Walter Meredith, c. 1558-1607: Scrivener of Radnorshire and London

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In asserting that the early modern Welsh diaspora is 'a huge and fascinating subject', Professor Sir Glanmor Williams noted in particular that 'the outflux of men and women of humbler origin [from Wales to England and beyond] is more significant in terms of numbers involved than the most dazzling of Welsh luminaries'.[1]

This theme was explored at the Colwyn Bay Eisteddfod in 1947, in Robert Owen's prize-winning essay entitled *Migration from Wales to London and the History of the Welsh in London up to 1815*. Available only in Welsh, it has been described as 'a huge source to be quarried, full of raw material about important facets of life in the capital city.'[2] Owen estimated that approximately one per cent of the population of mid-Tudor London was Welsh, but he did not locate the home parish of the 'middling sort' who were his subjects. Thus we do not know where in Wales their London journey began. In his more recent work on the topic, W. P. Griffith also did not examine the regional origins of his selection of London's Welsh population, but he estimated that, by 1541, 2.4 per cent of the city's inhabitants were Welsh.[3] We have frustratingly little knowledge about them because of the paucity of primary sources concerning 'the middling sort' that remain to us. Not being owners of large Welsh estates, they left behind no papers for the assiduous archivist to investigate. Fortunately, information about the lives that a small number of the successful Welsh 'middling sort' led in the English capital can be obtained from family wills and, in some cases, early Chancery proceedings for the Tudor period. These documents can also add detail to our understanding of migrants' relationships with their kinsmen back in Wales.

Tom Arkell declared that 'the most detailed [early modern] wills are potential mines of information, with fascinating and instructive detail about so many different aspects of life in the early modern period that sometimes historians of other periods must look enviously upon them'.[4] This paper will seek to illustrate, by means of a case study, how the early modern historian may glean valuable, sometimes detailed, evidence from such primary sources, comparatively rare though these documents may be for the Welsh 'middling sort' of the period.

From the last will and testament of Walter Meredith, proved in 1607, and from the writ he had issued against his enemies thirty years earlier, we can gather valuable insights into his progress in the English capital, after his arrival there as

1 Glanmor Williams, *Renewal and Reformation: Wales c. 1415–1642* (Oxford, 1993), p. 406.
2 *The Welsh in London 1500–2000*, ed. by E. Jones (Cardiff, 2001), p. 3.
3 W. P. Griffith, 'Tudor Prelude', in *The Welsh in London*, pp. 8–34.
4 Tom Arkell, 'The Probate Process', in *When Death Do Us Part*, ed. by T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (Oxford, 2000), p. 13.

a young adolescent. Coming as an unknown Welshman from the remote, rural, mid-Wales village of Glasbury, during the fourth quarter of the sixteenth century, Walter successfully qualified as a member of the lucrative profession of scrivener, becoming thereby a citizen of London. In 1603, he was elected Warden of the Guild of Scriveners, one of the oldest livery companies. This was a position that had also been held by Frances Kydd, father of the Elizabethan playwright, Thomas Kydd, and by John Milton, father of the great Puritan poet of the same name. The only primary sources we have concerning Walter's life are the writ and his will. Nevertheless, close examination of these documents, coupled with attention to other available contemporary evidence, helps us understand some of the socio-political issues at play in the London he inhabited and in the rural community from which he came.

Walter was born in Glasbury-on-Wye around 1558, a son of David Thomas ap Meredith. We know from Walter's will that he had two brothers, David and William, and two sisters, Elizabeth and another, unnamed. Given the traditional pattern of family naming, it is likely that Walter was a younger son. As a successful yeoman farmer, his father would have provided Walter with an education to fit him for a profession other than farming for, as Glanmor Williams pointed out, the hopes of many such younger sons 'lay in commerce, and for them the path to fame and fortune lay through an apprenticeship, preferably to a great London merchant'.[5] Given Walter's status as a yeoman farmer's son, it is unlikely that his family was sufficiently wealthy to include lawyers among its members. To apprentice Walter to a scrivener, a quasi-legal profession, was an unusual decision for someone from his rural Welsh background, even though the fathers of the majority of English apprentice scriveners in London during that period were described as yeomen. From 1580 to 1628, the names of scriveners' fathers, together with their place of residence and their occupation, are recorded in *The Scriveners' Common Paper,* the only scriveners' records to survive the Great Fire of London.[6] These records tell us that, from the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, it was not unusual for men to come 'long distances in order to qualify for membership of a profession offering a special and essential service to the population at large'.[7] However, Walter was the sole apprentice listed at that time as coming from Radnorshire. His achievements as a scrivener in London are therefore unique.

As Walter was not university educated the law was beyond his reach; not so a quasi-legal profession like that of a scrivener. Literacy was a prerequisite for entry into almost all guilds, but where Walter learned to read and write is not known. It could have been in Christ College, Brecon, founded by Bishop William Barlow in 1541. It could also have been in Presteigne, at the grammar school founded in 1565 by the cloth merchant, John Beddoes. Equally, Walter could have received

5 Williams, *Renewal and Reformation*, p. 466.

6 Ibid.

7 *Scriveners' Company Common Paper, 1357–1628: With a Continuation to 1678*, ed. by F. W. Steer (London Record Society, 1968), pp. 7–24 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35888 > [accessed 3 December 2009].

instruction from a local parish priest, as did the diarist, John Evelyn.[8] G. Dynallt Owen pointed out that ‘it was these humble but enlightened vicars who gathered their “scolers” around them in their homes […] and taught them how to read and write’.[9]

While Walter’s move from Glasbury to London must have been made with the blessing of Walter’s parents, such approval was not given by every Radnorshire family. Griffith ap Rees ap David of Llandegley, a parish in the centre of the county, stipulated in his will of 1602 that Margaret verch John was to be given a black cow, on condition that she came home from England. Should she fail to do so, then her brother would inherit the cow.[10] Like many of today’s successful migrants, Walter was young, male, single, energetic, ambitious and enterprising. His goal, London, lay at what was then a great distance from Glasbury and the journey there from the Welsh heartland was a tortuous one over what was known as ‘The Great Road’. Richard Moore-Colyer pointed out that a much-used roadline connected Glasbury with Presteigne, from where the road ran into Herefordshire and eventually onwards to London.[11] As a yeoman farmer’s son, Walter may have travelled to London in the company of the cattle drovers who, mindful of inclement weather, made their journeys only in the spring and summer seasons. All-in-all, the decision he made to migrate to England was a momentous one. Yet it was made by more than one young man of Walter’s generation. The outcome was not always a happy one, for as Ilana K. Ben-Amos has affirmed, ‘The drop-out rate of London apprentices throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in the order of 50 per cent.’[12]

There were considerable restrictions upon the young apprentice which not all were able to tolerate. He was subjected to the quasi-paternal authority of his master. He did not normally receive a wage, receiving his training in return for his work. He usually lived in his master’s household where he was provided with food, drink and clothing. His manners, dress, entertainment and freedom to marry were limited. Certain other restrictions were stringently applied: court aldermen ruled in the early seventeenth century that ‘no apprentice shall receive the freedom of the city unless he shall first present himself at that time with the hair of his head cut in a decent and comely manner’.[13]

In 1577, Walter was occupied in London as servant to John Hutton, scrivener, with whom he probably also lodged.[14] In 1580, he completed his seven-year apprenticeship as a scrivener, thereby qualifying as a ‘writer of the Court letter’.

8 *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by Guy de la Bédoyère (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 21.
9 G. Dynallt Owen, *Elizabethan Wales* (Cardiff, 1964), p. 207.
10 Cited in *Almanac: Newsletter of Powys Archives*, Llandrindod Wells, Autumn, 2009.
11 Richard Moore-Colyer, *Roads and Trackways of Wales* (Ashbourne, 2001), p. 84.
12 [12]Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Failure to Become Freemen: Urban Apprentices in Early Modern England’, *Social History*, 16 (1991), 155.
13 E. B. Jupps and W. W. Pocock, *An Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters of the City of London* (London, 1887), p. 434.
14 Walter Meredith is named as a witness, and described as ‘servant to John Hutton, scrivener’, in a deed of gift dated 2 July 1577. See The National Archive (TNA) 157 DD/P/15/12.

The Worshipful Company of Scriveners, the guild to which Walter had been apprenticed, had been established as a corporate body in September 1373. By the fifteenth century, their importance had increased considerably for, 'from humble beginnings as mere "writers" of letters and documents, [...] these men banded themselves together as a guild and [...] took steps to ensure that they had the monopoly of their calling'.[15]

On 11 November 1634, the Company received a grant of arms confirming the arms in use since circa 1530. The Company's motto is 'Scribite Scientes' – 'Write, ye learnèd ones'.

Fig 1: Coat of Arms of the Worshipful Company of Scriveners

Walter's duties as a scrivener would have included the copying, for clients, of confidential papers such as wills, charters, conveyances and other legal documents.

15 *Scriveners' Company Common Paper, 1357–1628*, pp. 7–24.

His English, therefore, must have been as fluent as his Welsh. Important as his role as scrivener in Elizabethan society was, it was also an uncomfortable one. David C. Coleman has pointed out that 'in addition to exercising their purely clerical art, scriveners frequently acted as legal and financial intermediaries, and thus came under fire from current opinion on middlemen'.[16] Even in seventeenth-century France, neither scrivener nor attorney enjoyed much popularity, as the narrator of Charles Perrault's fairy story, *Le Chat Botté (Puss in Boots)* made clear:

> There was a miller who left no more estate to the three sons he had than his mill, his ass and his cat. The partition was soon made. Neither scrivener nor attorney was sent for. They would soon have eaten up all the poor patrimony.[17]

Perrault had originally trained as a lawyer, so there may have been some personal experience lying behind this observation.

In the London of Walter's day, Shakespeare's audiences were not unfamiliar with the function of the scrivener. They were also probably not unmindful of their dubious reputation. Many might well have sought a scrivener's services to draw up a marriage contract for one of their children, as Tranio does for his son, Lucretio, in Act IV scene iv of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew.* Some may even have borrowed money from a scrivener to finance such a marriage settlement. In *Richard III*, written in 1597, slightly later than *The Taming of the Shrew,* the scrivener is given a brief, but significant role to play in Act III scene vi:

> London. A street. *Enter a Scrivener*
> **Scrivener:** Here is the indictment of the good Lord Hastings,
> Which in a set hand fairly is engrossed
> That it may be to-day read o'er in Paul's.
> And mark how well the sequel hangs together:
> Eleven hours I have spent to write it over,
> For yesternight by Catesby was it sent me [...].

Not only does the scrivener draw the audience's attention to his skill in copying the warrant for Hastings' arrest that will be read aloud to all of London later that day, he also has the important role of highlighting the king's hypocrisy, for the engrossment by the scrivener was written hours after Hastings' death. The scrivener, like everybody else, can see that the claim in the paper is a lie invented by Richard to justify killing his political rival. It has been calculated that more than fifty million visits were made to London's playhouses between 1567 and 1642. As a mature man, Walter may well have heard of the play being performed at the

16 David. C. Coleman, 'London Scriveners and the Estate Market in the Late Seventeenth Century', *Economic History Review, New Series*, 4.2 (1951), 221.

17 Charles Perrault, *Le Maistre Chat ou Le Chat Botté* (Paris, 1697).

Globe Theatre, newly opened on the south bank of the Thames in 1599.[18] It is doubtful if he attended a perfomance, however, for his will suggests that he had Puritan leanings.

In 1577, when still a scrivener's apprentice in London, Walter turned to the Court of the Star Chamber held in Westminster Palace for help in resolving a family dispute in his home village of Glasbury. Urgent legal cases were heard in the Star Chamber, so-called after the star pattern on the ceiling, in order to avoid the cumbrous prodedure of the ordinary law courts. Although the Council in the Marches of Wales had been established to suppress riots and other disturbances in the area, Penry Williams tells us that many cases 'were brought directly to London and the Star Chamber as a court of first instance'.[19] As a scrivener living in the metropolis, Walter possessed some legal knowledge, but it was not in order to gain a tactical advantage that he took his case directly to the senior court.[20] It was simply more convenient for Walter to seek redress for his family's wrongs directly from the Star Chamber rather than from the Council in the Marches, for their procedures and jurisdictions were very similar.

In the writ which he presented to Queen Elizabeth, Walter beseeched Her Majesty to bring to justice those villains who, while searching for him, had viciously assaulted his widowed mother, Katherin verch David, together with members of her family, in her Glasbury farm.[21] Walter had probably been apprised of the assault by his brothers, William and David, and his sister, Katharen, for David and Katheren were then still residing in Glasbury. We do not know the reason for the dispute between Walter and his neighbours, for his complaint to the Queen simply states that these men 'bear great evil will and deadly malice towards your said subject and his friends without any occasion to him given'. Was it perhaps a result of neighbours' jealousy at Walter's metropolitan success? Walter's anger at this unjustified attack upon his family is evident in the Bill of Complaint. So too is his mother Katherin's terror when she and her family were set upon by a gang led by John David, Roger ap Thomas's henchman, for Walter describes the episode in graphic detail.

The attack took place one Sunday evening at the beginning of January 1577, the day after Epiphany, at a time when the miscreants undoubtedly knew that Walter was unable to safeguard his mother and her grandchildren. John David, a local smith, did with 'fire and anger, unlawfully and riotously gather and assemble together' a band of approximately twenty 'lewd, desperate and evil disposed persons', who were armed with a menacing array of weapons. Joan, the wife of John David, had 'a mattock in her hands and stones in

18 *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by S. Greenblatt (New York, 1997), p. 3.

19 Penry H. Williams, 'The Star Chamber and the Council of Wales in the Marches of Wales, 1558-1603', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 16 (1956), 287.

20 Ibid, 294.

21 The National Archives, *Star Chamber Proceedings: Meredith v David, Roger ap Thomas and others,* STACS/M17/13, 19 Elizabeth.

her apron'; Roger ap Thomas carried 'a forest Bill' (that is, an implement for cutting wood); Maddock Sais, 'a lewd person' of no fixed abode, had a 'maynspike'. In addition to being a vulgar vagrant, Maddock also knew some English, as his nickname 'Sais', 'Englishman', indicates. We can deduce from this description that Welsh was still widely spoken around Glasbury at the time for it would seem that, unlike many others in the area, Maddock was familiar with English.

Another of the conspirators, Thomas ap Roger, held a sophisticated weapon – a sword; while his mother Margaret carried a more crude but no less effective pile of stones in her apron and held a spade; Lloykie (Lleucu), Thomas's sister, had also brought stones and carried 'a stake in her hand'. Others, also armed with swords, bucklers, bill staves, mainspikes and javelins, and women 'with their aprons full of stones', hid in the barn adjacent to the farm house and there 'desperately and maliciously consulted together' as to their battle tactics.

It was decided that John David and Maddock Sais were to break down the door of the farmhouse. When these men had gained entry, they were joined by their armed companions who declared 'with many more rancourous and rigorous words' that, unless Walter was given over to them, they would murder his mother, 'being a very old woman', and the three small children then staying with her. While stopping short of assassination, members of the group allegedly gave Katherin and the three young children 'many cruel and mortal blows', from which they 'sickened and lay at the mercy of God, not like to escape the danger of death'. Not content with inflicting such grievous bodily harm, the armed gang also made off with goods and chattels from the house to the value of one hundred pounds.

Walter requested the Queen to serve a writ of subpoena on John David and the others, to appear before her in the Court of the Star Chamber to answer the charges brought against them. We do not know how they responded for we have no record of the answers of the defendants, nor of the depositions of witnesses. While proceedings of this Court exist in large numbers, few of the administrative and judicial records remain. The most significant loss is that of the Decree and Order Books, giving final judgements by the court: none has survived. Thus we do not know what redress, if any, was obtained by Walter for the offences perpetrated upon his family and their property.

Cases similar to Walter's also came before the Council of the Court in the Marches in the late sixteenth century. They attest to the fact that housebreaking, assault and unlawful entry were not then infrequent in those areas.[22] However, records show that Walter's was the only Radnorshire case to come before the Star Chamber in 1577.[23] Indeed, by the reign of James I it was noted that 'the

22 C. A. J. Skeel, 'Social and Economic Conditions in Wales and the Marches in the Early Seventeenth century', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1918), 125.

23 Williams, 'The Star Chamber and the Council of Wales in the Marches of Wales', p. 297.

Subjects of the Country and Dominion of Wales have been constantly Loyal and obedient, and have lived in all dutiful Subjection to the Crown of England'.[24]

Walter did not return to Glasbury permanently after the 'breaking and entering' episode, for there would have been little opportunity in the mid-Wales of his time to develop his career as a scrivener. He remained in London where, after qualifying to enter the Scriveners' Guild, he became a citizen, with all the privileges that citizenship bestowed. That Walter was proud of the status he had attained is clear from the opening lines of his will, where he describes himself as 'citizen and writer of the courte letter of the citie of London'.[25]

In his maturity, Walter had become sufficiently skilled to enable apprentices to learn their craft from him. In 1590, Robert Griffith, who had been Walter's apprentice, was admitted to the Guild. Robert's deceased father, Peter Griffith of Aston-below-Hawarden, Flintshire, was described in the *Scrivener's Common Paper* as a 'gentleman'. Seven years later, in 1597, Richard Wotton, son of William Wotton of Marden, Herefordshire, another apprentice of Walter's, also qualified as a scrivener.[26] Richard's deceased father, like Walter's, had been a yeoman farmer. All three scriveners, then, were trained in an occupation very different from that practised by their fathers. Clearly, Elizabethan parents were as ambitious for their sons as are contemporary ones.

As apprentices, Robert and Richard, like Walter before them, were tested before the warden to ensure that they had a satisfactory knowledge of grammar, for the early history of the Scrivener's Company was mainly concerned with its efforts to establish control over the practice of all those writing legal documents in London, especially conveyances of real property. They held on to their quasi-legal function, but not without some opposition. It was challenged on Wednesday 11 November 1601, when *A Bill for avoiding Frivolous Sutes in Court at Westminster* was brought before Parliament. 'One Lashbrook, an Atorney spake and shewed the inconvenience of Scriveners being Attornies and practising in their names.'[27] Nevertheless, scrivener notaries continued to thrive in the metropolis and to maintain their monopoly over notarial work in the City of London up until the late twentieth century.[28]

In sixteenth-century London, Walter's professional prospects were not

24 Skeel, 'Social and Economic Conditions in Wales and the Marches', 143.

25 National Archives *PROB, 11/111 Walter Meredith, Writer of the Court Letter of Saint Dunstan in the West, City of London.*

26 *Scriveners' Company Common Paper*, ed. Steer.

27 'Proceedings in the Commons, 1601: November 11th – 15th', in *Historical Collections: or, An exact Account of the Proceedings of the Four Last Parliaments of Q. Elizabeth*, ed. by Heywood Townshend (London, 1680), pp. 207-216 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43554> [accessed 16 September 2009].

28 The scriveners' monopoly was finally ended in 1999. See the Hansard record for 10 February 1999 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1999/feb/10/worshipful-company-of-scriveners-monopoly [accessed 30 November 2010].

adversely affected by this issue and in 1596, on 12 December, he was wealthy enough to marry Katherin Boorne in the church of St Mary Magdalene, Milk Street, in Cripplegate ward. We know more about the area she came from than we do about the bride herself for John Stow, another contemporary of Walter's, noted that 'there bee many fayre houses for wealthy Marchantes and others' in the neighbourhood and that St Mary Magdalene was 'a small parish church'.[29] Sadly, this church of medieval origin did not survive the Great Fire. It was afterwards united with the church of St Lawrence Jewry. From Walter's last will and testament we learn that, after they were married, he and Katherin were living in the parish of St Dunstan's-in-the-West, Farringdon Without ward, to the west of the city. W. P. Griffith tells us that this was one of the areas where the Welsh settlement was marginally more significant that in other parts of London.[30]

Like all immigrants to a new country, Walter bonded closely with fellow-countrymen living in the district where he settled. St Dunstan's was clearly a residential area appropriate to Walter's rising socio-economic status, for John Stow noted that its parishioners included 'many rich Marchants, and other occupiers of diuerse trades, namely Saltars and Ironmongers'.[31] W. K. Jordan later declared that the social and economic complexion of St Dunstan's-in-the-West comprised 'an interesting mixture of gentry employed on crown affairs, chancery clerks and officers, professional men generally, and a large number of merchants and shopkeepers, including, however, no great merchants'.[32] Walter would have fitted very well into this milieu.

Walter had four houses in Fleet Street, at numbers 21–25, which he owned jointly with his brother William, whom we must assume had joined him in London. It was probably from one of these houses that Walter transacted his business. Only one house in the street, no. 17, survived the Great Fire and, while undoubtedly not all the others could have compared with such grandeur, the size of no. 17 gives us some indication of the quality of real estate that existed in the street in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Walter also owned land in the parish of St Dunstan and, though its exact location and acreage is not known, his name appears in the lay subsidy (taxation) lists of 1597 and 1600 for the parish of St Dunstan in the ward of Farringdon Without.[33]

29 John Stow, 'The Warde of Faringdon Extra, or Without', in *A Survey of London* (Oxford, 1908; reprinted from the text of 1603; first published 1598), pp. 20–52.

30 Griffith, 'Tudor Prelude', p. 10.

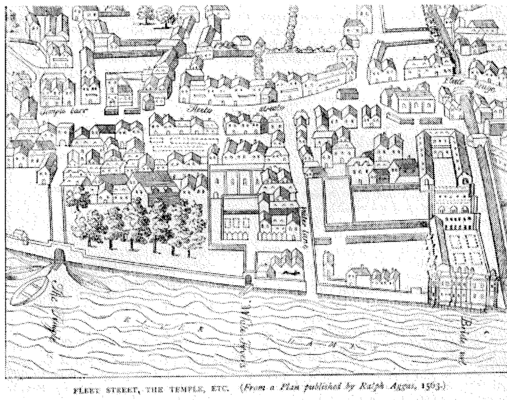
31 Stow, *Survey of London*.

32 W. K. Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480-1660* (London, 1960), p. 37.

33 Alan H. Nelson, *Lay Subsidy Returns for London, Middlesex, Surrey (North) 1593-1600* <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/SUBSIDY/subs.html> [accessed 30 November 2010].

Fig 2: No. 17 Fleet Street, London EC4[34]

Publishing started in Fleet Street around 1500, when William Caxton's apprentice, Wynkyn de Worde, set up a printing shop near Shoe Lane. At about the same time, Richard Pynson set up as publisher and printer next to St Dunstan's church. More printers and publishers followed, mainly supplying the legal trade in the four Law Inns around the area. Clearly, Walter's choice of residence was strategically made in relation to his occupation as a scrivener. Nowadays, as in Walter's time, Fleet Street is associated with the law and many of its courts and barristers' chambers are in alleys off Fleet Street itself.



FLEET STREET, THE TEMPLE, ETC. (*From a Plan published by Ralph Aggas, 1563.*)

Fig 3: Fleet Street, The Temple etc., 1563, from Edward Walford's *London, Old & New*, 1881.

The textual landscape of early modern England was changed forever by the

34 Peter Easton, 'Samuel Pepys and Fleet Street', in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* <http://www.pepysdiary.com/indepth/archive/2005/09/21/samuel_pepys_and_fl.php> [accessed 8 April 2010].

invention of the printing press, for new scripts, surfaces and techniques were required to enable it to function effectively and, of course, a ready supply of paper was a primary requirement. In his very early history play, *Henry VI, Part 2*, Shakespeare, disrespecting the historic timeline for artistic purposes, has Jack Cade accuse Lord Saye thus:

> Whereas before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the talley, thou hast caused printing to be used and contrary to the King, his crown and dignity, thou has built a paper mill.[35]

Jack Cade was the leader of the fifteenth-century Kentish rebels against the crown. Undoubtedly, the allusion that Shakespeare was making, via Cade's remark, was to the first commercially-successful paper mill established in England in 1588, on the river Darent in Dartford, a hundred years after Cade's day. In February 1589, Sir John Speilman, a German-born entrepreneur, secured a patent giving him a monopoly in buying materials for making white paper, and preventing anyone from setting up in competition without his permission.[36] Such restrictive practices could not have found favour with the scriveners of Walter Meredith's time.

There was no shortage of work for scriveners like Walter, whose greatest profit lay in activities like conveyancing and money-lending. Indeed, R. H. Tawney believed that scriveners have a claim to be among the pioneers of banking. He described their early modern professional progress thus:

> The constant mortgaging of land, and the growing dependence both of *Landowners* and *Traders* on credit transactions, involved a great increase in the half-clerical, half-legal business of 'making bonds'; this made the *Scrivener* at once more dispensable and more expert, and put considerable sums of money into the pockets of the more successful members of the profession. [...] His intimate knowledge of business conditions and of the land market, his practice in weighing the standing of Moneylenders and their clients, and his sometimes not inconsiderable wealth, made it inevitable that, in addition to arranging loans, the *Scrivener* should himself take to lending money.[37]

During the early modern period, it was scriveners and goldsmiths who were rivals in the matter of issuing loans, for goldsmiths already kept in their large coffers the gold or silver which their customers had deposited with them for

35 *Henry VI, Part 2*, Act IV, sc. vii, 30–31. The play was written c.1590, but not published until 1594.

36 Rhys Jenkins, *Early Attempts at Paper-making in England, 1495–1586; Paper-making in England, 1588–1788*, Library Association Record, vol. 2, pt 1 (London, 1900, reprinted 1958, Association of Assistant Librarian reprints, No 5).

37 R. H. Tawney, 'The Antecedents of Banking', in *Thomas Wilson: A Discourse upon Usury [1572]*, ed. by R. H. Tawney (London, 1925), p. 85.

safekeeping. While it is not known if they had a professional relationship, Walter enjoyed the friendship of one such wealthy goldsmith – William Pennant, who originally came from Flintshire and was one of the ancestors of Thomas Pennant, the antiquary and naturalist. William lived in Smithfield, also in the ward of Farringdon Without. In his will, he bequeathed 'to my loving friend Walter Meredith £5 in money and also my cloak of fine black cloth with some lace and lined through with rusty taffety'.[38] The sober colour of this garment may have indicated its owner's Puritan leanings. Nevertheless, such a handsome item of clothing, expensively dyed black, was costly and highly fashionable in late Elizabethan London. It would have been a visible sign of status and authority when worn by the owner. Thus, in leaving his cloak as well as a considerable sum to Walter, William Pennant, the wealthy merchant, was acknowledging him as his social equal.

Caroline Cross has highlighted the existence of Tudor legal formularies composed by scriveners and notaries for the benefit of their clients.[39] It is possible that during his career Walter himself may have made a contribution to such a legal handbook. His own will, copied in an impeccable secretary hand, was drawn up when he was 'in good healthe and perfecte memorye', a condition for which he praised 'Allmighite God'. In an age when plague epidemics were not infrequent, such a prayer must have been heartfelt. The religious preamble was written with a Protestant emphasis: 'I comend my soule unto Allmightie God my Creator and to Jesus Christe his onely Sonne my Savyour and Redeemer by the merytte of whose previous deathe and passion and by no other meanes I have assured hope of eternall salvacon.' Leaving the reader with no doubt as to his Puritan leanings, Walter added, 'And my bodye to the earthe from whence it came to be decentlie buried without pompe.' Details of where he wished to be buried were not given. Experienced scrivener that he was, he noted at the end of his will that he had subscribed his name 'to every sheete being five in number and tyed them at the toppe with a labell and my seale.'

Tudor central government assumed no direct responsibility for the needs of the poor, so without charitable bequests from the rich, such people could not survive. By the end of the sixteenth century, John Stow was complaining that the rich did not provide for the poor as their forebears had done.[40] However, like other testators of the period, Walter Meredith did not shirk from his Christian duty of almsgiving for he requested that, on the day of his funeral, twenty shillings should be distributed in bread or money among the poor of St Dunstan's, his London parish, with the same amount to be donated to them on the first anniversary of his death. In the codicil to his will, he bequeathed 'forty shillings yearely forever' to the poor of the same parish. He also left five pounds 'to make a supper or drynckinge' for his neighbours and others in St Dunstan's to mark his funeral.

38 National Archives *PROB 11/114, Will of William Pennant, gentleman of London.*

39 C. Cross, 'Wills as Evidence of Popular Piety during the Reformation Period', in *The End of Strife*, ed. by D. Loades (Edinburgh, 1984).

40 Stow, *Survey of London.*

Such bequests make clear to us that Walter was a man of some standing in his community and well-known to many. Undoubtedly recalling his own years of apprenticeship, he left 'forty shillings' to the assistants of the Scriveners, 'to make a repaste or drynckinge' on the same day.

To his wife, 'during her widowhood', Walter bequeathed £200 together with his mansion house. Walter was a man in early middle age when they married. Katherin may have been younger than him; thus he may have had the expectation that, after his death, she would remarry. Their marriage was childless, but Katherin did not receive the entire inheritance. Much of Walter's estate was bequeathed to his extended family and to friends in London and Glasbury. They clearly meant a great deal to him, for his bequests to them were generous. Childless himself, he left to his two nieces, the daughters of his sister, Elizabeth Watkins, 'tenne pounds apiece yearlie towards their maintenance'. On the occasion of either their marriage or their majority the girls were to receive one hundred pounds each, a sum which would set them up well in life. Before this, however, the £200 was to be loaned 'to persons of good sufficiencye and therebye raise proffyte towards the paymente of the said Twenty poundes yearlye', for their maintenance. Obviously, by the end of his life, Walter had become as proficient a moneylender as he was a scrivener.

Like many emigrants then and now, during his lifetime Walter had provided some support for his family back home, for his will reveals that his brother-in-law, John Thomas ap Howell, owed Walter two sums of money: £42 and 46 shillings and 8 pence. Walter stipulated that as long as his sister and brother-in-law lived together, then they could both hold onto the sum. If his sister should predecease her husband, then the money was to be returned to Walter's estate. However, to safeguard her interests should she be widowed, she could retain the amount, eventually leaving it to any issue she might have. Several other generous bequests were made to poor, named Glasbury individuals, before Walter bequeathed to his former London apprentices, Robert Griffith and Richard Wootton, three pounds each. Both men were later to follow in their master's footsteps and become Wardens of the Guild of Scriveners, Robert in 1615 and Richard in 1621.

That Walter was part of a close-knit, Welsh community in St Dunstan's-in-the-West is clear from the names of some of the other legatees: Robert Morgan, William Jones, as well as his former apprentices, are all included in the 1597 and 1600 lay subsidy lists for the parish. Robert Morgan, Walter's 'lovinge friende and neighboure', was bequeathed 'fortye shillings for a remembrance'. Robert was to become Master of the Guild of Scriveners in 1620. William Jones, also Walter's 'lovinge friend and neighboure', was left a similar amount. The bulk of Walter's real estate, his four houses in Fleet Street, were left to his brother William who was also the executor of his will. On William's death, the houses in Fleet Street were to pass to Walter's nephew, also Walter, the son of his brother David. Walter also inherited his uncle's books. He too had

joined his uncle in London and, after starting his apprenticeship as a girdler, 'translated' from the Girdlers' company to the Scriveners', taking the oath in 1632. In a quit claim case, dated 2 May 1636, Walter junior is described as 'citizen and scrivener of London'.[41]

A major charitable bequest of Walter's was 'to the poor people of the parishe of Glasburie where I was borne'. He may have had cause to lament on some of his journeys home the poor maintenance of the bridge in his home parish, for he left 'Fortye shillings' 'towards the makinge or repayringe of Glasburye bridge', an act that would have been of benefit to all of Glasbury's parishioners. W. P. Griffith pointed out that in early modern times, 'inland journeys were never easy and it may not be a coincidence that many wills of the period contained bequests for local bridges'.[42] While there had been ferries across the Wye at Glasbury since earliest times, for it was one of the narrowest crossings of the floodplain of the river, Walter's is one of the earliest references to a bridge being built there. Reverend Jonathan Williams made a brief note of Walter's bequest in his *History of Radnorshire*.[43] However, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological trust maintains that 'the earliest mention of a bridge across the Wye appears in 1665, where reference is made to a former bridge at Glasbury further upstream from the present bridge, near the confluence of the Llynfi'.[44] Up until the nineteenth century, it was a common occurrence for bridges to be swept away by the flooding of the Wye. The bridge which had benefited from Walter's legacy may have suffered such a fate. The present bridge over the river Wye at Glasbury is a concrete structure, built in the twentieth century.

Another of Walter's bequests to Glasbury's poor enjoyed a longer life. After his wife's decease, he willed that four pounds per year be distributed every other year, at 'Allhallowstyde', among the poor people of Glasbury parish in order to buy them clothes. In the alternate years, he requested that four pounds be distributed among eight young boys and girls, not exceeding the age of twenty years, as they grew in readiness for service, in order to prepare them for the same, 'always remembringe that my owene neerest poor kyndred be therein first preferred'. He required that six men of substance in the parish, 'whereof those of my neerest kyndred to be in the same number,' should receive and distribute the money annually.[45] This money was to be raised and paid out of income from his houses in Fleet Street.

In an intimate, short note at the end of this lengthy document, Walter added, 'Further legacies as are contained in an olde will in my cubborde in the hall unto Messrs Robert Johnson, Robert Morgan, Robert Griffith and Richard Wootton my

41 DS/321,Cornwall County Record Office.

42 Griffith, 'Tudor Prelude', p. 27.

43 Jonathan Williams, *The History of Radnorshire* (Tenby, 1859), p. 213.

44 Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 'The Middle Wye Valley' <http://www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/midwye/midwye.htm> [accessed 30 November 2010].

45 Walter's legacy to the villagers of Glasbury is still in existence and is administered annually by an elected member of Powys County Council, on behalf of the trustees.

will is shall be performed.' These men, all scriveners, were also loving friends and neighbours of Walter who, having few close kin in London, nominated them as overseers of his Will. Almost sixty years after Walter's death, the properties on which so many of these investments were drawn literally went up in smoke in the Great Fire of London, in 1666, though not before Walter's nephew was able to benefit considerably from his inheritance for, as a scrivener, he was involved in the buying and selling of estates in Cornwall, from which negotiations he profited handsomely.[46]

All migrants travel with a dream of achieving success and happiness in their chosen country. Few could have realized that dream more fully than did Walter Meredith, a representative of those gifted immigrants of modest birth and means whose rise to prominence in London, so graphically illustrated in his richly detailed will, can rightly claim to be impressive. Assuredly, there were other early modern Welshmen of 'the middling sort' who, like Walter, left their native communities with uncertain prospects and, one way or another, helped to make early modern London what it was, even if their achievements there were not of the order of 'dazzling Welsh luminaries'.[47] Examinations, similar to the one carried out in this paper, of the records they left behind would divest these migrants of their anonymity and add to our knowledge of the ways enterprising young Welshmen contributed to the life and culture of the Tudor metropolis.

46 Darrell Stephens Muniments 1557-1895, Cornwall County Record Office.
47 Williams, *Renewal and Reformation*, p. 406.