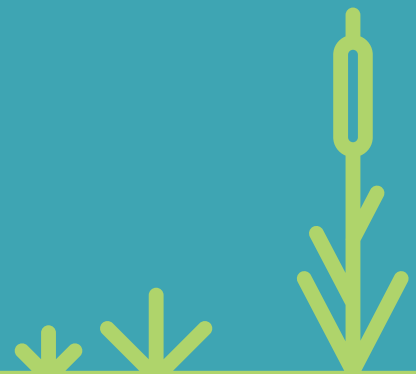




# Gwent Levels: Parish Portraits in the 1880s

Darganfod **Gwastadeddau Gwent**

Discover **Gwent Levels**



# Gwent Levels: Parish Portraits in the 1880s



## Contents

	<b>Author</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction		3
Bishton	Martin Gerrard	4
Caldicot	Maurice Turner	13
Chepstow	Martyn Swain	15
Llanedeyrn	Marion Sweeney	21
Llanvihangel Rogiet	Bob Evans	24
Magor	Bob Evans	28
Nash	Martyn Swain	34
Rumney & St Mellons	Marjorie Neal	40
Undy	Bob Evans	43
Whitson	Sharon Orton	47
Wilcrick	Martin Gerrard	52

## Parish Portraits

In order to build up a picture of life during the 1880s within the Living Levels Landscape Partnership area, the 1881 census and other contemporary sources were analysed and interpreted by volunteers from the RATS (Research And Transcription Service). The relevant areas of all the Living Levels parishes from East Cardiff Moors to Chepstow were covered, and a selection of the RATS' work is presented here in the form of parish portraits.

The 1881 census documented the acreage of farms, numbers and types of farm labourers, and those children who attended school. Occupations, places of birth, ages, marital status and relationships to the head of the household were also recorded. This information, together with newspaper articles, parish registers and other archival material, helped to recreate the stories of individuals and those of whole communities.

Ordnance Survey mapping enabled the 1881 census information from all identifiable farmsteads to be made available at <https://livinglevelsgjs.org.uk/> under the Volunteer Mapping Projects tab.



[www.livinglevels.org.uk/history-rats](http://www.livinglevels.org.uk/history-rats)

## BISHTON

The village of Bishton is situated on the northern edge of the Caldicot level, having Llanwern to the west, Wilcrick and Llandevenny to the east, and Redwick to the south.

'Bishton' is a corruption of 'Bishopstown' (or Llangadwaladr in Welsh) and was the location of one of the residences of the Bishops of Llandaff for many centuries. Bishop John Pascall died here of the plague in 1361.<sup>1</sup> Maps of the time recognise the 'Site of Castle' at the northern end of the village.<sup>2</sup> The monument comprises the remains of a castle, or house of the Bishops of Llandaff, dating to the medieval period (c. 1066 -1540 AD). The site consists of a partial enclosure defined by a semi-circular scarp occupying a low limestone ridge overlooking the Caldicot Levels and defended by sharp slopes but a more neutral approach to the north. The interior is level and retains traces of two possible rectangular building platforms. Bishton, or 'Lanickscastle', appears frequently on early mapping and is likely to have retained stone buildings until a relatively late date. It lies at the northern end of what may have originated as a planned linear village, the earlier parish church of St Cadwaladr being at its southern extremity.<sup>3</sup>

The village church originates from shortly after 570 AD.<sup>4</sup> It is the only church in the country dedicated to St Cadwaladr - although there is a suggestion that Magor church was also originally dedicated to him. Cadwaladr was the last Welsh ruler to call himself 'King of Britain', and he earned the title 'blessed' for his peaceful disposition. He died of the plague in 664 AD. The original decorated and perpendicular church was damaged in 1760 when part of the tower collapsed into the nave and considerable rebuilding and restoration had to take place.<sup>5</sup>

Further work was required in 1885; the South Wales Echo reporting that a Consistorial Court held at Llandaff received a petition "for a faculty allowing the restoration of the church of St Cadwaladr, Bishton, Monmouthshire, which from age and decay had become dilapidated and unfit for the celebration of divine worship. Plans had been prepared by Mr Pritchard, diocesan architect, and had received the approval of the bishop, the parishioners, and the diocesan commissioners. The cost was stated to be £800, towards which £750 had been subscribed. By the proposed restoration, accommodation for 110 worshippers would be provided. It consisted of the restoration of the nave, a new roof to the tower, the re-flooring and re-seating of the nave, re-hanging of the bells, erection of a new porch, and repairs to the walls, windows and nave. There being no opposition, the faculty was granted in the terms of the petition."<sup>6</sup> Bradney states that the rebuilding took place in 1887.<sup>7</sup> The church was twinned with St Mary's, Llanwern, and was officiated by Rev. Jeffrey Hooper at the time.

<sup>1</sup> <https://netherwent.church/bishton> [Accessed 20.03.23]

<sup>2</sup> Ordnance Survey, published 1902 (National Library of Scotland)

<sup>3</sup> <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/sam/FullReport?id=362> [Accessed 28.03.23]

<sup>4</sup> Bradney, Sir Joseph, *A History of Monmouthshire, Volume 4; The hundred of Caldicot, Part 2* (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 1994), p. 258

<sup>5</sup> <https://netherwent.church/bishton> [Accessed 20.03.23]

<sup>6</sup> *South Wales Echo*, 12 June 1885, p. 4

<sup>7</sup> Bradney, Sir Joseph, *A History of Monmouthshire, Volume 4; The hundred of Caldicot, Part 2* (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 1994), p. 258

Whilst the north porch is a 19th century addition, some of the lancet windows are original. The east window, the west tower window and the two south windows to the nave are Victorian insertions. The chancel arch is a mystery – presumably reconstructed from earlier stonework and incorporating medieval corbel heads of a monk, a nun, a man and a woman. A stoup is located near the north door. The font is a late medieval piece, whilst the stained glass to the east window dates from c.1915 and depicts Christ as the light of the world and as the good shepherd. It is recorded that the use of the Welsh language in services continued here until 1828.<sup>8</sup>



*St Cadwaladr, Bishton (Martin Gerrard)*

On the night of 3 April 1881, 154 persons resided in Bishton – including 2 visitors. They inhabited 32 properties, giving a slightly lower than average 4.75 persons per household. Four of the properties housed a total of 5 lodgers amongst their number. Of the 152 ‘permanent’ resident population, 88 (58%) were male.

Whilst there were 54 (34 male and 20 female) recorded as being 14 years old or younger, only 13 were identified as scholars. Accepting that many are under school age, this number is way below

<sup>8</sup> <https://netherwent.church/bishton> [Accessed 20.03.23]



expectation, and suggests that not all scholars were identified at the time. This is particularly so as Bishton was the location of a (boys and girls) school.

The school was built in 1878. A School Board, formed in 1875, raised £800 for construction of the school, which had space for 32 children. At the time of the 1881 census, school mistress Amey How lived in the school house with her husband (a carpenter) and their three sons.

In 1895 Henry Edsor, the school's headmaster, was sentenced to three months in prison with hard labour after he admitted trying to defraud the People's Co-operative Bank. He had recently been appointed by the Bishton School Board and said he needed a loan to help pay bills incurred in relocating from Cornwall. He forged the signatures of two Bishton men, including School Board member Noah Davies, to obtain £10 6s from the bank. The school closed in 1954.<sup>9</sup> The building is currently used as the village hall.



*The former Bishton School (Martin Gerrard)*

Of the 152 resident population in 1881, 94 (62%) were born within the parish itself. Conversely, 20 were born elsewhere in the UK, and 2 in Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> <https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=former-bishton-school-newport> [Accessed 28.03.23]

The working population numbered 82 – with 54 males and 28 females. Unsurprisingly, 49 of that number were directly engaged in farm work. Mr Joseph Jenkins combined his work as an agricultural labourer with that of ‘collector of taxes’.

The New Inn public house was to be found in the south-east of the village, and was home to the Inn Keeper, Mr John Edwards, his wife, brother and two children.

With the settlement adjacent to the northern side of the Great Western Railway line to London, it provided for the site of a railway crossing. Mr William Davies is identified as the railway gate keeper and is resident there with his wife in April 1881. In fact, Mr Davies had held that post since 1853, and continued to do so until at least 1901 (when 75 years of age). In 1911 the census records him as a ‘railway pensioner’. A ‘railway policeman’, James Edwards, was seemingly responsible for the railway at the time of its opening in 1850 (based on 1851 census information).

The railway crossing itself is very unusual, with a low underpass and a gated crossing above ground. It is likely that the underpass was too low for a fully loaded cart to negotiate, necessitating the addition of a ground-level alternative. The signal box is a much later addition, built in 1941.<sup>10</sup>



*Bishton Railway Crossing and Signal Box (Martin Gerrard)*

<sup>10</sup> <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/414549> [Accessed 28.03.23]



The importance of the railway is evident from the advertisement offering the sale of hay and pasturage on behalf of Mrs Mary Jenkins. The particulars state that “the sale will take place immediately after the arrival of the 1.25 train from Newport”.<sup>11</sup>

TO HAY MERCHANTS, GRAZIERS, AND  
OTHERS.

SALE OF PRIME OLD AND NEW MEADOW HAY  
AND PASTURAGE,  
**BISHTON**, NEAR THE LLANWERN STATION,  
(First Station from Newport),  
ON THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.

**M**R. MADDOX has received instructions  
from Mrs. Mary Jenkins to SELL BY PUBLIC  
AUCTION, on the Land situated as above, on TUES-  
DAY, the 14th day of SEPTEMBER, 1880, about  
70 TONS OF PRIME WELL-HARVESTED OLD  
AND NEW MEADOW HAY,  
In Four Ricks, as follows:—

One Rick of Prime Old Meadow Hay, about ten tons.  
One Rick of ditto, ditto, about fifteen tons.  
One Rick of New Meadow Hay, about eighteen tons.  
One Rick of ditto, ditto, about twenty-five tons.  
At the same time will be Sold the

LATTERMATH

Of a Field of 15 Acres (which is in splendid condition) to  
Christmas next.

The Sale will take place immediately after the arrival  
of the 1.25 train from Newport.

THERE WILL BE NO RESERVE.

For further particulars apply to Mrs JENKINS, **Bishton**,  
near Llanwern, Mon.; or to the AUCTIONEER, at his  
Offices, 76, St. Mary-street, Cardiff. [3564

Whilst 15 farms are identified (by occupation), only eight have a recorded acreage. Of those specified, Bishton Castle Farm is by far the largest at 380 acres. Ridings Farm comprises of 160 acres and Village Farm 150. The remaining recorded acreages range from (only) 10 to 50. Nicholas Jenkins of Great House Farm was Guardian of the Poor for the Newport Union at the time;<sup>12</sup> and William Jenkins a judge for ‘grass farms’.<sup>13</sup>

Newspapers of the time frequently had occasion to report on members of the farming community. For example, Mary Jones was summoned at Newport Borough Police Court for cruelty to a horse. “It was not a bad case. The bench made an order for the payment of costs”.<sup>14</sup>

At Newport County Petty-Sessions – “John Gale was summoned for allowing a mare to stray on the highway, in the parish of Wilcrick, on 8<sup>th</sup> inst. Defendant said the mare broke out. Fined 5s.

<sup>11</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 10 September 1880, p. 4

<sup>12</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 29 March 1881, p. 3

<sup>13</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 10 October 1884, p. 3

<sup>14</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 29 July 1879, p. 4

Defendant was also summoned for allowing five cows to stray on the highway at Bishton on 8<sup>th</sup> inst. He made the same excuse in this case. Fined 5s.”<sup>15</sup>

Under a headline of “Cattle Astray”, the Monmouthshire Merlin reported that “Elizabeth Tamplin, Bishton, was summoned on the information of PC Ferris for allowing two cows belonging to her to stray onto the highway on the 14<sup>th</sup> inst. The Bench fined defendant half-a-crown and costs”.<sup>16</sup>

“Philip Gale, farmer, Bishton and John Gale, farmer, Redwick were summoned for allowing animals, their property, to be at large on the highways. The Messrs. Gale admitted that their cattle were astray on days named by the police, but the defendants declared that owing to flies and want of water it was well-nigh impossible to keep animals within bounds.....Fines of 5s including costs were inflicted”.<sup>17</sup>

The Hereford Times reported on proceedings at Monmouthshire Spring Assizes, where farmers sons Thomas Leonard and James Phillips (both 12 years old) “were charged with having feloniously thrown stones at the up-express train on the South Wales Railway, breaking a window of the first-class carriage of the said train, and endangering the passengers, in the parish of Bishton on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1862”. The train was reported to be travelling at 50 miles an hour and passing through Bishton Crossing when the incident occurred. Witnesses included the train guard, a passenger, police officers and the aforementioned William Davies (the gatekeeper). “His Lordship having summed-up, the jury found both prisoners guilty of misdemeanour, but having no intention to injure the passengers.” As they had not committed a felony, “the Judge liberated them”.<sup>18</sup>

More serious matters were also recorded. The Monmouthshire Merlin reported on “The Scab in Newport Market - Joseph Samuel, Castle Farm, Bishton, was charged with exposing sheep affected with the scab for sale in Newport Market. Mr Woollett, Town Clerk, prosecuted. Defendant admitted the offence, and said the disease broke out unexpectedly; there had been so much wet weather lately that he did not know what to do with them. He hoped the Bench would be lenient. The Magistrate’s Clerk said he was doing a most grievous injury. Inspector Williams stated that on Wednesday last he saw Mr Samuel bring a flock of sheep into the market. After they were penned he found that in one pen there were four out of ten affected with the scab. The disease had been on them some time, and they had been ruddled, and those who did that must have known they were diseased. There were about 2,000 sheep in the market. He spoke to defendant, who said he hoped he would not mention it that time. The sheep came in in a rush, and it was some time before he could get at them, and by that time two of the pens had been sold and were gone. Mr Woollett said defendants were liable to a fine of £20 in the case of a single sheep, or £5 a piece if there were more. The Mayor said the case was clearly proved against the defendant, and the Bench were of the opinion that he knew that the animals were diseased. They were disposed, however, to be lenient, and defendant would have to pay £5”.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 24 October 1881, p. 3

<sup>16</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 27 June 1884, p. 8

<sup>17</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 July 1884, p. 8

<sup>18</sup> *Hereford Times*, 4 April 1863, p. 2

<sup>19</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 12 November 1875, p. 8

At the County Police Court – “George Gale, for assaulting Albert Jones, at Bishton, on Sunday night the 20<sup>th</sup> ult., was fined 10s and costs”.<sup>20</sup> The South Wales Daily News reported on: “Another Farmer Gone Wrong – David Gale, farmer, Bishton, was summoned for being drunk in charge of a horse and cart, and also with furious driving in Stow Hill on Thursday. The magistrates inflicted a fine of 21s.”<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the Gale family feature strongly in the aforementioned, they were at the centre of more extensive reporting in 1877. “Extraordinary Proceedings at Bishton – John Gale (publican), John Huggett, Jas. Huggett, Philip Gale, Albert Jones, William Morgan, James Evans, George Cullimore, John Whitehead and Wm. Navy, were summoned under the following circumstances. John Gale, farmer, is the uncle of John Gale, one of the defendants, and the latter has recently been fined for allowing a colt to stray, and it is alleged that the former was the informer in this case. Mr Graham appeared for the defendants.

John Gale, sen., at whose instance the information was laid, stated that on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> inst., the men drove two piles down in a field opposite his house on the other side of the road, and put a cross piece upon it, and said this was a gallows to hang the complainant on. Cullimore had previously trimmed the hedge for about two yards. He (complainant) went into Magor and gave information to P.C. Rowan, and then returned. Before he came back the men had made an “image”, and Cullimore brought it down by the neck, pulling it along. That was about seven o’clock. There were 30 more people present besides the defendants, but they kept back in the dark. Somebody said “Who do you call it?” and another said “Who is it?” and somebody said “Old Jack Gale, the old b\_\_\_, the highway informer”. Somebody then said “What did he do?” and they said “He informed of a colt straying in the road”. They said “He ought to be hanged”, and they then put a slip round the neck of the effigy and drew it up across the cross piece of the gallows as they called it. They then set it on fire and then it began to blaze and blaze, and it burnt till it fell off at the neck, and John Gale got a stick and stuck into it, and said “Up with the old b\_\_\_, up with it, up. (Laughter.) Let him hang by the neck till he is dead”. After it was burnt Albert Jones said “Now we will bury him under the gallows. We will bury him in his place.” Whitehead said “We will send his soul to hell. (Laughter.) After the first one was burnt they went back again up to John Gale’s. Then Mr Rowan (the policeman) came. They came back with another effigy and repeated what they had done before, and Mr Rowan saw them. The language was shameful for Christian men to use. After that they brought another effigy and burnt it. Two girls were out in the road on the watch.

In reply to Mr Graham, complainant swore that John Gale and John Huggett were present on the first and second occasions. On the third occasion the men were so drunk they could not stand. One of them told him that John Gale stood 18 gallons of ale. He had to apologise to John Gale some time ago. Arthur Gale, son of complainant corroborated; as did also P.C. Rowan, who added that after the effigies were burned a kind of funeral service was read over the remains by the light of a lantern.

Mr Graham called evidence to prove that John Gale and John Huggett were not there, but the Bench convicted all the defendants, who were bound over and ordered to pay the costs”.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *The Cardiff Times*, 16 February 1884, p. 8

<sup>21</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 19 September 1885, p. 3

<sup>22</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 19 October 1877, p. 3

## In the wider community of Bishton

Two men by the name of Charles Tamplin recorded within the village on census day 1881, both being lodgers and both designated as labourers. One was aged 39, the other 60. It is unclear which of these two is referred to in the newspaper story from 1884:

“Begging Imposters – Charles Tamplin and James Williams, said to hail from Bishton, were taken into custody on Monday for begging. Representing themselves as in the employ of the scavenging contractor, they obtained from several tradesmen sums of money as Christmas gifts for the scavengers. The public would do well to be on their guard against imposters of this kind. The prisoners will be charged under the Vagrant Act with begging”.<sup>23</sup>

However, it is evidently the elder of the two being reported on when Charles Tamplin appeared at Newport County Police Court in March 1886: “before Dr Woollet, magistrate – Charles Tamplin, a grey-headed old countryman, of Bishton, was charged with being drunk and riotous at Liswerry, on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst. P.C. Lawrence said that late at night he took the defendant to the Cross Hands, and set him with his face homewards. However he became riotous, and wanted to fight the officer, and he was obliged to handcuff him. Defendant: I forget all that. Dr Woollett: How old are you? Defendant: When I am older I shall be better a good bit. (Laughter.) Dr Woollett: You must be a very plucky old man to want to fight the policeman. Defendant: I was, sir. (Renewed laughter.) He put the handcuffs on me and brought another man. Lawrence: That was afterwards. I was obliged to lock him up. When he got to Eve’s Well he became disorderly. Dr Woollett: He heard water running, and thought it was something stronger? (Laughter.) To defendant – I think I have seen you before? Defendant (ruefully): Yes, it cost me too much then. (Renewed laughter.) Dr Woollett: We must try to prevent you from getting drunk at your time of life. You will have to pay 10s. Defendant: I’ve got no money. Sergeant Willmott: He’s got £2 in the bank. Defendant: Yes, I can get it. Dr Woollett: Now, Tamplin, never get drunk again between meals. Defendant: It’s there I do it, worse luck. (Laughter.) Dr Woollett: Well, never drink again except with your dinner or supper”.<sup>24</sup>

Less than a month later, the same newspaper reported: “Charles Tamplin, a grey-headed man, of Bishton, who has made several appearances lately before the borough and county magistrates, was charged with being drunk and disorderly in High street on the previous afternoon. P.C. Walker said he tried ‘over and over and over’ again to get prisoner away, but he would shout, and collected a crowd around him. Prisoner (saluting the bench): I met a friend. Mr Phillips (magistrate): The friendship took an unexpected effect on you. You met with a friendly policeman, too, I think. Prisoner deliberately commenced his sentence again about meeting with a friend. Mr Phillips: There is nothing very particular in the case. Head-constable Sinclair: He has been here six times, and at the County Police Court several times. The Magistrate’s Clerk: He divides his favours between the two courts. Mr Phillips (to prisoner): You’ll be fined 5s. Prisoner: I haven’t got the money. Mr Sinclair: The last time he was here he came to Newport to get money out of the bank”.<sup>25</sup>

Newspaper coverage also extended to a more sobering news story, when the Monmouthshire Merlin, had the unfortunate task of reporting a tragic event, under the headline “Painful Suicide at Bishton”. From an inquest held at the New Inn, the report read: “On Sunday morning last the

<sup>23</sup> *The Western Mail*, 30 December 1884, p. 3

<sup>24</sup> *South Wales Echo*, 13 March 1886, p. 3

<sup>25</sup> *South Wales Echo*, 9 April 1886, p. 3

inhabitants of Bishton, a quiet village about five miles from Newport, were shocked with the intelligence that Mr William Bailey, formerly farm bailiff, had committed suicide. The news proved to be true, and the particulars of the sad affair will be found below in the evidence given by the distressed father, at an inquest held by Mr W.H. Brewer, Coroner, on Monday.

Mr William Bailey, farmer, deceased's father (82 years of age), said that about five o'clock on Sunday morning, while in bed, he heard a noise downstairs, which awoke him. On hastening down to ascertain the cause, which he never surmised to be the report of a gun, he found his son, who was about 60 years of age, prostrate on the floor, weltering in blood. There was on the ground beside him a double-barrelled gun (produced), which was also stained with blood. His son, who had recently assisted him in farm work, had been for about 20 years a farm bailiff to Sir C. Salusbury, of Llanwern House, and he had subsequently been for many years a bailiff under William Weinholt Esq., on the latter gentleman occupying the estate. He believed he had been about 12 years in the service of the latter gentleman, whom he left only last year, when he became affected in mind owing to losing 100 or more pounds that he had saved in service. He was a man of industrious and frugal habits. He had to be taken to the Abergavenny Lunatic asylum for about six months, owing to his mental derangement. After being much relieved, he was discharged from the Asylum, and went to reside with witness at Bishton, as his wife and daughter had left him since his confinement in the Asylum, and did not live with him. During the last few months he had appeared much distressed in spirits, and witness was certain that his former mental infirmity was overtaking him.

Mr George, the foreman of the jury, stated that the deceased was a man highly respected by all who knew him. – Other jurymen endorsed the opinion expressed by the Foreman. – The Coroner, briefly summing up the evidence, stated that the jury would have no difficulty in arriving at a verdict, as there could be no doubt of the deceased's mental affliction. – The jury at once returned a verdict that the deceased had caused his own death by firing a gun at his head whilst in a state of mind that rendered him incapable of self-control.

It may be added that the poor fellow had dressed himself before perpetrating the terrible deed, with the exception of not having his boots on; and the gun had evidently been discharged by deceased applying his toe to the trigger. Mr Bailey, sen., had fired one of the barrels on Saturday night to test whether the charges had been rendered useless by being kept long loaded.

It will be remembered that a few years ago a coloured servant man of Mr Weinholt, of Llanwern House, committed suicide in a similar manner." <sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 April 1882, p. 8



## CALDICOT

On 3 April 1881 a nationwide census took place. This article will use the census enumerators' books to look at two of the parishes of Monmouthshire. Caldicot and its neighbour, Portskewett which included Sudbrook, concentrating on how they had changed over the course of 20 years. Both parishes are on the eastern side of the Levels, but it is not this that links them. It is the construction of the Severn Tunnel.

We will see how this area changed over a very short period from predominately agricultural communities to industrial with the populations increasing from the influx of workers to satisfy the needs of the Tinsplate Works and the Severn Tunnel.

In the census of 1861, the population of Caldicot was given as 558 and was predominately agricultural with 57% of the working population employed in agriculture. The only "industry" was six men who worked on the railway. The remainder were either in domestic service or providing local services. Caldicot was, and still is, the commercial and retail centre of this part of Monmouthshire.

Over the following twenty years Caldicot's population more than doubled to 1390 with the percentage working in agriculture dropping to 17% with 57% employed in industry. Two factors caused this rapid change in the balance of employment. Firstly, the Tinsplate Works and followed by the construction of the Severn Tunnel.

Henry Hughes of Tintern opened a wireworks factory south of the railway at Caldicot Pill in 1862. It soon became Caldicot's main employer. Between 1877 and 1879 the factory reconfigured to produce tinsplate and became known as the Tinworks.<sup>27</sup> In 1881 the works employed 78 men and women, 13% of the working population. In July 2020, tin working ceased in Caldicot after 158 years when Tin masters moved all operations to their new base in Swansea.

In 1873 the Great Western Railway commenced work on the construction of the Severn Tunnel under the supervision of Sir John Hawkshaw. 'After four and a half years work, all that had been done consisted of the sinking of one shaft... and the driving of about 1600 yards of 7-foot square heading under the river.'<sup>28</sup> As a consequence of this slow progress, the GWR awarded a contract to Thomas Walker to complete the Works. By 1881 construction was well under way.

It is not easy to identify from the census returns the precise numbers working on the tunnel and its associated works. This is because under "occupation" there are many who just have "Labourer" without saying where they were working. The rapid influx of people to satisfy the needs of the two employers meant that local entrepreneur Timothy Carter, by various means was able to develop the land south of the railway at Caldicot Pill. This area became known unofficially as Carterstown and it was here that many of the tinworks and tunnel workers lived.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Dr Robert Gant, Caldicot Wireworks 1871: A Study in Social Geography, *Gwent Local History* No 50 1985, p.19

<sup>28</sup> Thomas A. Walker, *The Severn Tunnel: Its Construction and Difficulties 1872-1887* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1888), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Gill Garrett, *Digging Up the Family* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2017), pp. 94-95

The majority of those residing in this area did not come from Caldicot and the surrounding area so it must be assumed that they were here for one reason only – to work on the tunnel. Using the assumption above, at the time of the 1881 census there were around 250 men working on the tunnel project, which is approximately 40% of the working population of Caldicot.

Table 1: Employment Structure in 1881

Farming	106	17%
Domestic Services	60	10%
Tunnel works	251	41%
Tinworks	78	13%
Railway	17	3%
Local Services	100	16%

As can be seen from Table 2, over the 20 years between the 1861 and 1881 census there was a massive influx of workers, mainly men, from outside of Caldicot and the neighbouring parishes.

Table 2: Distribution of where the population of Caldicot were born

Place of birth	1861		1881	
	Count	%	Count	%
Caldicot parish	295	53%	382	27%
Neighbouring parishes	63	11%	77	5%
Elsewhere in Monmouthshire	83	15%	287	21%
Elsewhere in Wales	5	1%	70	5%
Elsewhere in GB	101	18%	555	40%
Ireland	5	1%	6	1%
Born abroad	1	<1%	1	<1%
Not recorded	5	1%	12	1%

North of the railway life went on much as it had done for hundreds of years. In the parish of Caldicot (which in 1881 went as far north as Five Lanes including much of what is now the parish of Caerwent) the census recorded 15 farms varying in size from 6 to 217 acres. There were 93 males and 13 females, mainly the farmer’s family, employed in farming, 17% of the working population. As a comparison, in 1861 there were 140 people working on the land or 57% of the working population.

In 1881 the centre of Caldicot was a bustling small village with a variety of shops and other trades. There were four teachers and pupil teachers, who taught 244 students in St Mary’s School in Church Road, as well three doctors and midwives and two ministers of religion. Caldicot did not have any policemen but there was a jockey living in the village. The only entertainment was provided by the five public houses. Only two of them, *The Cross Inn* and *The Castle Inn*, survive today.

## CHEPSTOW

This study of Chepstow's 1881 census<sup>30</sup> was undertaken as part of the Living Levels project. It reveals the size and composition of the population thirty years earlier than Robert Gant's analysis in *Gwent Local History* 128.<sup>31</sup> There were four enumeration districts: St Kingsmark has also been included as it fell within the Living Levels Landscape Partnership area. As a thriving market town, Chepstow provided a wide range of services and employment to its inhabitants and hinterland, the latter including the eastern end of the Caldicot Level.

On the night of 3 April 1881, Chepstow recorded a population of 3,526 of which 1,722 were male and 1,804 were female. They occupied 696 households, an average occupancy of 4.77 persons. By comparison, the population in 2011 was 12,350 occupying 5,168 households with an average household size of 2.37.<sup>32</sup> In 1881 there were 48 properties marked as unoccupied, although some residents may have simply been away from home. Boarders and lodgers figure prominently with 259 living in 119 households. Additionally, 44 visitors spent the night in the town. The Chepstow Union Workhouse (on the western edge of town) registered 160 inmates. Powis Almshouses recorded 12 single occupants. In port there were 8 vessels with a total of 25 seamen on board.<sup>33</sup>

Of the male population, 637 (37%) were under 15 years, 319 (19%) were 15-25 and 608 (35%) were 26-60. The remaining 158 (9%) were over 60. The oldest male was 86, while the youngest was just 6 hours old and awaiting a name. The working male population was 1054, with 14 having two occupations. Several men aged over 80 were recorded as working as labourers. General labourers numbered 206 (13%) of the total working population.

Of the female population, 637 (35%) were under 15 years, 337 (19%) were 15-25, 671 (37%) were 26-60 and there were 159 (9%) aged over 60. The oldest female was 87. The working female population of 537 included several women over 80 mostly as servants.

Domestic service accounted for 353 people in total, 29 male and 324 female: 22% of the total working population and 60% of female workers were in domestic service.

Chepstow was the birthplace of 50% of the population (1,754 people). Another 510 (15%) were either born in a neighbouring parish or elsewhere in Monmouthshire. Further afield, 67 were born in Ireland, 15 in Scotland and 12 abroad. The overseas births included in Chile, Denmark, Germany, India, Italy, Jamaica, North America and South Africa. Seafaring connections are evident: for example, former master mariner, Benjamin Evans, and his wife were born in Chepstow, as was their youngest child, a boy. Their three adult daughters were all born in Valparaiso, Chile, one of them on board a ship.

<sup>30</sup> This paper was published in *Gwent Local History* 2022, no.132: pp.35-42.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Gant, 'Chepstow in 1901: People, Place and Environment', *Gwent Local History*, 128 (2020), pp.59-74.

<sup>32</sup> <<https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2015/08/Census-2011-Town-and-Community-Council-Statistics.pdf>> [accessed 8 June 2021].

<sup>33</sup> <<https://www.angelfire.com/de/BobSanders/Chepstow81.html>> [accessed 20 November 2021].

The enumerators recorded 788 children as scholars: 378 (48%) male and 410 (52%) female. These predominantly fell within the 3-13 age-range, but some boys and girls continued in education. The records include 1 boy and 5 girls aged 17-19 as scholars. There were 28 teachers enumerated.

There were three farms enumerated. The largest, New House (just south of today's M48 interchange) was 266 acres and employed 5 labourers. Nearby Thornwell Farm had 3 labourers and Clay Pitts Farm, 1 labourer. Altogether 49 people were recorded as engaging in agricultural work. The *South Wales Daily News* reported that the overall harvest of 1881 would be satisfactory with the yield 'not large but will exceed the average of the last three years.'<sup>34</sup>

In 1876, the streets were considered to be well paved.<sup>35</sup> The town was lit by gas and the recently restored and enlarged parish church could accommodate a congregation of 1,600. There were also places of worship for Roman Catholics, Wesleyans, Independents, Irvingites and Baptists. The theatre, assembly rooms, choral society, literary institution and horticultural society provided for some of the town's social needs.

Situated on higher ground overlooking the River Wye and Caldicot Level at the lowest bridging point of the River Wye, Chepstow offered dock facilities and marine access. The River Wye was navigable up to the bridge but the huge tidal range limited navigation.

Chepstow was a flourishing tourist destination and *Mercer's* directory informed readers that during the summer there were daily coaches from the railway station to Tintern Abbey and Windcliff, the latter affording magnificent views across the landscape. All trains to Chepstow station were met by omnibuses from the *Beaufort Arms* and *George* hotels, both still in existence today.

The *Beaufort Arms* was the premier hotel in town. The owner/manager, William Garrett, was also the lessee of the Market Hall and superintendent of the fire brigade, whose equipment was kept in the hotel's yard. On the night of the 1881 census, 22 people were recorded: Garrett, his wife and 3 children, 12 servants, 2 family visitors and 3 paying boarders. The servants included a bookkeeper, cook, barmaid, chambermaids and a waitress. The *George Hotel* had no boarders that night. *The Castle Hotel* (nowadays named *The Chepstow Castle*) and the attached shop and house (both tenanted) were auctioned on 5 October 1881. The hotel was advertised with 'shooting ground, quoit ground and convenient outbuildings....in Bridge Street, opposite the entrance to Chepstow Castle'.<sup>36</sup> At the rear was a '...valuable piece of garden ground with fruit trees...greenhouses and outbuildings.' The main building had a bar, a bar parlour, kitchens, 2 billiard rooms, sitting room, 4 bedrooms, attics and arched cellars. The advertisement also stated that all the property was 'substantially built, well drained and ventilated and have a never-failing supply of pure water.'

Chepstow offered a large range of trades and retail services for food, drink, clothes and interior furnishings and equipment employing 391 (24%) in all. There were also a significant number of industries involving engineering, metal, wood and shipbuilding works which occupied 186 (12%)

<sup>34</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 5 September 1881, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Mercer & Crookers Directory for Monmouthshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and the Principal Towns and Places in Glamorganshire and Radnorshire*, 1876, pp.27-31.

<sup>36</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 1 October 1881, p.5.

people. Law, banking, accountancy and other professional services were undertaken by 120 (7%) people.

Large single employers included the Chepstow Bobbin Mills Company Ltd and Edward Finch and Co. The bobbin factory had been established in 1861 by Nelson Hewertson and sold on his death by his executors to the newly formed Chepstow Bobbin Mills Company Ltd in 1878. The *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser* carried an advertisement seeking people to apply for shares in the new company.<sup>37</sup> The workforce included many born in Cumberland and north Lancashire who probably moved south when the bobbin-making industry in the north slumped due to cheaper foreign imports. The 1881 census recorded 36 men, women and children as having been born in Lancashire and Cumberland. The factory's manager, William Hodgson, himself born in Westmorland, employed 76 men and 25 boys. The last cargo of timber from Russia for the factory was landed in 1885.<sup>38</sup> The company went into liquidation in 1887 and the business was sold again. The *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser* carried an auction notice from the liquidator selling off all the 'valuable Plant, Goodwill & Lease'.<sup>39</sup> On the same page there was a long letter to the shareholders from the directors of the company defending their conduct and referring to an acrimonious shareholders meeting.

Edward Finch and Co had constructed the (now Grade 1 listed) tubular railway bridge designed by Brunel in 1852 and remained thereafter in the town as a shipbuilding, bridge building and engineering establishment until the outbreak of the First World War. According to the 1881 census, 150 men and 61 boys were employed in the business. Several ships were launched from their yard in 1881 including a tug steamer named *Moss Rose* in May 1881.<sup>40</sup> This was for Messrs D. Guy and Sons based in Bute Docks, Cardiff. The article says another order for a similar vessel had been signed that morning. Finch's announced in July that they were about to lay down an iron steamship of about 2,000 tons and anticipated an order for a twin ship.<sup>41</sup> The notice added that 'during the past twelve months several smaller iron steamers have been launched from this yard. One is now on the stocks and other orders are in hand. In the river at the present time are lying three steamers built at and launched from this yard almost fit to proceed to their destination.' *Graces Guide* gives a good overview of the history of Edward Finch & Co.<sup>42</sup>

However, as Robert Gant notes, Chepstow was already in decline as a port by 1881. The Custom House was one of a number to be closed nationally in 1882. The docks at Cardiff and Newport being closer in proximity to the coalfields were growing at a great rate. Despite this 27 people are shown in the census as working in the maritime industries at sea and on land. And there was a good news item in October reporting from 'the right source' that land had been acquired from the Duke of Beaufort on the banks of the River Wye to erect a shipbuilding yard and that 'actual operations would soon commence'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 13 June 1878, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Gant, 'Chepstow in 1901: People, Place and Environment', *Gwent Local History*, 128 (2020), pp.59-74.

<sup>39</sup> *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 6 August 1887, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 7 May 1881, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> *Western Mail*, 7 July 1881, p.4.

<sup>42</sup> <[https://gracesguide.co.uk/Finch\\_and\\_Co](https://gracesguide.co.uk/Finch_and_Co)> [accessed 14 December 2021].

<sup>43</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 11 October 1881, p.4.



There was a serious clash of personalities at Chepstow's Workhouse reported in the *Western Daily Mail* in February 1881.<sup>44</sup> The same paper had in January complained that the press had been excluded from a meeting as the newly appointed assistant matron, Miss Talbot from Bath, wanted to address the board in private. She was now complained about by the matron, Mrs Hartland, to the Chepstow Board of Guardians. The complaint was that she was impudent and did not carry out her duties correctly, for which Miss Talbot was admonished by the chairman. The *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser* describes the proceedings at some length and in detail, including the fact that Miss Talbot had been assaulted by an inmate.<sup>45</sup> It seemed unlikely that the matron and assistant matron would ever be able to work together and this proved to be the case when Miss Talbot resigned after four months, requested a reference in July 1881 and became a schoolmistress in Wincanton Union, Somerset.

William E. Clark, a printer and newspaper owner, published the *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser* and other local newspapers. He came from a family of publishers and lived at 16 High Street where his business was also based.

On Bonfire Night 1881, there was 'a scene of uproar, surpassing any demonstration for a number of years.'<sup>46</sup> A large crowd set off 'squibs, rockets, crackers and combustibles of a more extensive character than of late years.' The newspaper speculated there was an organized determination on the part of the crowd to prevent the police controlling them. At one point a tar barrel was lit with the intention to roll it down High Street but it didn't burn well and on its way down the street it lodged on the pavement near the *Bush Inn*. It was removed by the police into the back yard of the premises. Stones were thrown and several panes of glass smashed at the *Bush Inn*. The crowd remained for some hours, tainting the police until eventually dispersing towards morning. The same newspaper carries an editorial under the by-line 'Smiler' two weeks later.<sup>47</sup> It questions why following 'the "Great Demonstration" the populace versus the police...of the numerous offenders against the law, only one victim alone was brought before the "beaks". He was a lad, son of a crippled mother, in very poor circumstances, who, the same day, was fined, with costs, five shillings, for not sending another child to school.' As they were unable to pay their fines the youth had been handcuffed to 'a stalwart miner accused of felony, and marched through the streets to the railway station. Penalty 14 days.' The paper then asks 'where are the offenders of the middle class who could afford to pay a fine for their fun?'

Herbert Lewis opened his department store in 1878 and the shop on the High Street was run by 5 generations of the same family until it closed in 2018, still under its original founder's name.<sup>48</sup> In 1881 he lived at 9 High Street with his wife, son, 2 daughters, 2 apprentices, 4 assistants and 2 domestic servants.

George Dewdney JP was a notable Chepstow citizen of the period.<sup>49</sup> He formed Chepstow Rugby Football Club in 1869. A player from the club, Edward Peake, played in the first Wales versus England

<sup>44</sup> *Western Daily Mail*, 28 February 1881, p.3.

<sup>45</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 5 March 1881, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 12 November 1881, p.5.

<sup>47</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 26 November 1881, p.4.

<sup>48</sup> *South Wales Argus*, 13 June 2018, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> <<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/11988244/the-dewdney-family-of-surrey-chapter-five-the-history-of-redhill>> [accessed 24 May 2020].

match in 1881.<sup>50</sup> Dewdney was headmaster of Chepstow Grammar School which he opened in January 1871. In 1881, he was living in Belle Vue House (the school premises, and later to be renamed High Trees) with his wife, 3 daughters and 2 female servants. The 23 boys listed as boarders and scholars were mainly born in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire. He was also on the Board of Guardians which oversaw the Workhouse. George Dewdney died in 1905 and is buried in Chepstow cemetery. The school disbanded and the buildings were sold in 1907.

*Slater's Directory* lists the schools in Chepstow as Board School, Bridge Street (boys); Board School, Station Road (girls); Chepstow Grammar School, Belle Vue; Independent School, Welsh Street; Infants School, Priory; National School, Chapel Hill; Roman Catholic School, Welsh Street and also two additional names, Maria Roberts, Church Street and Charles Wootton, Steep Street.<sup>51</sup>

The *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser* reported a Board School meeting at which the schoolmaster reports that 177 boys are on the books with an average attendance of 137 and that the amount of fees received was £3 6s. The schoolmistress reports also 177 girls and 75 infants are on the books. Average attendance was 124 girls and 48 infants.<sup>52</sup>

In May 1881, the *South Wales Daily News* reported that 'a monster petition several yards in length' had been delivered to the local MP, Mr. Rolls, asking him to vote to include Monmouthshire in the forthcoming bill in Parliament to close all public houses in Wales on Sundays.<sup>53</sup> The Sunday Closing (Wales) Act 1881 was politically important in its formal acknowledgement of the separate character of Wales and did not apply to Monmouthshire.<sup>54</sup> Parliament rejected a similar bill for England.

As one might expect, the census records contained a few intriguing entries. Hannah Driscoll from Ireland, a charwoman aged 48 living in Owners Yard with 4 children, was listed as married twice with a note stating that her husband had run away. At 23 St Mary Street the head of the household, Bessie Jones, in the column intended for disabilities, advised that her general servant, Mary Powell, has 'bad temper'. On Hardwick Hill, Richard Jones, a 29-year-old shoemaker born deaf and dumb from birth was being visited by another deaf and dumb shoemaker, Timothy Lewis, aged 49.

Jacob Bolz (52) was a lodging house keeper living at 5 Thomas Street with 3 sons and a daughter. Jacob was born in Nassau, Germany and his wife Mary (48) in Genova, Italy. His lodging house next door (6 Thomas Street) listed 15 occupants in the census. The entry for 8 and 9 Thomas Street has a note under the address 'Common Lodging House Rented by Jacob Bolz'. There are 12 occupants listed here. It is not noted whether any more nearby properties in Thomas Street were lodging houses and they seem to be occupied by family groups. Bolz did, however, rent 1 Morgans Court which had 3 occupants in the census. The majority of his tenants were labourers or domestic servants. Jacob was still living in Thomas Street and listed as a lodging house keeper when he died in 1904.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> <<https://chepstow.rfc.wales>> [accessed 20 November 2021].

<sup>51</sup> *Slater's 1880 Directory of N & S Wales Pt.2: Shropshire, Monmouthshire, Bristol & Chester*, pp.15-23.

<sup>52</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 13 August 1881, p.4.

<sup>53</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 30 May 1881, p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Sunday Closing (Wales) Act 1881 <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday\\_Closing\\_\(Wales\)\\_Act\\_1881](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_Closing_(Wales)_Act_1881)> [accessed 2 February 2022].

<sup>55</sup> *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 27 February 1904, p.1.

At 28 High Street Benjamin Dexter and his wife Martha lived above his grocery shop with two young grocery assistants and a fourteen-year-old domestic servant. Benjamin was born in Jamaica. His father (also Benjamin) had been a prominent Baptist Minister and missionary in Jamaica who was heavily involved in the abolition of slavery and events afterwards.

At 3 Kendal Square, Elizabeth Abraham was enumerated alone aged 18. She was born in November 1862 in Cawnpore, India to William and Elizabeth Abraham. Her father was a Private in the 46<sup>th</sup> South Devon Regiment of Infantry who had been born in Chepstow. On 6 September 1882, in Chepstow Parish Church, Elizabeth married Valentine John Arthur, described as a painter. On their marriage certificate her father was stated to be a pensioner, the groom's father was a plasterer. Both of the newlyweds marked the register with a cross. In the 1871 census Elizabeth had been living in Chepstow with her mother, 2 sisters, a brother and her maternal grandfather. One older sister had been born in Ireland, the younger sister and brother in Chepstow so they had moved around while the father was in the army. Father was not present in the 1871 census but mother states her occupation as labourer's wife. His British Army Service Record shows he had been discharged in Cawnpore in May 1864 on medical grounds after over 21 years of service at the age of 41. His discharge record states poignantly 'he is very weak and his health is much impaired from long service'. He was working as a labourer and lodging in Merthyr Tydfil in 1871 and in 1891 his wife was with him in Mountain Ash where he was still labouring aged 68. His service record shows he drew a pension until he died the next year.

The construction of the Severn Railway Tunnel was well underway in 1881. Despite the enormous workforce required, just 7 of the men were enumerated in Chepstow, all recorded as 'miners'. In the main, workers lived much closer to the tunnel entrance, especially in Portskewett and Sudbrook. However, there was a report that the main contractor, Mr. Walker, 'is about to "put on" a large number of extra men'.<sup>56</sup> The workforce of over 500 men had apparently asked Mr. Walker to put on a workman's train night and morning between Portskewett and Chepstow, which suggests that more workers lived in Chepstow and had merely put down a more general occupation such as labourer in the census and not referred to the tunnel. Chepstow's main connection with the workers was via the court of Petty Sessions which heard with numerous cases of theft, drunkenness and other small crimes.

When the tunnel opened in 1886, Chepstow lost a considerable amount of through traffic. This, together with the gradual demise of the port, inevitably brought about change. Nevertheless, the facilities associated with Chepstow's market-town status enabled it to adapt as Gant has shown in his analysis of the 1901 census where retail, accommodation and professional and business services still featured highly among the economically active population.

---

<sup>56</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser*, 26 November 1881, p.4.

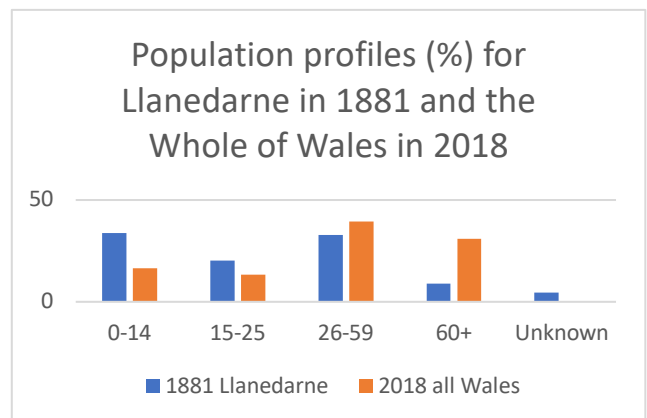
## LLANEDEYRN

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Llanedeyrn was a village more usually known by its inhabitants as Llanedarne. Today, it is a suburb of Cardiff centred on the heart of that village, and its parish includes parts of the present-day suburbs of Cyncoed, Pentwyn and Pontprennau (*figure 1*). Like its namesake the Cardiff ship SS *Lanedarne*, lost between Gibraltar and Dunkirk in 1879, the old character of Llanedarne has disappeared.<sup>57</sup> This article explores the original village of Llanedarne, and what it was like to live there in 1881. By way of background, in 1846, most of the parish of Llanedarne (approximately 75%) had been under the ownership of Charles Kemeys Kemeys Tynte and formed part of his Cefn Mably estate.<sup>58</sup> Much of the remainder was held by Revd Edward Windsor Richards (the farms Coed-y-Gores, Cefn Coed and Llwyn-y-Grant Unchaf), and William Thomas Edwards (Llwyn-y-Grant Isaf farm). There were in addition, thirteen small-scale landowners.

The connection of the estate to the Kemeys Tynte family goes back to 1450 when David Kemeys, son of Ievan Kemeys of Began, married Cecil, daughter of Llewelyn ap Evan ap Llewelyn ap Cynfig of Cefn Mabli.<sup>59</sup> Charles Kemeys Kemeys Tynte lived at Cefn Mably manor house and Halswell House in Somerset and was for several years MP for Bridgwater.<sup>60</sup>

Table 1, Chart 1: The percentage of people in various age ranges: in 1881 Llanedarne and 2018 all of Wales (Chart and table).

AGE	% Per age group	
	1881 Llanedarne <sup>61</sup>	2018 all Wales <sup>62</sup>
0-14	33.7	16.4
15-25	20.1	13.3
26-59	32.9	39.3
60+	8.8	31.0
Unknown	4.4	0.0
TOTAL	100	100



We can derive a great deal of information about the population of Llanedarne in 1881 from the census data, although some records are now damaged or missing. In those that remain, the population was 249; 53% male and 46% female, (1% information unknown). The Owens and Co. *Cardiff Directory* of 1891 describes the 1881 population as 'about 300'.<sup>63</sup> The census return's age

<sup>57</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 13 April 1880, p.2 <[www.britishnewspaperarchives.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchives.co.uk)> All further newspaper references are from this source unless otherwise stated.

<sup>58</sup> National Library of Wales (NLW), Welsh Tithe Maps, Llanedeyrn tithe map and apportionment <<https://places.library.wales/home>> [accessed 13 April 2020].

<sup>59</sup> *A Dictionary of Welsh Biography-Kemeys and Kemeys-Tynte family, of Cefn Mabli, Monmouth* <[www.biography.wales/article/s-KEME-CEF-1234](http://www.biography.wales/article/s-KEME-CEF-1234)> [accessed 13 April 2020].

<sup>60</sup> Halswell House, <[www.halswellpark.wordpress.com/halswell-house/](http://www.halswellpark.wordpress.com/halswell-house/)> [accessed 13 April 2020].

<sup>61</sup> 1881 Census

<sup>62</sup> Office for National Statistics, <[www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)> [accessed 14 April 2020].

<sup>63</sup> Owens & Co, *Cardiff Directory*, 1891, p.441 <<https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/find/specialcollections>> [accessed 14 April 2020]. All trade directories are from this source unless otherwise stated.

profile is given in *table 1*, alongside all-Wales data for 2018 (Office for National Statistics data). This shows that the 1881 population had a much younger age profile than is typical for Wales today.

Of the total working population, 81% were male, and 18% female (this excludes unpaid domestic labour in the home). The largest group were in the farming profession (57%), and 22% were general labourers. The remainder were in various occupations, either in domestic service or supplying goods and services to the community. This was about to change, as the period 1880 to 1914 was characterised by a movement away from the land — in 1851, 35% of the adult male population of Wales were in agricultural occupations, but this figure decreased to 12% by 1911.<sup>64</sup> However, in 1881, Llanedarne was still very much a farming community, having a high proportion of agricultural workers compared to that in Wales as a whole.

The community was relatively self-sufficient as the farms supplied a range of produce, and the area was heavily wooded, ensuring a plentiful supply of timber. Three residents were woodworkers/carpenters. A blacksmith (David Lewis) and his apprentice worked at New Forge, supplying metal products. Three women (Celia Jones, Ann Edwards and Mary Wilkins) were dressmakers, and shoes were made by William Jones. Linen and clothes were kept clean by washerwoman Mary Wilkins (mother of dressmaker Mary Wilkins). The only individual in the parish whose occupation was not directly connected to supplying local goods and services was William Laurance, a smith on the railway.

As some of the data from the census was missing, additional information was obtained from trade directories.<sup>65</sup> These reveal the presence of builder George Morgan, William Davies, publican of the *Unicorn Inn*, and the vicar of St Edeyrn's Church, Revd John W. Evans.

Most of the population were born relatively locally, 32.8% within the parish of Llanedarne, and 46.4% elsewhere in Glamorgan or Monmouthshire (*table 2*). Of the remainder, nearly all were born in England, predominantly Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. There were two individuals born outside the UK, one in Tipperary, Ireland, and the other in Jamaica.

*Table 2: The birthplace of people in the parish of Llanedarne in 1881. (Wales 1881 census)*

BIRTHPLACE	%
Llanedarne	32.8
Elsewhere in Mon. or Glam.	46.4
Elsewhere in the Wales	0.8
Elsewhere in the UK	14.4
Outside the UK	0.8
Unknown	4.8

<sup>64</sup> Openlearn Cymru 'Migration in Wales in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century' <<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=55154>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

<sup>65</sup> Butchers *Cardiff Directory 1880-81*, p.529; Owens and Co, *Cardiff Directory*, 1887, p.379.



The 1881 census did not record the proportion of Welsh speakers: this information was only collected from 1891 onwards. In that year, 19.6% of the population spoke only Welsh, 41.5% only English and 38.9% both languages. Ten years later in 1901, 1.4% spoke only Welsh, 46.7% spoke only English and 51.8% spoke both languages. Today, exactly comparable data are not available, but statistics from 2019 show that in Cardiff, 24.7% reported an understanding of spoken Welsh, and 18% in Monmouthshire.<sup>66</sup>

The data should be considered in relation to the population migration patterns occurring in Wales at that time.<sup>67</sup> The percentage of Welsh-only speakers in Llanedarne declined considerably over the ten-year period 1891-1901, whilst the percentage of English speakers remained about the same. The monoglot Welsh speakers were generally older, and over time were gradually dying out. This, and the general hostility of the education system to the Welsh language, were in part responsible for the decline during this period.<sup>68</sup> There was also the tendency of bilingual parents to speak to their children in English. Another factor was inward migration; the second half of the nineteenth century had seen a doubling of the Welsh population, but the inward migration was relatively small. This gradually increased as time went on, becoming significant by the early 1900s. Much of this inward migration was to the industrial towns of South Wales. Due to its proximity to Cardiff and the English border, Llanedarne is likely to have seen the effects of this relatively early in the period.

Evidence that the settlement of Llanedarne dates from the early medieval period comes from the pre-Norman origin of its' Parish church, and the long-gone twelfth century chapel of Llanforda. Scattered farmsteads sprang up in the fertile and heavily wooded area to the west of the river Rhydney and by the early 1800s, a self-sufficient and thriving farming community was well developed.

The rapid growth and industrialisation of Cardiff in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a huge impact on the parish, initially providing a nearby and growing market for its produce, but eventually expansion of the city absorbed much of Llanedarne into its boundary, a process that is ongoing. Today, St Ederyns church is the only thread that takes us back to the settlements medieval origins.

---

<sup>66</sup>Stats Wales <<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue>> [accessed 18 April 2020].

<sup>67</sup>Openlearn Cymru 'Migration in Wales in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century'  
<<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=55154>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

<sup>68</sup>Gwenfair Parry & Mari A. Williams, *The Welsh Language and the 1891 Census* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999).

## LLANVIHANGEL, ROGIET and IFTON



### Anatomy of the Parish in 1881

Llanvihangel Rogiet (“Llanvihangel”), Rogiet and Ifton form a string of three small settlements to the west of the larger settlements of Magor and Undy, midway between them and Caldicot. Like Magor and Undy they are located on the higher land to the north of the moors, along the spring line and located on the B4245, then the main road to Chepstow. There was very little development to the north of the road, apart from several quarries and the focus of activity was south towards the Levels and the Estuary and by 1881, the railway.

In earlier times, each was a distinct parish, each clustered around its own ancient 14<sup>th</sup> century church. Llanvihangel was a large settlement up to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and is odd in that it straddled two manors, which did not align with the parish boundaries. We know from work by Barry Stopgate for the Gwent Local History Council that Llanvihangel was a thriving settlement in 1651 with 28 houses, of which 19 were farms in their own right, with an alehouse/inn which survived until 1776. It began to decline from 1711 and by 1881, together with Ifton, it had been combined into a single parish with the minister living in Ifton. Perhaps because of this, the living was very valuable - £390 pa. This is more than Magor and higher than most of the town livings in Monmouthshire.

The building of the Railway and the opening of the Severn Tunnel Junction in 1886 precipitated a big change in the layout and population of the villages. Construction must have been very active in 1881 but there is little evidence for this in the Census. Rogiet began to expand as rail-related business

grew up alongside the junction. The growth was slow: even in 1881 the total population was only 84 and Rogiet did not get communal buildings until the 1890s, when the Railway Hotel was constructed to accommodate rail travellers along with a school. Llanvihangel was the loser with a gradual reduction in population. Despite four new farm labourers' cottages being built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it never recovered and today it is only marked by a farm and a redundant church.



*St Michael's Church, Llanvihangel Rogiet*

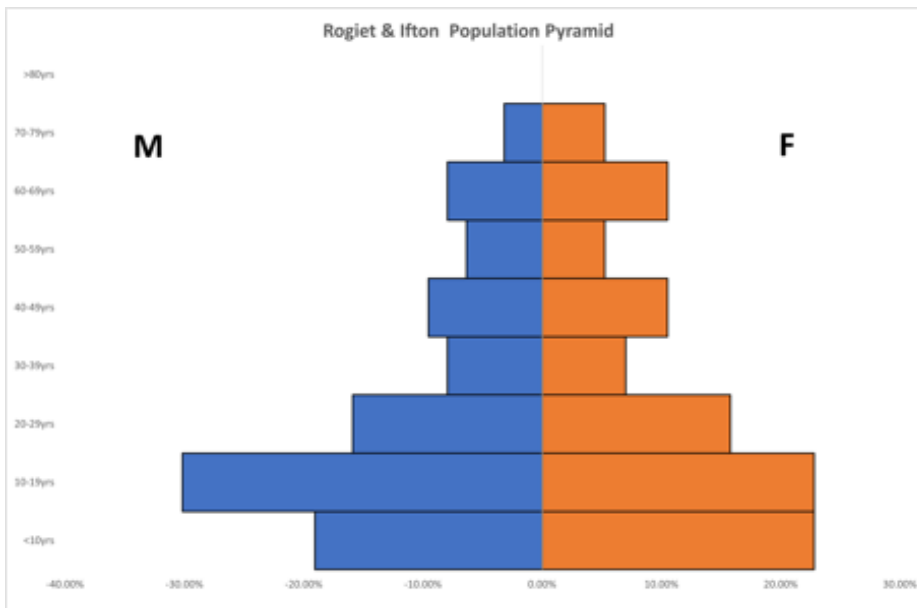
Ifton today is remembered by the name of a quarry, Ifton Great Wood and a few roads on the west side of Rogiet known as Ifton Manor. Even in 1881 it was in steep decline. The church was pulled down in 1755 but its remains were still visible at the time of the Census, located where Chestnut Drive now runs.

### **Parish Life in 1881**

This is a very small group of communities: 21 households in all, with a total population of 121. Rogiet is the biggest with 52 people, but 38 people still lived in Llanvihangel and 31 at Ifton. Of these 39 were under the age of 15 and 9 were at school. 46% of those in Rogiet and Llanvihangel were born either in the parish or its neighbour.

The three parishes have only 5 farms in total: one small holding of ten acres and the rest all over 200 acres each. This combination is unusual in south Monmouthshire: it may reflect the big ancient manors in the area, but is more likely to be a result of consolidation following enclosure of the moors.

The working population in 1881 was 54 strong, 14 of them female. Perhaps surprisingly, agriculture did not dominate, employing 17 males and 2 females, only 35% of the total. On the Court of Sewers map dating to 1830, a large part of Rogiet parish is still shown as unenclosed moor. So, despite the large acreage (1347 acres in total) in cultivation, it may have been made up largely of unimproved grazing which required little manpower.



The population pyramid is unbalanced due to low numbers in the sample but it illustrates the young age of the population and is the only one to show more females than males in the over 60s age group.

8 men are shown as labourers, probably quarry workers. In more recent times, Rogiet looked towards the coast and fishing was a popular activity – the Rogiet Hotel being a good source of salmon for those in the know, but there is no sign of this in the Census return.

However, 18 people of both sexes – 34% were employed as domestic servants, which gives some indication of the social stratification of the community. The presence of a veterinary surgeon, a minister, a teacher and an artist, suggests that larger wealthier houses were unusually predominant in this small community.

This social standing is reinforced by one very distinct household in Ifton. The Rectory was occupied by the Morris family and in all there were 16 residents. Alfred Morris was the Rector of Rogiet, Ifton and Llanvihangel. He was a graduate of Jesus College Oxford though he was originally born in Newport. But his wife Annie is shown as born in British Guiana. They had a visitor staying with them: a Carl Muller who was a student at Oxford but hailed from Hanover. There were also six scholars, including three from Trinidad, whose birth places caused great confusion for the enumerator. It suggests the Rectory was a boarding school of sorts, even though it does not appear in the local directories of the time. One can only sympathise with an 11-year-old Trinidadian lad, transposed from the West Indies to, of all places, the Caldicot Levels. What he made of it and what the locals made of him, can only be wondered at.

Another odd feature of Rogiet is that other censuses suggest it had the highest proportion of Welsh speakers of any parish in Monmouthshire. Sadly, language preferences are not recorded in the 1881 Census and there is no sign that a preponderance of residents came from other parts of Wales.

## Within and Beyond

Despite this being a small community, it appears to be more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than the bigger settlements of Magor and Undy.

It is notable that between Magor and Caldicot there was a dearth of communal buildings apart from churches. There are no licenced premises recorded, even of the small ale houses which tended to proliferate in rural areas. There was a village blacksmith in Rogiet – Henry Rowland - and the business was big enough to have an assistant, Henry Llewellyn, employed by him. The village smithy still exists today on the track to Rogiet church.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century other religious buildings proliferated, but at the time of the Census the only religious buildings were the two large and ancient churches – St Michael's in Llanvihangel and St Mary's in Rogiet.



*St Mary's Church Rogiet*

The buildings are very close together – a few fields away as Pevsner remarks. They are a reflection of 14<sup>th</sup> Century local wealth rather than the needs of the population. Both churches were lucky to escape major 19<sup>th</sup> Century restoration, which suggests they were more than adequate for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century communities as well as a more old-fashioned style of worship.



## MAGOR



### Anatomy of the Parish in 1881

Magor is located on the northern edge of the Levels on the spring line just south of the Newport-Chepstow Road now known as the B4245 (and referred to here as the Chepstow Road). It is approximately midway between the two larger settlements.

Magor is one of the largest settlements on the Levels and has a long and ancient history. A 4<sup>th</sup> Century boat was found to the west of the village when the Tesco depot was built, and a 13<sup>th</sup> Century vessel was found about 500m south of the seawall. A Roman road ran south from the Roman settlement at Caerwent to Magor and down to the shore where there was a landing or port on the Roman route from Bath. By medieval times this had developed an active port known as Aberwethy which continued to thrive into the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when it supplied fresh food and livestock to ocean-going vessels leaving Bristol and subsequently store cattle to the other side of the Estuary. The route of the Roman road is now followed by the north-south road known as the Whitewall.

In area, the 1881 parish covers about 2,760 acres. Traditionally, to the east and north, Magor is bounded from its neighbour Undy by the Mill Reen, extending south to Magor Pill. To the west it is bounded by Cold Harbour Pill so unlike neighbouring parishes the foreshore is quite short. To the west is Wilcrick and to the north St Brides, Netherwent. In practice of course the parish boundaries



meant little and Magor's hinterland sprawled much further, taking in Redwick and the area west up to the Monks Reen.

The landscapes north and south of the Chepstow Road are very different. The area north of the Chepstow Road is made up of dispersed settlements focused on a few bigger farms with large fields, mainly arable. The Census records these small communities – Waunarrow, Skeviag, Castle Coch, Salisbury and Upper Grange. Each of them included two or three households centred around a farm and agricultural activities. They appear very isolated, even though they are only a mile or so from the centre of the village.

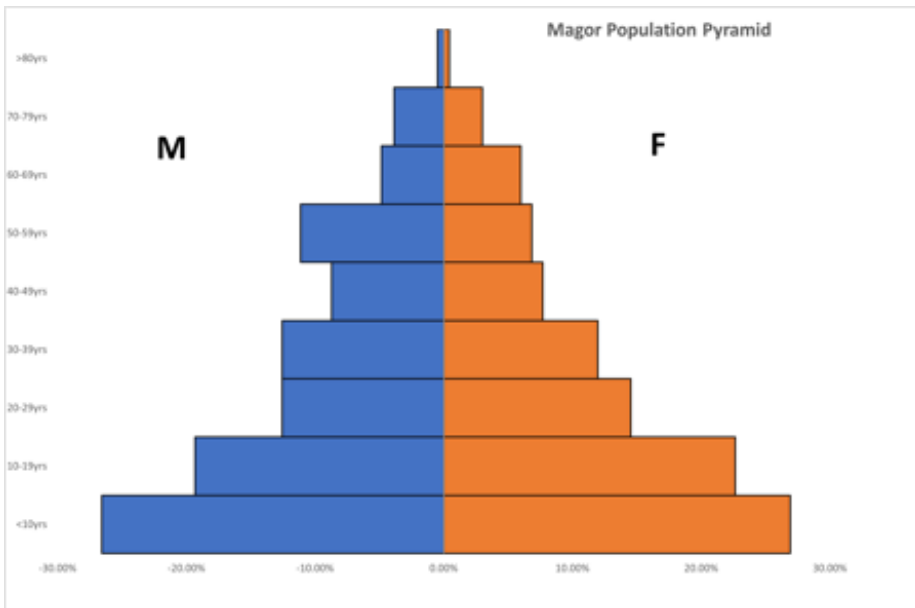
To the south, the Levels were fairly well enclosed by this period. There are a few distinct farms on contemporary maps such as Magor Pill Farm, but the Census gives the impression of ribbon settlement along the main routes. For example, Whitewall has 15 households (69 individuals) recorded along its length, three of them with farms of only a few acres – scarcely even smallholdings. The biggest, Pill Farm only had 80 acres, employing 2 men, which is hardly a viable size even in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But most farms probably had other activities which were commercially more valuable as part of Magor's role as a service centre – explained below.

The village settlement itself is quite compact. During the period of the Census, Magor was developing rapidly. In medieval times there were two distinct settlements: one area around the church and the misleadingly named "Procurators House", the other focused around the mill and its common bounded by the medieval site of Manor Farm and the mill pond. By 1881, the two separate centres of settlement: the area around the church and latterly the railway station, and the area around Mill Common, the Wheatsheaf Inn and the medieval site of Manor Farm - were beginning to merge. The two areas were linked by the development of the Square, and the extension of the Baptist Chapel and the Lion Inn. New housing was also spreading west along West End parallel to the railway.

The Census enumerator appears to have been inexperienced. Apart from dreadful handwriting, the original record missed out several local buildings. There are several corrections by a supervisor, but we cannot be confident that the Census represents a complete record.

### **Parish Life in 1881**

Magor's population in 1881 was 435 plus three visitors and 15 lodgers. There were 103 properties, 5 unoccupied and 96 households recorded. Women made up 53% of the total: a higher proportion than the average for local settlements. 54% of the population were of working age with 9% over the age of 60. There were 164 (37%) under the age of 15 of whom 107 (65%) are described as scholars – quite a high proportion for a rural community.



The population pyramid (showing the proportion of either sex for each age decile) is remarkably symmetrical without the preponderance of elderly females normally expected in such a diagram. This may be due to recent immigration/emigration but also to Magor's role: more a small town than an agricultural community.

23 farms are recorded, 14 under 30 acres in extent and only 2 over 150 acres. The preponderance of smaller farms is expected, and it may indicate that many of the occupiers had other occupations. Certainly, Magor appears as a local service centre with a range of economic activities beyond farming. Just 55 people (30%) recorded farming as an occupation with a further 15 (8%) described as general labourers. 45 (25%) were in domestic service. 12 men (7%) worked on the railway – a relatively small number given that the local station was at Magor. Artisan trades are well represented, with 5 blacksmiths, including an apprentice, 7 carpenters and 3 wheelwrights. We also have a cooper – Thomas Adams – who was sufficiently prosperous to support a household of 12, including 4 grandchildren. William Edwards, living at 1 Croft House is shown as a farmer with 10 acres but is also described in a commercial directory as a surveyor. Some trades are bluntly described – John Lock, aged 25, in Green Moor Road, describes his occupation as “castrator” a trade he appears to have inherited from his father William.

Apart from the main occupations there is a good mixture of service industry: dressmaking (10 individuals or 6%) three shoemakers, innkeeping and grocery (7 people or 4%), one tea merchant, two schoolteachers, two ministers of religion, a doctor, a solicitor (and a law student) and 2 post office staff.

In 1881 there were apparently two schools. A national school located behind the church was built in 1857. It was run by a husband and wife - Joseph and Sarah Ann Holt from Middlesex. The school was built to cater for 120 children and was extended in 1890 to cater for 150 children even though average attendance was only around 100. This is quite a large school by rural standards and further emphasises Magor's role as a local service centre. Moreover, in addition there was a second school, based either in the Baptist Church or later in the nearby building now known as School Cottage. The census does not record this establishment or its teachers.

Magor had an elegant sufficiency of places of worship. The Church, St Mary's dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was built on a grand scale leading to its title (shared by several other Level's churches) as “Cathedral of the Moors”.



*St Mary's Church, Magor*

A large mansion was constructed nearby in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century for its vicar, apparently a secular appointment and the remains are now known as the Procurator's house. There was a major restoration in the 1860s and construction of a new vicarage some  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away along Newport Road in the "Tudor Gothic" style. Both are evidence of the steady development of Magor from the time of the railway. The vicar (the Revd Arthur Saunders, a Pembrokeshire man) also held the curacy of Redwick Church. The living was worth £296 pa – a good stipend for the time and above that of many larger churches in the county. In addition to the church, Magor boasted a large Baptist Chapel, the Ebenezer Baptist Church dating from 1816.



*Ebenezer Baptist Church*

This seated 300 compared to 400 in the church giving a feeling for the relative scale of the different denominations. The Minister, the Revd Benjamin Davies, lived in a new house in Green Moor Road and hailed from Evesham. In addition, there was a Methodist Chapel just over the parish border on the Chepstow Road and a Temperance hall in West End. The Temperance hall is a significant building in its own right and a very rare example of its type.



*Magor Temperance Hall (Copyright)*

## **Within and Beyond**

Magor has always been one of the main centres on the Caldicot Levels since Roman times but the coming of the railway cemented its position in the hierarchy and the 1881 Census shows its accelerating development as more than just an agricultural settlement. Its neighbour Undy was nearly the same size in terms of population but was predominantly focused on farming. Magor by this time, had the main railway station between Newport and Chepstow, together with the only post and telegraph office.

There is no doctor recorded in Magor or the surrounding villages in 1881 although by 1901 there were two practices in the village. In 1881 there is just a midwife, the widow Elizabeth Evans. There is a solicitor recorded – George Batchelor, whose son Arthur is also described as a law student, but no evidence they practiced locally.

There were two grocery businesses, one run by Margaret Griffiths (apparently from the post office). Her son, James was also recorded as a grocer and eventually took over the business, being described in the 1901 Kelly's directory as "Grocer & draper & Post Office". The other grocery business was run by William Baynam who also kept the Dochare Bell pub. His son Thomas is described as a "tea merchant". There is no record of anyone describing their occupation as baker or butcher, but these functions must have existed, probably as part of a local farm. A miller is recorded, David Joseph, living appropriately at Salisbury's Mill, which is a good mile to the north of the village, almost at St

Bride's Netherwent. The village mill site had lost its extensive mill pond by 1881 which was filled in in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Census suggest that there were at least four public houses in the village by 1881. None of the surrounding villages have records of local ale houses which seems a bit odd, but Magor was already getting a reputation as a social centre and in later years it was a focus of trippers from Newport looking for a good time. The Wheatsheaf Inn on Mill Common has 17<sup>th</sup> Century origins and was run in 1881 by George Thomas, which passed on to the Hoggetts and then to the Wootton family in due course. There was also the Red Lion just round the corner on the way to the Square, run by Sarah Baker, a widow, inherited from her husband Robert. By 1901, her son, Arthur Baker is recorded as Innkeeper (and butcher) at the Golden Lion, which one presumes was the same establishment. William Baynam kept the Dochare Bell. We also have a Frederick Smith who lived out in New Inn, Station Street and described himself as a Carpenter and Inn Keeper. His household was very large – 12 individuals including 6 children and 4 boarders including a carpenter and sawyer. It is entirely possible that he was running another hostelry in the village. Mercer and Crocker's directory for 1876 records a New Inn owned by Henry Wems in Magor, so this is probably the same establishment.



## NASH

Nash is a rural lowland parish on the Caldicot Level, a little over a mile to the south-east of Newport on the eastern side of the mouth of the River Usk. Part of the area which now forms Newport Wetlands lies within the parish of Nash. In addition, the Uskmouth Power Station has subsequently subsumed the western part of the parish. Nash, with Goldcliff and Whitson to the east along the coast, form what is known as ‘the three parishes’. Together with Goldcliff, it is one of the few villages to appear on Humphrey Llwyd’s *Cambriae Typus* of 1573, the earliest published map of Wales.<sup>69</sup>



In 1881, Nash was a scattered community of farms, with a range of dwellings and farms arranged in a linear fashion along Broad Street Common, and clustered around Pye Corner and in the vicinity of the church and inn. In that respect Nash is little changed today. The Grade 1 listed Church of St Mary the Virgin has been described as ‘the cathedral of the moors’ and is medieval in origin with mid-nineteenth-century alterations.<sup>70</sup> Its medieval spire is unusually located on the north wall of the chancel. There is a ‘squint’, which traditionally allowed people with contagious diseases such as smallpox and leprosy to view a service from outside the building without passing on the disease. A slot on an external wall of the tower indicates the height a tidal flood reached in January 1607 for

<sup>69</sup> National Library of Wales, Map 5007, compiled by Humphrey Llwyd and published by Abraham Ortelius <<https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/maps-1/maps-of-wales/cambriae-typus#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-203%2C-275%2C9148%2C7780>> [accessed 29 November 2021]

<sup>70</sup> F. J. Hando, *Out and About in Monmouthshire* (Newport: R. H. Johns Ltd, 1958), p. 29.



which a commemorative plaque was added four hundred years later. In 1881, the vicar was Wilmer Mackett Willett who lived out of the parish in Christchurch. The living was in the gift of Eton College.



St Mary's Church, Nash



The Waterloo Inn, Nash

*The Waterloo Inn*, occupied in 1881 by John Jones, his wife Sarah, two children and a lodger, overlooks the church. The current building was constructed in 1898. In addition to the church, there are four further listed buildings within the parish, all Grade 2 and good examples of Gwent Levels farmhouses and agricultural buildings.<sup>71</sup> These are:

- 1) Fair Orchard built in the early nineteenth century and listed as its value as a group with....
- 2) Fair Orchard Barn and attached agricultural buildings 400 metres south of Pye Corner, built early in the eighteenth century with nineteenth century additions to the rear.
- 3) Pye Corner Farm at the junction of Nash Street and Broad Street, probably of seventeenth century origins, rebuilt in late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and modernised in the late nineteenth century.
- 4) Tatton Farm about 1km northeast of Pye Corner, built early in the nineteenth century.

To the east of the church and inn was a school built in 1877. The schoolmistress in 1881 was Miss Ann Jones, aged fifty-six, who lived nearby on Nash Road. There were thirty-seven children recorded as scholars in the 1881 census. The school log book has several entries for this period stating attendance was poor due to flooded roads making the school unreachable and, usually in August, that the hay harvest was not yet in so children were absent. *Kelly's Directory* of 1895 states a capacity of forty-eight children with an average attendance of thirty-one. The schoolmistress then was Mrs Rhoda Reese. The school closed in 1980 and is now a private house.



*Former school building*

<sup>71</sup> British Listed Buildings, Listed Buildings in Nash, Newport <<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wales/nash-newport#.YaTTX7qnyUn>> [accessed 24 November 2021].

To the north, at the road junction on the road to Newport, is Pye Corner. Here there was a Baptist Chapel built in the 1820s which was in use until late in the twentieth century before also being converted to a private dwelling.



*Former Baptist Chapel*

East from Pye Corner is Broad Street Common where much of the population lived in 1881. The census of 3 April that year records 123 males and 112 females. There were also four visitors in the parish that night. In 2011, the population was 284 but in 118 household units rather than the 58 recorded in the 1881 census. Of the 1881 population, 155 (66%) were born in the parish with a further twenty-three born in neighbouring parishes. Twenty-eight people were born outside Monmouthshire.

Twenty-six people (16%) were recorded as being over sixty years of age, whereas seventy-one (30%) were under the age of fifteen. The oldest inhabitant was Rachel Watkins aged ninety-two, of independent means, who lived at Rose Cottage, Pye Corner, with Fanny Price her domestic servant. One hundred and thirty people were recorded as working, predominantly (66%) in farming-related activity. There were twenty-one farms, most of less than 150 acres. Moorbarn Farm, run by Thomas Waters (422 acres), and Tatton Farm, run by William Jones (337 acres), were the largest. Seven were less than 30 acres in area. Five farms were run by widowed women and, in all, twenty-nine women are recorded as working in agriculture. Most of these were wives and daughters of farmers who would typically be expected to assist in the farm work.

In 1881, there were several advertisements in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* for auctions of hay and grass, much of which may have been used in the coal mining industry to feed and stable the pit ponies. These auctions could be of a significant quantity, e.g. 90 tons, 150 tons and 350 tons. Thirty-three acres of mowing grass were also auctioned in 1881. These auctions were often held at *The*

*Waterloo Inn*. Two acres of land were advertised for sale by auction, the land currently then being in the occupation of Mr Henry John at a rent of £5 per annum. He farmed 54 acres at West Nash. Dairy cows must have been kept on some farms as two dairymaids are listed on the census.

A butcher and a shopkeeper were also recorded in the census, probably in the vicinity of Pye Corner. Additionally, a handful of other trades associated with building and two dressmakers and one shoemaker are noted.

The death of Lucy Jane Waters of Burnt House on 8 December 1881 was announced in the *Monmouthshire Merlin*.<sup>72</sup> Her death certificate notes she was twenty-seven years old and died of epilepsy. Her brother-in-law, Henry Levi Williams, a pharmacist in Newport, was present at the death.

On 25 May 1882, Burnt House Farm contents were sold at auction by Mrs Elizabeth Waters, Lucy's widowed mother, who 'was relinquishing farming duties.'<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth's husband, Joseph, had died in December 1877. Her son, also called Joseph, took over the tenancy. The auction notice in *The Star of Gwent and South Wales Times* shows that this was a substantial farm with household contents of high quality. Forty head of cattle for milk and beef included sixteen Shorthorn cows, both with calves and in calf, and four heifers in calf. There were eight good horses (three of which were in foal), pigs, farm implements and machinery, wagons, carts and a market trap. A Phaeton carriage was put up for sale together with 250 tons of meadow hay, 700 gallons of cider and three and a half sides of home cured bacon. The extensive list of household contents included a walnut drawing room suite, an oak cased eight-day clock, a pianoforte, a mahogany dining suite and tester and four poster beds. The notice states 'Luncheon at Eleven, Sale at Twelve o'clock prompt.'<sup>74</sup>

One unusual item in the 1881 census is the entry for Frederick Morgan, aged thirty, staying with his widowed mother, Elizabeth, at Green Field House and whose occupation is recorded as Australian Bushman. It has not been possible to definitively trace his movements to and from Australia. Green Field House, a fine Georgian building rurally situated on the northern limit of the parish in 1881, is today on the edge of an industrial estate on the southern fringe of Newport.

There was a police constable (Henry Milsom) living on Broad Street Common in a police station shown on the Ordnance Survey map of the period. It seems as though he was kept busy by a local family called Adams. They feature in a *Monmouthshire Merlin* report of a court case involving neighbours in Broad Street Common.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 16 December 1881, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> The *Star of Gwent and South Wales Times*, 19 May 1882, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Burnt House Farm has been the subject of a separate study, invoked by curiosity about the above two events

<sup>75</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 9 December 1881, p. 4.



(defendant's) face. — The Bench then adjourned to 20s and costs.

**TWO TO ONE.** — Two men named William Adams, father and son, were summoned for assaulting William Henry Meredith. — The defendants and complainant live at Nash. On the 24th ult. complainant drove into Newport, and after transacting business, stopped at the Bridge Inn on his way home. Adams, senior, was in the public house, and proposed that he should return with witness to Nash. Complainant assented, and when about three miles from Newport they quarrelled about the capabilities of a trotting horse, the property of the younger Adams. Both men then left the trap and fought, the result being (as Meredith put it) that Adams was "finished up in two or three rounds." Complainant proceeded on his journey, and about an hour after reaching home his late antagonist called him out to renew the fight. Complainant declined, and while asking the father to go home, young Adams jumped out from under the hedge and gave complainant a violent blow in the face. — Witnesses were examined on both sides, and it was suggested by Mr. Parker for the defence, that it was a case of "six of one and half-a-dozen of the other." — The magistrates were of a contrary opinion, and fined each defendant 20s and costs.

**NON-MAINTENANCE.** — Samuel and James Roberts,

One of the two William Adams referred to above (it is not apparent which) had been fined ten shillings the previous year for allowing several horses to escape and stray. Another man, John Keene, was fined twenty shillings for a similar offence on the same day. The strays had all been re-captured by PC Milsom.

Outside the period of this study, Nash features in two other items of significant interest. On 21 July 1896, a fourteen-year-old girl, Louisa Maud Evans, ascended in a balloon from a park in Cardiff as part of a public display for the 1896 Cardiff Maritime and Industrial Exhibition.<sup>76</sup> Blown by an unfavourable wind, she descended by parachute into the Bristol Channel and unfortunately drowned. Her body was subsequently discovered on the foreshore near the East Usk Lighthouse and taken to St Mary's Church prior to the inquest. There are graphic descriptions in the *Evening Express* of 21, 25 and 27 July of the search for and discovery of her body.<sup>77</sup> Known as 'The Balloon Girl', she is buried in Cathays Cemetery in Cardiff in a grave paid for by public subscription.

In the summer of 1950, a stone coffin was discovered about a quarter of a mile west of Burnt House Farm during building works. It is believed to date from the late fourteenth century and the grave of a person of some significance.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Living Levels, 'Balloon tragedy at the Cardiff Exhibition' <<https://www.livinglevels.org.uk/stories/2021/9/2/balloon-tragedy-louisa-maud-evans?rq=louisa%20maud%20evans>> [accessed 29 November 2021].

<sup>77</sup> *Evening Express*, 25 and 27 July 1896, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> C. Barnett, 'Two Stone Coffins', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, vol 1, part 2 (c.1962), pp. 37-9.

## RUMNEY AND ST MELLONS

Rumney and St Mellons in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was an idyllic place according to the memories of the villagers in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In earlier times each village had its own identity. The original small settlements on or near the ancient overland ridgeway route across South Wales grew to become villages, ecclesiastical parishes and then suburbs of Cardiff. [William Booth visited Rumney many times between 1890 and 1928. He lived at 99 Newport Road, Cardiff, and travelled by bicycle recording his observations in his sketch book, and later with a camera.<sup>79</sup> Booth recorded the beauty of the area but also its problems. Rumney was one of his favourite places, and he and his wife are both buried in the churchyard.]

Census records for Rumney and St Mellons reflect the changes that started to take place from about 1871 when the population of Rumney was half that of St Mellons.

	Rumney	St Mellons	Total
1871	339	641	980
1881	445	577	1022
1891	514	648	1162
1901	579	637	1216
1911	930	676	1606

As a result of the continued expansion of Cardiff and the housing developments in Rumney and St Mellons the boundaries have been completely changed. On the 1871 census, the farms and few houses in Llanrumney were included in St Mellons. Pontprennau was mainly farmland with only a few houses. Rumney village and the area south of the railway line from Rhymney River to the boundary with Peterstone was always in Rumney.

In 2011, the total population of Rumney, Llanrumney, Old St Mellons and Pontprennau, Trowbridge (which includes the new St Mellons housing estate) and the farms of Wentloog area within the Cardiff boundary was 45,801. These once quiet rural communities have become a densely-populated urban sprawl.

How did these changes happen? The 1871 census records that there was a tollhouse keeper at Rhymney River Bridge, but he was no longer there on the 1881 census. The Manor of Rompney over the centuries had two mills:<sup>80</sup> by 1881 only one was still operating. This was in Llanrumney and employed four men. In 1901, Llanrumney Mill was worked by Alfred Walky, a miller of corn on his own account. This is the last record of a working mill in either Rumney or St Mellons. Richard Allen, of Ty To Maen in St Mellons, was a first cousin of Joel Spiller and had lived and worked for him in Somerset in the milling business. Joel Spiller opened his first mill in Cardiff in 1854, and several generations of his family, nephews, joined him in the business.<sup>81</sup> Spillers provided work for many people in Rumney and St Mellons. Sir William E. Nicholls, manager of Spillers, a nephew of Richard Allen and a subsequent owner of Ty To Maen, presented the mansion and grounds to Cardiff Royal

<sup>79</sup> William Booth's scrapbook. Cardiff Library Manuscript Collection CL/MS 4.1263.

<sup>80</sup> Archive of the Rumney and District Local History Society.

<sup>81</sup> Archive of the Rumney and District Local History Society.



Infirmary for use as a convalescent home as a memorial to the late Richard Allen who had built the mansion.<sup>82</sup> It is now St John's College.

The 1871 census shows that there were groups of cottages and a large number of farms, the biggest of these in Rumney was Ty Mawr at 230 acres. Other farms varied from more than 100 acres to smallholdings of 10 acres and less. A number of these farmhouses were substantial buildings dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From about the mid-1870s, when industry and commerce started to develop in Cardiff, the population increased, especially at Rumney, which absorbed Cardiff's overspill.

Pre-1891 Rumney had a few important private houses. Richard Travell, a retired hotelkeeper and widower, lived at Rumney Court (now the British Legion). He employed a housekeeper, servant and groom. To the south of Newport Road stood Witla Court, in 1841 a small cottage occupied by an Irish agricultural labourer, the father of eleven children. By 1871 it had been enlarged and become Witla House, and in 1891 was known as Witla Court when Henry Heywood, a mineral importer, lived there. He provided the first place of worship for Roman Catholics in Rumney. Llanrumney Hall, once stood in a well wooded park and near the Rhymney River. It was usually included on the St Mellons census. This was the residence of the magistrate, George Croft Williams. [His family remained at Llanrumney Hall until it was purchased by Cardiff City Council in 1952 for housing development.<sup>83</sup>]

St Mellons had a larger number of 'big houses' in 1871. Mathew Cope, a colliery proprietor, lived at Quarry Hill. Vaindre Hall was the home of John Cory, a magistrate and colliery owner: this is still a private residence. The history of Began Farm is tied to the Kemeys family.<sup>84</sup> David Kemys, a son of the Began Kemeys family, married a member of the Lewellyn family of Cefn Mably and he moved there. A younger brother remained at the Began. While Cefn Mably is not in St Mellons, it is included here because of its close links with the people of Rumney and St Mellons.

The 1891 census shows us that four big houses had been built on Rumney Hill, the first and most impressive of these was William Cubitt's Rumney House. This had similar features to Osborne House, Queen Victoria's home on the Isle of Wight which was designed by Prince Albert working with Thomas Cubitt, the architect and builder who was a second cousin of William Cubitt. Rumney House had a commanding position overlooking Cardiff and the Bristol Channel. The house at the top of the hill was Tredelerch. Henry Lascelles Carr was a newspaper proprietor who later owned the *Western Mail*.

With expansion and development of businesses in Cardiff, people started to take advantage of better paid jobs in the town, rather than working on the farms. As Cardiff's population increased, so did the demand for fresh produce: milk, fruit, vegetables and fish. Rumney and the neighbouring villages stepped up to the challenge. William Booth describes the farms in Rumney thus: 'One or two of the farmers breed horses and cattle but most of them supply Cardiff with flowers, vegetables and milk.'<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/listedbuilding/FullReport?lang=en&id=13941> [Accessed 28.03.23]

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.llanrumneyhall.org> [Accessed 28.03.23]

<sup>84</sup> Hando, F.J. *Monmouthshire Sketch Book*. Newport: RH Johns, 1954.

<sup>85</sup> William Booth's scrapbook. Cardiff Library Manuscript Collection CL/MS 4.1263

According to the 1901 census, there were eight self-employed market gardeners, and twenty-seven others variously described as market gardeners, gardeners, carters or garden labourers. The gardeners included a cucumber grower, the superintendent of a market garden and fruit farm, two fruiterers and a fruiterer's assistant. Over the next twenty or so years, gardening and market gardens continued to expand.

The other commodity that Booth refers to is milk. The local tradition of collecting milk in jugs from the nearest farm was gradually replaced by a delivery service: farmers or dairymen taking it in churns on horse-drawn floats from which they ladled the milk out into the jugs of the customer. The abundance of fish in the rivers was fully exploited. Farmers and fishermen very gradually moved on to a more commercial level. As mentioned earlier, William Booth referred to the fishermen's huts on the sea wall and that most of the shrimps on sale in Cardiff had been caught between the Pontyprydd and Cardiff sewers, i.e. across the mouth of the Rhymney River.

William Booth's scrapbook demonstrates how he loved Rumney: the peace and tranquillity, the lovely old buildings he had drawn, many now demolished. He also showed us some of the down sides of the parish, recording many times the poor condition of the roads. As he had lived in Cardiff, he had the benefit of a water supply, while in the early years of his visits, residents of Rumney depended on wells. The transition of pumped to piped water was finally achieved when new houses and additional roads were built in the early twentieth century.

As the population increased, so did the number of people travelling to and from Cardiff. This led to ever increasing complaints about the condition of roads. The first major improvement to the road system was a new bridge crossing the Rhymney River, followed by commercial development on Rumney Common has replaced the old ponds and clay pits. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, brickworks were the only buildings on the common, to be followed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Connies and Meaden, steel-processors. The wet and muddy track across this low-lying floodplain was raised and improved, and during the early part of the twentieth century, the road was about five or six feet above the level of the ground on either side.

Research has shown that Rumney and St Mellons have, over the centuries, had been included mostly with Monmouthshire but sometimes with Glamorgan. Magor and St Mellons Rural District Council was the administrative body for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The local parish councils bore the brunt of villagers' complaints and suggestions and councillors passed these on to the appropriate bodies above them. On 1 April 1938 the Cardiff Extension Act 1937 incorporated it into the County Borough of Cardiff.

## UNDY

### Anatomy of the Parish in 1881

Like its neighbour, Magor, Undy is an ancient settlement sitting on the slightly higher ground to the north of the Levels, located on the spring line. There is evidence of Roman settlement within the parish, but no big gathering of dwellings before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

At the time of the 1881 Census, Undy was almost as big as Magor but was spread east-west for a mile or so along the Chepstow Road, with much less dense settlement. There is a group of dwellings to the east of Mill Common, - effectively an extension of Magor - and another grouping by the big farm known as Whitehall and, to a lesser extent, north of this up Vinegar Hill. The centre of the village, if anywhere, was a cluster of houses in the east to the south of the road, around the church. The focus of the community is almost completely agricultural, with good access to the Levels to the south and better-quality farmland to the north of the road.

The parish extended to around 4,147 acres ie. much larger in area than Magor. It abuts Magor to the west and traditionally it is bounded by the Mill Reen. To the east the boundary is Collister (sometimes called Colchester) Pill, the Estuary to the south and the Newport- Chepstow road, now the A48 to the north. The parish is bisected by the Newport-Chepstow Road, now the B4245. At West End, more or less in the middle of the parish, a road known as the Causeway, branches off south across the Levels.

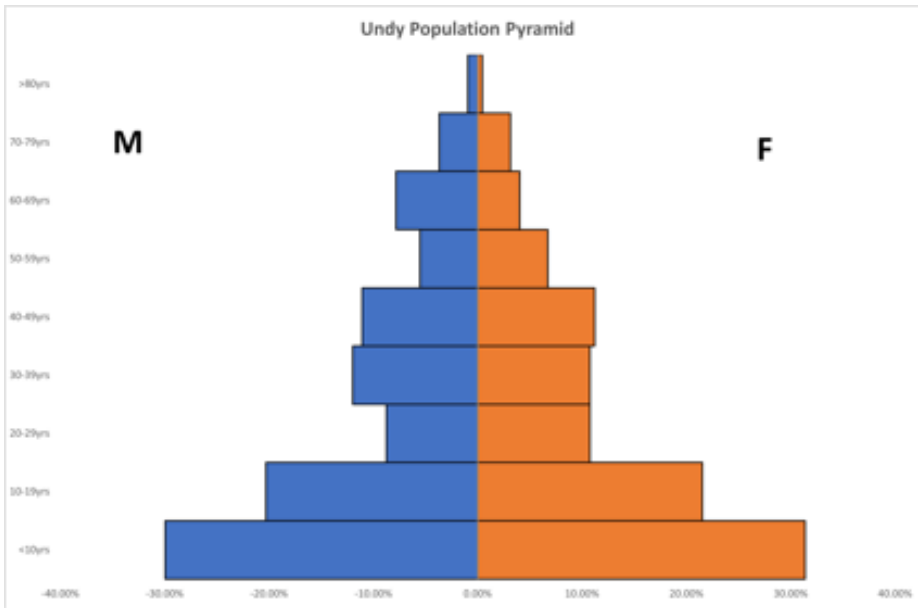
The B4245 divides the landscape neatly. To the north is Dinchill, Dancing Hill and Common-y Coed to the west and Vinegar Hill to the east. This is good, mixed farming land, well wooded with some quarrying. South of the road are the Levels. By the 1880s much of these were enclosed but there were still extensive commons – Bridewell Common to the west of the Causeway and Undy Common between Norton Reen and Great Well Reen further east.

The railway had already been constructed by the time of the Census but here was no official station in Undy. A small halt was constructed in the 1930s; it is plausible that, even at the time of the 1881 Census, this was an informal stopping point for local traffic to take workers down to the Severn Tunnel and the developing junction at Rogiet.

### Parish Life in 1881

At the time of the Census, Undy and Magor were the same size: Undy had 84 households and a total population of 439 – one more than her neighbour. 15 of these were lodgers and the households averaged 5.23 individuals – about average for the area. Again, like Magor, there were slightly more females (51%) than males.

Probably because of its agricultural basis, the age profile of Undy is skewed to the young (43% were 14yrs or below) and the old (9% aged over 60). Oddly, this makes those of working age (15yrs-60yrs) in a minority (47%). This profile would not be surprising today but is unexpected in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The working population of 163 is only 37% of the whole.



The population pyramid is completely different to that of Magor, but again there is a lack of elderly females. It is also narrower, and this appears to be a result of significant in-migration by younger adults at some stage, rather than the loss of the older section of the population.

At the time, Undy had only one school, built in 1871 (which I attended myself some 80 years later than the Census) and attendance levels were high for a rural community. 107 children (56% of the total) are marked as scholars, with slightly more girls (55%) than boys. There were two schoolteachers who lived in the parish.

There were 21 farms recorded in the Census and whilst 8 were relatively small (under 30 acres), there were 10 farms of 151-300 acres and three of over 300 acres. It is not surprising therefore that agriculture dominates employment in the parish. 55% of the working population and 48% of the men worked on the land.

Of the rest there are some interesting groups. 18 men, 11% of the whole, worked on the Railway or at the Severn Tunnel - more than in Magor which had the local station. A further 15 (9%), worked at dressmaking and clothing related trades. 16 people, 10% of the total, were domestic servants of some sort – a high proportion by our standards but much lower than the number in surrounding parishes. Five people worked at the Tin works in Caldicot and there were two individuals who showed their occupation as fishermen, although it is likely that far more followed this as a part-time occupation, legally or otherwise!

Some are more modest about their occupations. Sam Lawrence, who lived in Common y Coed, is described as a simple farm labourer but in later Censuses has promoted himself to the occupation of mole catcher! Richard Sheppard, the postman, also advertised in local directories as a basket-maker.

There is some evidence of small-scale shipbuilding in Undy just before the date of the Census, with small schooners and other vessels of up to 20 tonnes being constructed on Collister Pill. Presumably this enterprise had ended by 1881 as there is no record of any such employment in the Census return and evidence is also lacking from other sources for the period, such as the tithe maps. There is one individual described in the 1891 Census as a Shipbuilder, but no evidence that he practiced this trade in Undy.

Undy has an ancient church, St Mary's, with parts dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.



*St Mary's Undy*

It was extensively restored in the 1880s with new windows and possibly the pews. The cost of £800 for the renovations suggests a local prosperity which is not evident in some other local churches. The vicar, George Shacks, lived in the Vicarage but apparently did not hold the living, which was worth £183 pa. The records suggest that this belonged to a Revd George Davies, so George Shacks must have been a “surrogate”, being paid a stipend to minister on behalf of the holder.

There was also a Methodist Chapel by this time in Chepstow Road at the other end of the village.



*Undy Methodist Chapel*

The building is now a private house (the chapel closed in 1968) but the gable has a plaque recording its previous use. The Royal Commission records it as having been built in 1856, but early records are hard to come by and it is not marked distinctly on the early maps. The Methodist Chapel is intriguing. It is a substantial building and I know that in my own lifetime there was still a strong Methodist presence in the village. But there is no record of a Methodist Minister in the Census returns. Moreover, there is no record of the Magor Chapel in the minutes of the Methodist Conference for the 1880s, a record that normally makes the Domesday Book look amateur! I conclude that the chapel was part of the Newport District and had no resident minister of its own, although I would be delighted to be proved wrong if anyone has access to the

local Methodist records. The scarcity of nonconformist worship amongst the villages between Newport and Caldicot is odd, given their proliferation in other parts of South Monmouthshire and the vigorous activities of the Magor Baptist Church.

The census records a William Price aged 44 from Spittal living in the village, who describes himself as an “Independent Dissenting Minister of Llanvaches and Goldcliff”. The Methodist Chapel was Wesleyan and it is unlikely that a Methodist Minister would describe himself in this way, so the presumption is that William ministered to another non-conformist community somewhere out on the Levels to the east of Undy. In later times he was described as a “Congregational minister”, so he was probably minister at the small Congregational church in Goldcliff.

### **Within and Beyond the Parish 1881**

The village of Undy did not need to be self-sufficient, so the local services are very basic. Like Magor, Undy in 1881 had the advantage of good transport links sitting astride a well-developed road from Newport to Chepstow and the main railway line. Travel was relatively easy, which may explain why local facilities in Undy were so modest: a church a chapel, a smithy. Shops and public houses were located in Magor, though the police station was in Undy, just. (Greystones, at the bottom of Mill Common). Allegedly there were two post boxes, one at either end of the village.

Population mobility was also modest. 54% of the census population were born in the parish, much higher than the local average (Magor was 40%) and 84% were born on the Levels or elsewhere within Monmouthshire. 13% were born in England and 5 individuals were born abroad: Suzie Lewis, the 8yr old granddaughter of Joseph Pearce, the local hay dealer, was apparently born in America. Steve Harris, the local police constable, his family and two other residents were born in Ireland. The impression is of a close-knit community, many of whom are related to each other. There are a few interesting incomers though. William and Richard Grimshaw, and George Moss, who all lodged with George Farr, shepherd, described themselves as hay cutters and all hailed from Heaton on Merseyside.

However, we are up against the limitation of a single night’s survey of the population. My great grandfather William Brace is there in Mill Common with his wife Sarah. The Brace family went on to occupy Dinchill Farm and surrounding properties and it is tempting to conclude that they never left the village. In fact, they moved out of the village to Risca, but had returned by the time of the 1891 Census.



## WHITSON

Whitson is the smallest parish on the Caldicot Levels, comprising 800 acres on the edge of the low-lying back fen. On the western edge of the parish is Monksditch. Its southern boundary with Porton (in Goldcliff parish), a green lane, follows Hare's Reen. Elver Reen forms part of the eastern boundary. To the north, it is bounded by Llanwern and Bowlease Common. Whitson, together with the neighbouring larger parishes of Nash and Goldcliff, forms the "Three Parishes" which have long been treated as a unit - geographically, socially, economically and ecclesiastically.

The date of the foundation of Whitson is unknown and the development of the parish is poorly documented. The earliest documentary evidence is from 1314 when it is noted as part of Langstone Manor, part of the lordship of Caerleon<sup>86</sup>. A more likely possibility is that Whitson was a later addition to the estate of Goldcliff Priory. In Kelly's 1901 *Directory*, the Provost and Fellows of Eton College are listed as one of the principal landowners and lords of the manor. Given the history of Goldcliff parish, this lends credence to Whitson's origins. A survey by the Commissioners of Sewers dated 1856 gives a detailed account of the drainage system in place at the time.<sup>87</sup>

The principal element is a linear settlement along a funnel-shaped "street common", with very long narrow fields laid out longitudinally to the east. These narrow strip fields extend for almost 1 kilometre in length and are commonly a third of a furlong<sup>88</sup> in width. There is evidence of three boundaries or divisions along their length. At least one of these boundaries was at some point a lane. The medieval field units and subdivisions show considerable variation in size. The length of the initial strips varied as the first fen-back was not parallel to the edge of the common. One curious feature is that the first lateral street (Middleway) is not parallel to the edge of the street common or to Monksditch, as might have been expected if either feature had been used as a base line for planning.

The settlement is enclosed by a road, which is metalled to the north/west; there is a fine green lane along Parish Reen to the south east. The main village street runs down the centre of the former common, leading to the farms, which originally all lay on the common's edge, being set back from the present road. Monksditch runs down the west side of the former common. A fine row of pollarded willows lines Bowlease Reen. This is a unique and fascinating example of a planned landscape and linear settlement dating to the twelfth to fourteenth century. It is unique on the Levels. There is a coherent range of landscape features giving the area a very high group value (e.g. Monksditch, the former common, sequence of fen-banks, green lanes). A number of boundaries have been lost but some grips are well preserved and the pattern of long narrow fields survives in essence.

The present parish church, known locally as St. Mary's, is actually situated in the village of Porton, approximately 400 metres south of the village of Whitson. The church is built in the Early English style, with a chancel, nave, south porch and a western tower, which originally held two bells. The church has a distinctive 'thimble' tower and a fine Norman doorway and font. The living was a vicarage in the diocese of Llandaff, in the alternate patronage of the Chapter of Llandaff and the Provost of Eton College.

<sup>86</sup> CIPM, V, 336

<sup>87</sup> GwA D.695/92

<sup>88</sup> 660 feet/c.201 metres

The low-lying back-fen to the north of the parish has a simpler “intermediate” landscape. The initial enclosure and drainage by reens and banks had begun by the fourteenth century. Individual field-boundaries are probably later (perhaps post-medieval). To the north, the integrity and coherence of the landscape have been damaged by the building and operation of the Llanwern steelworks, though tree planting partly screens this. The waste ash dumps to the north-east are visible in the landscape. There are many scrubby and well-wooded hedges (especially in the village), though others are cut or absent. This, along with the loss of some boundaries, leads to a rather open landscape in places, though still retaining the important pattern of long narrow fields.

This area once extended to the edge of the fen, but the surviving area is now bounded by the Llanwern steelworks site to the north and Green Moor to east. The steelworks were originally built for Richard Thomas & Baldwin and were subsequently owned by British Steel and, currently (2023), Tata Steel Europe (formerly known as Corus Group). The site was built between 1958 and 1962 on a green field site extending 4.8 km (3 miles) along the south side of the main London to Wales railway line. Steel making ceased in 2001 and the heavy end of the works was demolished in 2004. In 2011 the hot strip mill was under threat of closure but continued to employ 1600 workers and roll more than 1.5 million tonnes of steel per year. Since 2006 work has been undertaken to clear and make the site environmentally safe. From 2010 development has been underway to build 4,000 new homes, along with primary schools, a 100-acre business park, a library, a doctors' surgery, a police station, shops, sporting facilities, parkland, habitats for wildlife, and lakes.

Here, the fairly rectilinear field-boundary pattern can be broken down into small blocks, defined by major reens and former banks that represent individual reclamations. Roads are mainly straight and without waste along their length. There were a distinct range of other landscape features. The lowest-lying areas closest to the fen-edge were occupied by a series of commons. The commons, along with two duck decoy ponds and the only two farms in this character area, were destroyed by the building of the steelworks in the late 1950's. There are several fine lines of pollarded willows. This area was once representative of a common type of landscape on the Levels, covering much of the back-fen, characterised by a fairly homogenous rectilinear pattern arranged in blocks of several dozen fields, with very little settlement.

Monksditch is particularly well preserved, being stone faced in places. Hedge management varies, with a mixture of well-cut and scrubby hedges, and many mature trees around the Whitson electricity sub-station.

Stephen Rippon<sup>89</sup> has suggested a possible development sequence for the parish:

1. The higher ground west of Monksditch was the first to be enclosed and drained. This left the area between Monksditch and Elver Pill Reen as open moorland
2. The settlement of Whitson was laid out along the edge of a street common. A fen-bank prevented flooding from the back fen while Cliff Reen channelled water from the village under Monksditch to the coast

<sup>89</sup> Rippon: *The Gwent Levels: The Evolution of a Wetland Landscape*, 1996 Council for British Archaeology Report 105, pages 85 - 87

3. The long, narrow field strips were extended on several occasions until the present shape was reached
4. The remaining areas of open moor were enclosed. They formed larger and more rectangular fields
5. Lastly, the common was enclosed.

Similar settlement patterns exist in the Netherlands, called a 'cope' system. A settlement would be strung out along a street on the highest ground with long tenement strips running perpendicular to the street, extending into lower-lying ground. An embankment would surround the reclaimed land. When more land was needed, the tenement strips would be extended and a new surrounding embankment would be constructed.

Overall, Whitson is a very important and coherent landscape, retaining considerable integrity. It is a fine example of English planted settlement and reclamation in the Welsh Marches.

### 1881 census

On the night of the 1881 census there were 93 individuals listed for Whitson, 4 of whom were visitors, in 16 households. Two of the households had a boarder while one household consisted of a lodger. Of the 89 permanent inhabitants, 47 were male and 42 female. 31 were children up to age of 14, including an as-yet-unnamed 1 day old daughter of the Rickards family at Whitson Court. 19 fell into the 15-25 age category; 35 were in the 26-60 category and only four were aged over 60. The oldest was the Reverend John Beynon, vicar of Whitson and Goldcliff who was 80 years old. In all age categories, the balance between male and female was fairly equal, though there are slightly more men than women in the 26-60 age category.

There is no school in Whitson. Children from the village attend the school in Goldcliff. 23 of the children are classified as scholars. Interestingly, while the division between male and female is not greatly uneven (13 male: 10 female), the age spread is quite different. Male scholars are aged 2 to 17, while female are aged 5 to 11. The 17 year old scholar is St. John Rickards, son of retired Surgeon, Andrew Rickards, living at Whitson Court. If he is removed from the equation the age spread for the remaining male scholars peaks at 14.

Farming is the main occupation for the parish. There are six farms named in the 1881 census for Whitson:

	Farmer	Acreage	No of employees, including family members, listed as living on farm
Church Farm	Henry Gale		3
Whitson Farm	John Hale		4
Whitson Court	Elizabeth Green	121	5 (states she employs 3 men)
	Clifford Green	22	

Arch Farm	Edgar Morgan		4
Green Court	John Keene		2 (states he employs 3 men)
New Hall	Elizabeth Withers	25	3

Additionally, Sidney Jones, at an unnamed address, lists his occupation as a farmer of 54 acres, employing a boy. In the 1891 and 1901 censuses, Sidney Jones is living at Chestnut Tree Farm. Robert Thomas also lists his occupation as farmer.

Looking at the returns for 1981 and 1901. There appears to be a degree of stability in the ownership/tenancy of the farms. Church Farm is still occupied by Henry Gale. Court Farm (formerly Arch Farm) is occupied by Edgar Morgan. Whitson Farm continues with the Hale family (John Hale, followed by his widow, Jane). New Hall has passed to Thomas James and Green Court is in the hands of John Waters. Whitson Court, or the Court as it is later referred to, remains with the Rickards family. In 1881, Elizabeth Green and her son Clifford were listed as farmers of this estate. Retired Surgeon Major Andrew Knox Rickards<sup>90</sup> and his family are also living at the Court. In 1891 and 1901, the estate is occupied by his eldest son, St. John Knox Rickards Phillips.

59% of the working population are employed in agricultural work (24 men and 15 women). 14 women are engaged in domestic service, including a cook and a housemaid at the Vicarage, a monthly nurse, housemaid and nursemaid at Whitson Court, plus two households have housekeepers.

Aside from agricultural or domestic employment, the range of other occupations is limited. There is the vicar of the parish, a retired surgeon general, a master mason and apprentice, two wheelwrights (the brothers Richard and Edward Keyte), a dressmaker, a plasterer and a general dealer. For any other services and for a range of goods, the inhabitants would have had to travel to nearby parishes or into Newport.

The majority of the inhabitants were born somewhere on the Gwent Levels or within Monmouthshire (81%). A further 2 (2%) were Welsh born and 12 (14%) were born in the rest of the UK. Only 3 (3%) were born outside of the UK and these are all from the Rickards family at Whitson Court<sup>91</sup>. 52 (58%) of the inhabitants were either born in Whitson parish or adjoining parishes.

There is one church, St Mary's, located close to the border with Porton. The vicar, the Reverend John Beynon, lives in the vicarage and is vicar of Whitson and Goldcliff. There are no shops, pubs or post offices in Whitson in 1881, though the Keytes brothers are living at the Carpenters Shop. In the 1891 census, Richard Keyte and his two brothers, Edward and Charles, are living at the Post Office. In the 1901 *Kelly's Directory for Monmouthshire*, however, it is only a partial service. Letters from Newport arrive at 8.50am and are dispatched at 4.20pm. Postal orders are issued but not paid. The nearest money order and telegraph office is at Maindee, 5 miles distant. Richard Keyte is listed as carpenter,

<sup>90</sup> Andrew Know Rickards was a member of Rickards family of Usk Priory. Family records are held in the Gwent Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew and Rickards were born in Ireland. St. John Rickards was born in St John's Newfoundland.

wheelwright and sub-postmaster. The nearest railway station is at Llanwern, 2.5 miles to the north of the parish.

The principal private home in the parish is Whitson Court<sup>92</sup>, occupied in 1881 by Retired Surgeon Major Andrew Knox Rickards. This is a country house originally built for William Phillips, MP (1752-1836). It is recorded in 1791 as “completing by Nash”. John Nash, architect, is known to have been in Newport in 1791 to design a bridge over the Usk. While there are similarities between Whitson and other known works by Nash, there are also similarities to Coytrahen, Bettws, and Iscoed, St Ishmael's, both attributed to Anthony Keck. It is possible that Whitson was begun by Keck but completed by Nash.

Monumental inscriptions at Whitson church indicate that the house was called Whitson House from at least 1789 and for most of the 19th century but was known as Whitson Court by 1903. The census returns for 1881 onwards also refer to it as Whitson Court.

By 1889, Andrew Knox Rickards had moved to Portsmouth. His eldest son, St. John Knox Rickards Phillips<sup>93</sup> is resident at Whitson Court in the 1891 census so is likely to have taken over from his father. Following his death in 1903 the house passed to the Reverend Father Oliver Rodie Vassall Phillips. He invited the nuns of the Sacramentines of Bernay of the Perpetual Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament to use the house as a convent. The order had fled from religious persecution in France. Oliver Rodie Vassall Phillips died in May 1932 and the nuns vacated the house for the United States of America.

During the Second World War the building housed more refugees fleeing persecution – this time the Jews escaping Nazi Europe. The house was home to many refugees and later also provided work for German prisoners of war. Whitson Court was purchased in 2007 by Collingbourne Properties for renovation and conversion to create a family home. Prior to Collingbourne Properties acquiring the property the house remained empty and abandoned for several years and was recorded on Newport City Councils “Buildings at Risk” register.

---

<sup>92</sup> <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300002944-whitson-court-including-attached-pavilions-and-garden-walls-goldcliff#.XzFnX6-Sk2w>

<sup>93</sup> The additional surname of Phillips appears to have been adopted at this point. The same thing occurs with his successor to the tenancy/ownership of Whitson Court who adds Phillips to his name of Oliver Rodie Vassall.



## WILCRICK

Wilcrick is situated on the northern limit of the Caldicot Level, with the parishes of Bishton to the west, Magor to the east and Llandevenny due south.

The hamlet lies north west of Wilcrick Hill, a 'bare hill' or 'mound', from which the Welsh name is derived. Rising 100 feet (30 metres) above the surrounding land, and recognised on later Ordnance Survey maps (1949 revision) as the site of an iron age hillfort, the hill offers uninterrupted views over the Level and across the Severn Estuary. Whilst this afforded an ideal vantage point at that time, the hill is now densely wooded and access is barred by 'private property' signs.



*Wilcrick Hill viewed from the northeast (Martin Gerrard)*



*Wilcrick Hill viewed from Wentwood (to the north) with Denny Island visible in the Severn Estuary to the left (Martin Gerrard)*

The first thing of note when entering from the east – apart from the total absence of any road-signage to indicate the presence of the hamlet – is a well of unknown origin which lies within the patch of common ground below the church.



*Wilcrick Well (Martin Gerrard)*

St Mary's church nestles into the side of the hill. Although entirely rebuilt in 1860, it retains a twelfth century font, a tablet to an eighteenth-century rector who ministered there for fifty-seven years, late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century altar rails, a stone dated 1621, a pedestal sundial, and a bell of 1726 cast by the Evans foundry of Chepstow.<sup>94</sup>

The *Monmouthshire Merlin* of 13 October 1882 reported that 'the church was re-opened on Sunday morning last after thorough internal renovation. The design and execution of the decorative part was entrusted to Messrs. T Harse and Son of Newport. The sermon was preached to a crowded congregation by the Rev. W. Conybeare Bruce, M.A., Vicar of Newport.....The offertories for the Newport Infirmary amounted to £4.'<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Magor Ministry Area, St Mary's Wilcrick <<http://magorministryarea.org.uk/our-churches/wilcrick/>> [accessed 9 February 2022].

<sup>95</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 13 October 1882, p. 5.



*St Mary's Church, Wilcrick (Martin Gerrard)*

On the night of 3 April 1881, the census recorded 28 residents in 5 properties, giving an average household size of 5.60. There was a perfectly even split of males and females, and whilst 5 scholars were identified, there was only 1 female in the age range 15 to 25. Only 1 of the residents was born outside of Monmouthshire, with 17 born in the same or neighbouring parish, or elsewhere on the Caldicot Level.

Evidently agricultural in nature, there are three farms identified within the Wilcrick parish: Church Farm of 157 acres, Newhouse 125 acres, and Tump 60 acres. Twelve of the 16 total working population (75%) were engaged in farm work: 7 males and 5 females.

Mr Isaac Lawrence was the head of household at Church Farm in April 1881. He was clearly eminent within the area, being recently elected as Newport Union's 'guardian of the poor' for Wilcrick and Llandeenny parishes,<sup>96</sup> and a judge for 'ploughing' at Magor Farmers Association's Annual Meeting.<sup>97</sup> He achieved success at agricultural shows, winning 'a prize of two pounds, for the best half acre of mangold wurtzel, grown on a farm containing not more than 40 acres of arable land' and 'two guineas, given by Mr Thomas Williams of Penycoed Castle, for the best acre of mangold wurtzel, grown by artificial manure purchased of him and manufactured by the Avon Manure Co, Bristol'.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, Mr Lawrence and his servant John Waters featured in the local newspaper in August 1882 under the headline 'Gun Accident - Waters was out with his master....and had with him a loaded gun.' The gun fell to the ground and fired and 'Waters was badly wounded in the leg by the

<sup>96</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 1 April 1881, p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 9 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 October 1878, p. 5.



shots. He was removed to Newport Infirmary without delay and is progressing favourably. Although close to Waters when the charge went off Mr Lawrence did not receive any injury'.<sup>99</sup>

At the time of the 1881 census, Mr John Baker occupied New House Farm. He too warranted newspaper coverage the following year: 'Mr Baker has disposed of his famous trotting mare to a North of England purchaser for £100'.<sup>100</sup> The farm was recorded as covering 125 acres in 1881, but in 1886, Mr Baker gained second prize for 'best farm of between 28 and 80 acres'.<sup>101</sup>

His predecessor at New House Farm was Mr William Baker, an overseer for Newport and Christchurch Divisions for Wilcrick.<sup>102</sup> In 1878, his sheep earned 'a prize of one guinea, given by Magor Farmers Association, to the son (over twelve years of age) or servant of a member who shall on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of May 1878, have the greatest relative number of lambs alive, from a flock of ewes, numbering not less than 30 – shepherd of Mr W Baker, Wilcrick, 49 ewes, 69 lambs'.<sup>103</sup>

In October 1880, William Baker acted as a judge for 'horses' at Magor Farmers Association Annual Meeting.<sup>104</sup> However, the following month newspapers reported: 'A Missing Farmer – A considerable amount of anxiety has during the week been manifested in this neighbourhood as to the whereabouts of Mr William Baker, a farmer, of Wilcrick. Mr Baker went to Bristol on Monday, the 11<sup>th</sup> inst., on business, and in the evening of the same day went a portion of the way to the terminus with the expressed intention of going home. On the way he left his companion, alleging that he had neglected something in the city which he was bound to return for, and he has not since been seen or heard of'.<sup>105</sup>

Subsequently, the *Monmouthshire Merlin* of 31 December 1880 included an advertisement (below): 'New House Farm, Wilcrick - About 1½ mile from Magor and 2 miles from Llanwern Station on the Great Western Railway – Important and Unreserved Sale of valuable Live and Dead - Farming Stock, Dairy Utensils, Potatoes, Casks, Portion of the Household Furniture, and Other Effects – The property of Mr William Baker'.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>99</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 25 August 1882, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Western Mail*, 31 January 1882, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 15 October 1886, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> *Western Mail*, 7 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 October 1878, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 9 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Weekly Mail*, 27 November 1880, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 31 December 1880, p. 4.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sales by Auction.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NEW HOUSE FARM, WILCRICK.</b></p> <p>About 1½ mile from Magor and 2 miles from Llanwern Stations on the Great Western Railway.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Important and Unreserved Sale of valuable <b>LIVE AND DEAD FARMING STOCK,</b> DAIRY UTENSILS, POTATOES, CASKS, PORTION OF THE HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, AND OTHER EFFECTS,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The property of Mr. WILLIAM BAKER. PARTICULARS:—</p> <p><b>CATTLE.</b>—6 prime Shorthorn Dairy Cows, due to calve in the months of January and February next; 12 two-year-old ditto Steers and Heifers, two-year-old ditto Bull, 9 ditto Yearling Steers and Heifers.</p> <p><b>HORSES.</b>—4 powerful Cart Geldings and Mares, 1 Half-bred Mare, quiet to ride or drive; 2 two-year-old Cart Colts, 1 ditto Half-bred ditto, 1 Weanling Cart Filly.</p> <p><b>PIGS.</b>—2 Baconers</p> <p><b>IMPLEMENTS.</b>—2 4½-inch-Wheel Road Waggons, 1 Broad-wheel Harvest ditto, 1 ditto Timber Carriage, 2 4½-inch-Wheel Carts, 1 Broad-wheel ditto, Pair of new Broad Wheels, Spring Trap, Set of Brass-mounted Harness, light two-wheel Dog Cart, with Cushions and Lamps complete (by Rogers and Co., Bristol); Set of Plated Carriage Harness, 5 Sets of Trace, 3 of Thiller, and 4 Pairs of G.O. Harness; heavy Cambridge Roller, 2-horse Scarifier, Horse Hoe, 3 Pairs of Iron Drags, 3 Pairs of ditto Harrows, Set of Chain Harrows, Swing Plough, Wheel ditto (by Hornsby), 2 Root Graters, 1 ditto Slicer, 1 ditto Cutter, Sheep Racks and Troughs, Feeding Boxes, several dozen Hurdles, Horse Rake, Tedding Machine (by Nicholson), Chaff Engine and Horse Works, Corn Mill (by Richmond and Chandler), Oil Cake Breaker, Sack Cart, Sack Bags, Winnowing Machine, Corn Screens, Beam Scales and Weights, Timber and other Chains, Corn Bins, Wheelbarrow, Grindstone, Pig Troughs, Hay Knives, Seed Lift, Waggon Ropes, 35-rung Ladder, and a large assortment of Agricultural Tools.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SEVERAL SACKS OF PRIME POTATOES,</b> 2 Hives of Bees, Pipe, Hogshead, and other Casks; Mashing Tubs, Coolers, Tun Pail, Wood Bottles, and Benches.</p> <p><b>DAIRY UTENSILS, &amp;c.</b>—2 Double-lever Cheese Presses, 3 Barrel Churns, Cheese Tub, Stand, and Ladder; 4 Trindles, 3 Milk Pails, Milk and Cream Tins and Pans, Scales and Weights, Prints, Strainers, number of Cheese Vats, Patent Steelyards to weigh 415 lbs.</p> <p><b>HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE.</b>—Pier and Chimney Glasses in gilt and rosewood frames, capital 8-day Clock in mahogany case, Mahogany Chiffonier, ditto Corner Cupboard, Set of Spanish Mahogany Telescope Dining Tables with one insertion, Mahogany 2-leaf Dining and Work Tables, large Oak ditto with turned legs, Mahogany-frame Spring-seat Sofas, covered in American leather and hair seating; ditto Frame Easy Chair, in American leather; 8 Single and 2 Arm ditto Frame Dining-room Chairs in hair seating, Grecian, Windsor Arm and Single Chairs, Children's Table Chairs, Barometer, in rosewood; Treadle Sewing Machine (by Singer), Mahogany Window Poles, Pair of Figured Damask and Muslin Window Curtains, Cast Fenders and Fire Sets, Chimney Ornaments, Prints and Engravings, handsome Table Lamp, Books, Banjo, Glass, Gold and White China Tea and Coffee Service, Green Dessert ditto, Dinner and other Ware, Plated Cruet Stand, ditto Coffee Biggin, Double-barrel Breech Loader (by Hopkins), Shot Belt and Powder Flask, Mahogany Waiter's Tray and Stand, Japan Tea Trays, Meat Hastener, Half-tester Bedsteads with Draperies, Iron French Bedsteads, Wood Stump ditto, Child's Crib, Mahogany and Painted Chests of Drawers, Oak Chest, Mahogany and Painted Washstands, Chamber Services, Dressing and Toilet Tables, Mahogany-frame Dressing Glasses, Night Conveniences, Bedside Carpets and Rugs, Cane-seat Chairs, with the usual assortment of Kitchen and Culinary Requisites, and other miscellaneous Articles not mentioned, which</p> <p><b>MESSRS. DAVIS &amp; BROTHERHOOD</b> (late J. DAVIS &amp; SON) have been favoured with instructions to arrange for <b>SALE BY AUCTION</b>, on the above Premises, on <b>THURSDAY</b> and <b>FRIDAY</b>, <b>JANUARY 6th and 7th, 1881.</b></p> <p><b>ORDER OF SALE.</b>—Thursday, Live Stock and Implements; Friday, Potatoes, Casks, Dairy Utensils, and Household Furniture.</p> <p>Luncheon will be provided on Thursday, and will be laid at 10.30. Sale to commence each day at Twelve o'clock.</p> <p>The days being short, a punctual attendance will oblige. Welsh-street, Chepstow, December 29th, 1880. [3798]</p>
---	--

This would suggest that William Baker had died, but no record of his death is evident, and no other trace of him has been found. The third and smallest of the farms, Tump Farm was headed by Mr William Roberts. Other than being an overseer for Newport and Christchurch Divisions for Wilcrick, Mr Roberts appears less newsworthy than his peers.<sup>107</sup>

Besides the farms, the only other feature of note within Wilcrick was the brick works, situated to the west of the settlement and home to labourer John Hayes, his wife and three children. A mason, John Morgan, also lived within the hamlet.

<sup>107</sup> *Western Mail*, 7 April 1879, p. 3.



