



# DARGANFOD HEN DAI CYMREIG DISCOVERING OLD WELSH HOUSES



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traddodiadol a bywydau'r bobl oedd yn byw ynddyn nhw.

Celebrating Welsh Heritage through the study of traditional  
houses and the lives of the people who lived in them.

## CYLCHLYTHYR 41 Mehefin 2022

## NEWSLETTER 41 June 2022

**GWEFAN:** <http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk> yw prif sianel cyfathrebu'r Grŵp. Ewch i'r wefan i weld ein llyfrgell sy'n tyfu a nodweddion eraill. Fel arfer mae'n cynnwys manylion digwyddiadau diweddar a digwyddiadau sydd ar y gweill. Cyhoeddir fersiynau Cymraeg a Saesneg y Cylchlythyr hwn ar wahân ond anfonir y ddwy fersiwn i bob aelod

**OUR WEBSITE** <http://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk> is the Group's main channel of communication. Please visit it to look at our growing library and other features. Normally it contains details of recent and forthcoming events. The Welsh and English versions of this Newsletter are printed separately but both are circulated to all members

### FROM THE CHAIR by Richard Cuthbertson

Well, Covid has nearly gone and Summer is nearly here! I see quite a few of our branches are organising interesting events and I hope we can all support these and get back to the 'new normal' as soon as possible. We must constantly remind ourselves not to take for granted the huge number of interesting buildings, histories and strange customs of our forefathers. The more we discover, the more we reveal the rich tapestry of ancient North Wales. Our work really does add to the store of knowledge, and the enjoyment that it can give to all of us is invaluable.

Last year I announced that, with sadness, I was stepping down as Chairman at this year's AGM because I feel strongly it is time to give someone else a chance to bring a fresh approach and renewed energy, particularly as we are entering a new era of 'Post Covid' opportunities. So I am resigning at this year's AGM but have agreed to carry on as a caretaker for a few months until a new appointment is made. I cannot thank you all enough for the support and often hard work that members have given to our group. It has been an honour and a privilege to be part of the effort. I hope I can remain as a Trustee and still make some sort of contribution in the future. Thank you again.



Richard with Margaret Dunn  
at Plas Penmynydd

### NEWS UPDATE FROM THE SECRETARY by Margaret Dunn



#### Hazel Agnes Formby 7<sup>th</sup> January 1932 - 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Wally and Margaret Barr write "It is with sadness that we record the passing of DOWH member Hazel Formby, following a fall at her home in Ysceifiog, Flintshire. Hazel had a long and busy life, being a very active member of numerous local history societies and groups. The list of her published articles and pamphlets on local history is extensive and her impressive memory was frequently called upon by local historians. Hazel will be much missed by members of the many groups to which she contributed. Our thoughts are with her family and friends".

*Hazel's known society memberships were with DOWH, Flintshire Historical Society (Excursions Sec and Council Member), the Friends of Clwyd Archives, the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust and Clwyd Family History Society. She was author of several articles in the latter society's journal. Hazel was also actively involved with her local community through Ysceifiog Village Hall committee.*

**PLEASE NOTE** that the **2022 DOWH AGM** will be held at **6.15 p.m.** on **Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June** on **Zoom**, hosted by Peter Masters. The agenda and key reports will be circulated to all members in late May and joining details soon after that. Should a member wish to nominate any person as a Trustee / Officer, please forward their name, address with a short note of support, their signed permission, together with the name of their proposer and seconder to the Secretary by 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022. Please also inform the secretary by 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 of any relevant matters which you wish to be raised.

At **7.00 p.m.** on the same evening the 2022 **PUBLIC LECTURE** will be given on **"RUTHIN CASTLE - Medieval ruin reclaimed"** (in English) by **Dr Fiona Gale, MBE**, Chair of the Ruthin Castle Conservation Trust.

The DOWH **WEBSITE** launched in December 2021, continues to grow in popularity and new reports are regularly added, including some, which we have obtained permission to include, on houses researched by other organisations. We gratefully acknowledge this support.

The DOWH **HOUSES DATABASE** continues to add information as it is received.

The **PARISHES PROJECT** has been somewhat restricted during Covid but branches are gradually recommencing systematic research; any interested members should enquire which parishes have not yet been visited by their branch.

Plans for **FUTURE RESEARCH** are currently being discussed by the trustees and local branch members, so please contribute your ideas.

We are delighted that following the lifting of covid restrictions, most **branches are again arranging local events**, either monthly or occasionally. Some have by now held several activities, mainly outside or in spacious settings. It is suggested that masks are still taken to meetings and reasonable social distancing maintained should some members remain cautious. Members can still book on events arranged in any branches. Contact branch secretaries to receive details and book.

## NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

### CONWY BRANCH



Six members of the Conwy Branch and three other people visited Llangelynnin Church about 1000 feet above the Conwy Valley on April 21st. The church was originally built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated to St. Celynin, one of the sons of Heilig ap Gannock, *aliter* Helig ap Glannog, whose lands in the early Middle Ages are said to have lain in the cantrefs of Arllechwedd, Creuddyn, Rhos, Rhufoniog and part of Dyffryn Clwyd. It is a local tradition that a seaquake drowned the area off the north coast of Gwynedd from Puffin Island to the Great Orme where his Llys was situated. Heilig believed that this was God's retribution for all his misdeeds and so he sent his sons (he is said to have had twelve) to monasteries to atone for his sins.

The church seems very isolated now, but there was an established community at the time. It was on the pilgrims trail from Basingwerk Abbey to Bardsey Island and was also an important crossing point for farmers, herders and other travellers coming up from Llanrwst to Conwy. There was even an inn outside the churchyard wall so that weary travellers could quench their thirsts. Inside the church, there is a small side chapel which was reputed, either to be for the local men who



would sit separately from the women, or for the drovers whose behaviour, and possibly diseases, the community wanted to keep at bay. On the wall behind the altar, beneath the words 'Fear God and honour the King' there is the Creed and the Ten Commandments all written in Welsh. Also a drawing of a skull to remind people of the inevitability of death.

A holy well sits in a corner of the churchyard. This gained a reputation for having the power to heal sick children and to predict whether the child's health would be restored. The child's clothes were dropped into the well. If they floated, the child would get better. If they sank, it was likely that they would die. *For further information see - Penmaenmawr Museum Fact Sheet 16 St. Celynin's Church.*

Several other churches in North Wales were dedicated to Heilig's sons. Rhychwyn - Llanrhychwyn church above Trefriw, which is supposedly the oldest surviving church structure in Wales; Bodfan - the church at Aber; Brothen - the church in Llanfrothen; Peris - the churches of Llanberis and Nant Peris; and Boda and Gwynin the church at Dwygyfylchi.



Supposed site of *Llys Helig* out in Conwy Bay

ANGLESEY BRANCH

Branch report by Sue Hurst

The Anglesey branch are hoping to hold the following events this summer.

- |                  |                      |   |
|------------------|----------------------|---|
| <b>Wednesday</b> | <b>June 1st</b>      | House visit to 17 <sup>th</sup> century Cefn Coch, Llanfechell. |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | <b>July 20th</b>     | A walk around Penmon.   |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | <b>September 8th</b> | A walk around Beaumaris.  |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | <b>October 12th</b>  | A talk about the new DOWH website/databases.                    |

Plas yn Amlwch - Amlwch's lost Elizabethan house by T.P.T. Willams



Fig.1

*"To those who have, will more be given; but from those who have not, even what they have will be taken away"*

Luke 19:26

The words might well be applied to the fate of Amlwch's built heritage. Old St Elaeth's church exists today only in a few thumbnail sketches such as that by Lewis Morris from 1740. The superb C17th date-stone from *Madyn Dysw*, illustrated in Newsletter 35, was apparently casually broken and is now lost. But worst of all, in the 1970s the extraordinary C16th survivor *Plas yn Amlwch*, anciently a house of the Bishop of Bangor and his fellow church magnates, was sacrificed

to the construction of a wretched oil pipeline, which within a few years was superfluous to requirements and, along with an obtrusive oil terminal, fell into disuse.

Fortunately the wise officers of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales were able to secure both ground plan and excellent photographic archive of these in many ways mysterious buildings. The building on the right in Fig.1 was latterly the Plas proper, dated to the late C16th and early C17th, with C18th alterations. That on the left was latterly used as a barn and dated mainly from the C17th. However, the distinctive 'diamond-oblique' chimney visible in the gable end is much earlier, from the beginning of the C16th at least. A few houses with such chimneys survive in Gwynedd and Anglesey, notably at *Tyn Twr*, *Bethesda*, *Gronant*, *Llanfachraeth* and possibly *Cefn Coch*, *Llanfechell*. At the *Plas*, the Royal Commission judged that the entire gable end was of a piece with the chimney and of the same age. The gable can be seen again in Fig.2.

However, that is not the end of the story. Here and there within both buildings, older probably late medieval stonework was identified, re-used from an even more ancient house in a supposed rebuild in the Tudor period. A fine corbel carved in the



Fig.2





Fig.3

shape of a head is shown in Fig.3. Elsewhere, dressed mullions could be seen such as in Fig.4, whether re-sited or in situ is now unclear. They leave us wondering what kind of house they could once have been part of.

It was long assumed that nothing could be known of this mysterious lost Bishop's house. However, the diligent researches of Amlwch local historians have brought to light a document dating from the reign of Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup>, nothing less than a sketch map of the Amlwch coast. As can be seen from Fig.5, its most prominent feature is a front-elevation view of an imposing house. In crabbed script at centre we read 'Ye Byshoppe's Howse Amloughe'. Could we accept the sketch as even an approximately accurate rendering of this extraordinary place, the mullions and corbels seen in the 1970s, re-

used in the *Plas*, may have been among its last surviving relics. What has happened to them? What part if any, did that remarkable cleric Nicholas ap Elis, Rector of Llanelian and Archdeacon of Anglesey in the last quarter of the C15th, play in its construction? His soaring architectural ambition is clear from the crenellated splendour of Llanelian church, resembling Clynnog Fawr and Bangor Cathedral.

Whilst the *Plas* itself was completely demolished during construction of the oil terminal, the foundations of the 'barn' building apparently still survive as can be seen from the aerial photograph Fig.6. Is it time to revisit the site to see whether there is still anything left to learn, for instance using modern geophysical survey?



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

## CAERNARFONSHIRE BRANCH

**Report** by Margaret Dunn

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May twelve members attended the guided tour of NANHORON House and walled gardens led by Bettina Harden, M.B.E., M.A., garden historian and owner who gave a fascinating history of the house and its famous owners, many of whose portraits we saw. It was a followed by a tasty tea and was a great success. The photo opposite captures the occasion.







Ty Mawr Nanmor

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2.00 p.m. Visit to TY MAWR, NANMOR**, Beddgelert, by kind permission of the owners. This restored 16<sup>th</sup> century hall house is now a bunk-house and is currently not frequently used. **BOOKING is ESSENTIAL by 1<sup>st</sup> June**. The cost is £3 per head paid on the day, and is due even if you cancel. Bring a picnic. Meet at Beddgelert main car park at 12.15 p.m. or the National Trust Aberglaslyn, Nanmor, car park at 1.30 p.m. to share cars for the remainder of the journey.

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2.00 p.m. Guided Walking Tour of Caernarfon**, led by Rhys Mwyn, local historian and archaeologist. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL by 30<sup>th</sup> June**. Cost £5.00 per head excluding refreshments to be paid on

the day, even if you cancel. Meet at Beddgelert main car park at 12.15 p.m. or by the Lloyd George statue in Y Maes, Caernarfon by 2.00 p.m.

**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2.00 p.m. Guided Walking Tour of historic PWLLHELI**, led by Iwan Edgar, local historian. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL by 30<sup>th</sup> August**. Cost £5 per head including light refreshments to be paid on the day, even if you cancel. Maximum of 15 people. Meet at Beddgelert main car park at 1.15 p.m. or Y Maes, Pwllheli 2.00 p.m. Organised jointly with Cymdeithas Hanes Beddgelert.

**Bookings** can be made online through our website, Membership events bookings page [https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/events\\_booking.htmlpage25.htm](https://www.discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk/events_booking.htmlpage25.htm) or your Branch secretary email [caernarfonshire-branch@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk](mailto:caernarfonshire-branch@discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk).

Bookings will be listed in order of their receipt and there will be a waiting list.

## MERIONETH BRANCH

The second of the 2022 Merioneth Branch meetings will be a visit on **Thursday 9 June (10.30) to Llwyn Hwlcyn**, a sixteenth-century listed Snowdonia type house with some very curious features, set within a collection of eighteenth and nineteenth-century listed farm buildings. After this we will go to see the early medieval grade I listed church of St Tanwg, set evocatively in the sand dunes that were its undoing! This is owned and maintained by the National Churches Trust. If you're interested in joining us, please let me know well beforehand (by 2 June if possible, please) since numbers may be restricted. [martincherry@btinternet.com](mailto:martincherry@btinternet.com) 07716 993652 Fuller details will be provided later to those who register an interest.

## EARLY ALERT! An excellent training opportunity in Historic Buildings Recording

The Vernacular Architecture Group (to which DOWH is affiliated) holds an annual training conference for people interested in developing their historic building recording skills. It's a relatively recent initiative, unfortunately interrupted by covid, but sessions so far, in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, proved very popular. Numbers are kept low, to between around fifteen and twenty. This year DOWH is co-hosting it during the weekend of 1-2 October and it will be held in and around Ruthin. We are lucky to have secured three of the most experienced tutors in the business and the emphasis is practical – looking



Eglwys St Tanwg

closely and thinking in the field about a small but varied selection of buildings, usually three or four, with discussion sessions (usually in the pub) afterwards. There is a modest fee in the region of £25 to cover tutors' expenses and students must find their own accommodation.

A full announcement will be made in due course, but note the date now if you might be interested. For a preliminary chat, contact [martincherry@btinternet.com](mailto:martincherry@btinternet.com) Places are normally allocated on a first-come first-served basis, although a small number of dedicated places for DOWH members will be secured.

### Dolgellau Walkaround 12 May 2022 by Martin Cherry

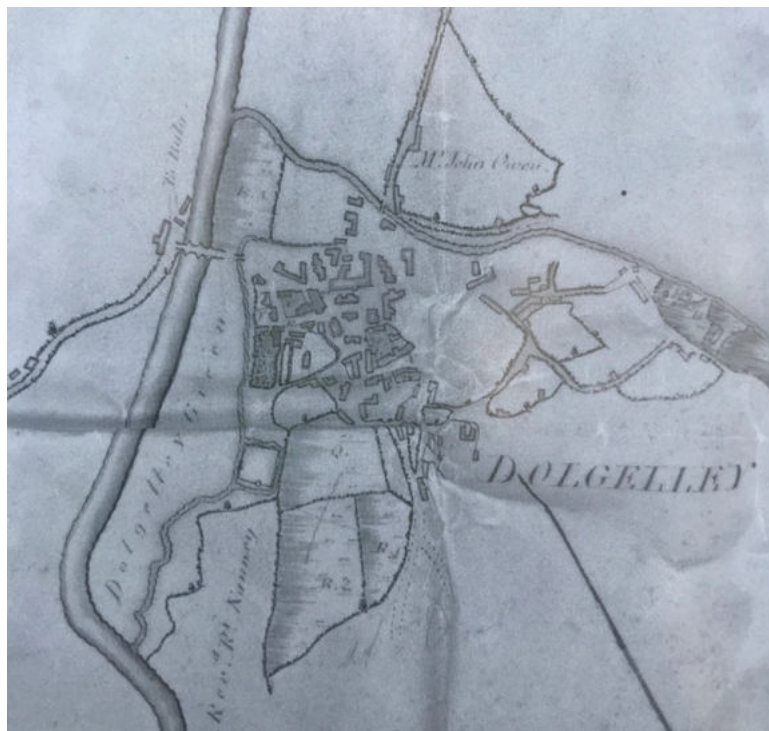
Eight members of the Merioneth Branch met together for the first time since the relaxation of Covid restrictions. We had arranged to meet in December but were rained off: this time the sun shone. The main purpose of the stroll around the central parts of Dolgellau was to try and 'reconstruct' in our minds' eye what the town may have looked like prior to the period of rapid growth in the late eighteenth century and the improvements of the early nineteenth, using what we could see - the layout of the streets and older houses - as our guide.

Dolgellau in the Middle Ages was never formally a borough. During the early Middle Ages, it didn't amount to much at all - the bond township of Nannau had substantially more resident families - but by the fourteenth century it was clearly a busy market town and by the fifteenth something of a local political centre, too. Courts were held here and local gentry visited and, in some cases, had second homes in the town. Substantial families that feature in the work of the court or praise poets had houses nearby, including Nannau, Hengwrt, Dolserau, and Llwyn and added to that we should appropriated as a centre of Lancastrian power).

Unlike towns such as Bala or Machynlleth, Dolgellau was



gravity had shifted a few hundred yards to the east: a picture of about 1800 shows an informal open space for trading (Fig 2), which in and after 1830 was transformed into a proper square, the only part of Dolgellau that could be called 'planned'. The nineteenth century saw



**Fig. 1** The earliest surviving map of Dolgellau, dated 1760. It shows the informal street pattern before improvements were made in the early nineteenth century. North is to the left.

of the grid pattern you associate with the 'planted' towns of the thirteenth century, Dolgellau filled the spaces that were already there, following the boundaries of pre-existing landed estates and the old field hedges and ditches (Fig 1). At first, the heart of the little town lay below and to the west of the church, which stands on a bluff overlooking the meadows and the Mawddach estuary, around what is now called Y Lawnt. In fact, the name Dolgellau is made up of two elements, *dol* (meadow) and *cellau* (merchant or trading stalls) - so, the market by the fields where the sheep and cattle graze - and animals were grazed, stalled and slaughtered in this part of the town down to the nineteenth century.

As regional trade grew Dolgellau was well placed to facilitate it, on or close to four river valleys, many roads and the estuary carrying small ships to Barmouth. By the late seventeenth century (possibly before), the town's centre of

**Fig 2** The irregular open market space tidied up and improved in 1830 by Sir R. W. Vaughan of Nannau, what is now Eldon Square, named after the Lord Chancellor and a friend of Vaughan's. Some of the older buildings survived including Plas Newydd, the canted west wing of which is visible at the far end



much change - a new shire hall and court house (1825), municipal gas works, market hall (1870-1), inns, shops, factories and warehouses and much new housing. Despite all this development, the character of the town is still determined by the street patterns that preceded it, and many of the earlier houses, dating probably in the main from the eighteenth century, are notable for their seemingly haphazard alignment with odd corners and a jumble of courts and rear yards. Around a dozen houses retain their distinctive half-hipped dormers. All these early houses use massive blocks of stone that in many cases had to be reared by cranes specially constructed on each site for the purpose. Victorian buildings can be distinguished by their mechanically worked sneaked masonry.

DOWH and Treftadaeth Dolgellau Heritage are considering working up a community project to identify and record the early houses of the town. It's still early days, but if you would like to join us, contact me at [martincherry@btinternet.com](mailto:martincherry@btinternet.com)



**Fig 3** Plas Newydd. Behind this frontage lies a much older range, perhaps a sixteenth or seventeenth century town house, we do not know for sure. Although the tree-ring samples contained over 50 rings, they did not match master chronologies: according to the tree-ring dating expert this was probably because the trees grew in an area with a very distinct microclimate.



**Fig 4** Four houses have been tree-ring sampled but three did not date and the one that did is no longer in Dolgellau: pictured here shortly before its removal by special train to Newtown, Cwrt Plas yn Dre was an up-market aisled gentry town house built for the Owen family between 1512 and 1542. It originally occupied a prominent position close to the marketplace.

## DENBIGHSHIRE BRANCH

### Branch report by Janice Dale

The following events are planned.

**June 17th 2pm.** Walk up Nant y Pandy, Glyndyfrdwy. Tea afterwards at the Berwyn Arms

**July 20<sup>th</sup> 2pm.** Ruthin Walkabout with Fiona Gale. Tea afterwards at Ruthin Castle

## FLINTSHIRE BRANCH

### Branch report to June 2022 by Wally and Margaret Barr

Since our last report the Flintshire branch have met on two occasions. The first of these, in early March, was held in the 15<sup>th</sup> century house Nantclwyd y Dre in Ruthin. At this meeting Janice Dale, representative of the Denbighshire branch of DOWH, gave an interesting presentation about the 'Fifth Dimension', including the art, portraiture, poetry and literature that can inspire our house histories. The next

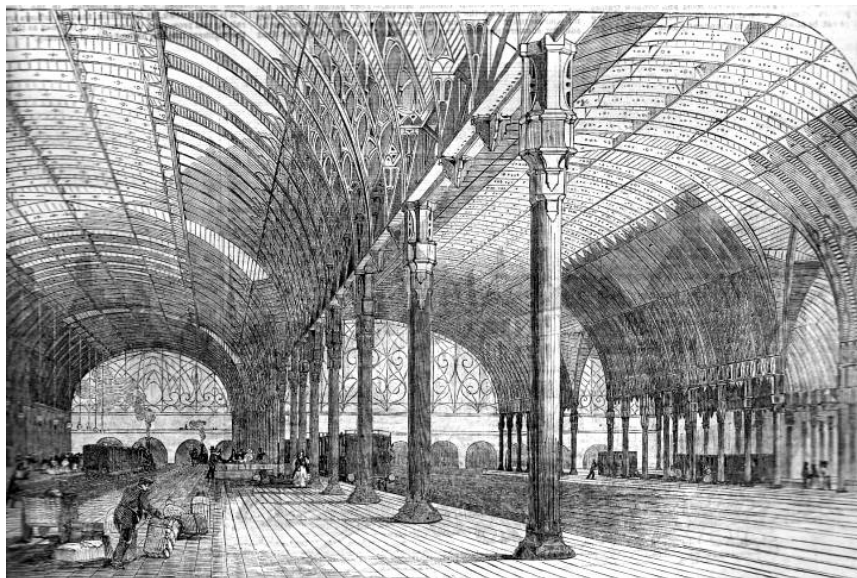


**Fig 5** A house at the entrance to the old town close to the bridge over the Arran. It is a well-preserved example of a house type of which several survive, with an off-centre doorway and distinctive half-hipped dormers. These houses would deserve further study: they may well be early eighteenth century.

branch meeting, towards the end of April, began with a tour of St Asaph Cathedral with its anomalies in the stained glass, famous graffiti in the choir stalls and the story of William Morgan's Bible. The afternoon concluded with refreshments in the cathedral tearooms.

## **Journey of Joseph Iron (age 35) through South Wales in 1843 by Tim Biddle**

My three times great uncle was born at Bury St Edmunds. He was a man of 'independent means' and wrote copious diaries. Having returned from 2 years in Paris where he attended the Sorbonne he caught the train from Paddington on Brunel's Great Western Railway, recently completed in 1841. He travelled to Swindon, connecting to Cirencester whence he travelled into Wales by coach via Cheltenham and Gloucester. The following entries give a flavour of his impressions - not all entirely p.c!



Brunel's Great Western Terminus at Paddington.  
Print from *Illustrated London News* 1854

*Wednesday April 19 - With mind full of misgivings of what would be the result of my journey, left kind friends and was driven by brother to station at Paddington and after some delay found myself comfortably seated in a carriage en route to Cirencester.*

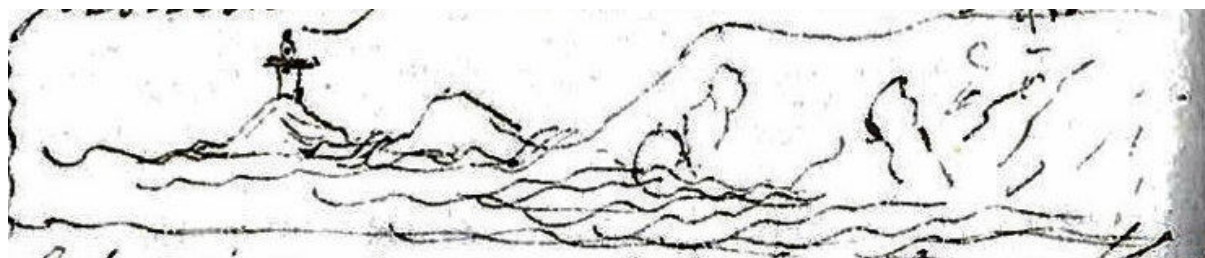
*Coach to Cheltenham, surprised to find it so pretty a town- quite a London en petit. Passing a churchyard with graves covered with flowers on Palm Sunday so religiously observed by the poorer classes that they would expend their last farthing to purchase flowers.*

*Monmouth nothing remarkable, scenery picturesque and mountainous. Breakfast at the Royal Hotel a favourite retreat of Queen Victoria.*

*Carmarthen apparently pleasant town, nothing remarkable - both boys and girls without any shoes or stockings other than those provided by nature-namely a coating of mud. Yet how happy and jocund they appear, the proof that at all events neither a shoemaker or hosier is necessary for happiness. At S's heard report of pistol and found the servant had had a very narrow escape with her life. S. had foolishly left 2 loaded pistols by the bedside, and the maid in making it had accidentally thrown one down. It went off and the ball passed through her clothes but fortunately without injuring her.*

*The taste of the peasant women in their hats seem to me exceedingly outré - I suppose prejudice - Yet they seem very proud of their conspicuous chapeaux and twirl them about often very significantly. Occasionally a trio of old women discussing their neighbours' concerns have much reminded me of the witches of Macbeth.*

*Swansea is seated in a valley surrounded by lofty hills, with a beautiful capacious bay. Strolled to the Mumbles. Sat awhile to watch advancing and receding waves - found myself surrounded by waters and could only liberate myself by climbing up formidable looking rock which otherwise I would not have dared to adventure - thought of shipwrecked seamen - four men drowned very near a short time previously*



Sketch by JI of rough seas at the Mumbles with the lighthouse.



*Walked towards copper works, at extremity of upper town. Seen long before approach the dense cloud of smoke in which a thousand vomitories pour forth in continuous streams. Rolling on its course it creeps slowly up the hills, destroying vegetation wherever its pernicious presence is felt .*

*Admire the dexterity which the shoeless girls carry their well posed pails and pitchers full of water on their heads without touching them with their hands. The arms of the market women are at liberty pour un enfant.*

*Sunday. April 30 - Morning to St. Anne's, where thoughts almost dissevered from prayer by twang and discordant delivery of minister. Strolled to pier, commanding fine view of Mumbles. Vessel about to leave for Chile and on passing entrance, crew collected and gave three hearty valedictory cheers to their friends of whom many were assembled to have last look.*

*Stepped on board the 'Bristol' steamer and soon ploughed our course through the noble bay. Scarcely two knots from starting place ere qualms not of mind but body began to seize me reminding me never to resort to sea again. I had no remedy but the expected calmness of the Severn which I looked for anxiously - Avon narrow - walls of stone on either side - walked through Bristol - apparently fine town - canals in streets - similar I imagine to Dutch. Reached station at other extremity of town - Deluging rain.*

I presume he returned by rail to Paddington where he was met by his bother Nathaniel. With apologies for any offence caused to the people of Carmarthen !

