it in 1391<sup>37</sup> and whose descendants had maintained it as a 'free chapel' until the Reformation.<sup>38</sup> The patronage of the chapel at Hampton has been held by either the Kynastons or the Hanmers from the fourteenth century to the present day. It is perhaps worthy of note that all the surviving names of chaplains of Hampton from this period are unmistakably Welsh. The Hanmers seem to have lost their interest in Plas Beddowe sometime in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century when it was rented out as part of the Bridgewater estate. In 1922, it was sold to William Mottram, the sitting tenant, and it was thereafter known as Bank Farm.<sup>39</sup>

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32 NLW, Bettisfield MS 1675, p. 291.

33 NLW, Plas Yolyn MS 192; Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, p. 312.

34 National Archives, C66/369.

35 TSAHS, vol. 47, p.15.

36 Lichfield Joint Records Office, B/A/3.

37 F. Madden et al. (eds), *Collectanea et Topographica et Genealogica* (London, 1834-43), vol. 5, p. 179.

38 Shropshire Archives, 212/345/1.

39 B. Hall, unpublished information given to the author.

When this idea of Owain's grave was mooted to the present owner of Plas Beddowe, Richard Hall, he promptly produced his oldest map of the property (undated but almost certainly nineteenth century) that clearly shows a cross marked beside the house. He informed me that an ancient yew tree used to exist at the intersection of the cross. Of course, none of the evidence discussed here proves that Owain Glyn Dŵr was buried at Welshampton. Individually, each piece of evidence is vague and inconclusive but when examined together a degree of coincidence is apparent. What has been established is that there was a nucleus of Owain's family and followers concentrated in this area. To this can be added the connections of two crucial documents, namely Peniarth Manuscript 26 and the detailed evidence given in Kynaston's case before the King's Bench within Owain's home district of Oswestry, from whence originated the appeal for the pardon of Adam of Usk. Conjectural though the name Plas Beddowe and the cross on the map may be, the early documentation of the Hanmer family's connection with this property is beyond dispute.

One final point to consider is that the earliest known use of the previously unexplained prefix of 'Welsh' to 'Hampton' is found in the 1587 list of recusant Catholics preserved in the British Library which contains two familiar names, 'Mr. Hanmer of Bradenheath' and 'Mr William Kynaston of Welshehampton'.<sup>40</sup> The explanation could be that it was added to signify a village largely populated by Welsh, or at least Welsh-speaking, people; but might it just be that the village came to be known as *Welshampton* because here, carefully concealed, just as Adam of Usk recorded in his chronicle, lies one of the most precious and elusive treasures of Wales?

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40 British Library, Landsdown MS 55, fol. 166.