Robert Vaughan the artist's portrait of Sir John Wynn

Preface to Halliwell-s edition

THE following ancient survey is chiefly valuable for the very curious and graphic account which it affords of the state of the ancient remains on Penmaenmawr, a they presented themselves to an intelligent observer of the early part of the seventeenth century. The manuscript I have little doubt, is the same which is quoted, though very imperfectly, in the additions of Camden, as "a manuscript written by Sir John Gwynn of Gwedyr temp. Charles 1, communicated to Bishop Gibson by his worthy friend, Griffith Jones, schoolmaster of Llanrwst;" in which work the substance of a portion of this manuscript is given. Previously to the taking of this survey, Sir Thomas ap William, one of the family of Cochwillan, had described it about A.D. 1594, but his account does not appear to be preserved. Pennant ascended the mountain on purpose to view the fortifications here described, and he says the account is a very just one. His description of the ancient fortress is interesting, and should be carefully compared with that contained in the following pages. See the notice of it in Pennant's Tours in Wales, ed. 1810, vol.3, p.116.

The village of Pen Maen Mawr is now a very insignificant one, being merely a long straggling collection of mean houses, though scattered amidst the meadows are a few picturesque gentlemen's seats; but it is one of the most charming localities in North Wales, and it needs no great prophetic gift to foretell that it will ere long become a favourite [sic] resort for tourists, and probably so lose much of its antiquarian character. The rapid changes now taking place in North Wales warn us to preserve what we can of the memorials of its ancient history, and hasten to verify early descriptions of its remains while it is yet possible to do so.

The MS. is a somewhat obscure one, and has several errors, here literally followed; but this is not a matter of great importance, the document deriving its chief value from the account of Pen Maen Mawr, the rest being partly taken from early printed sources. The original MS. is in the possession of Thomas Wright, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

November, 1859.

Preface to Bezant-Lowe's edition

The interesting work, entitled "An Ancient Survey of Pen Maen Mawr" by Sir John Gwynn of Gwedyr, was published in 1859, but only 30 copies were printed and it is consequently now very scarce.

At the suggestion of several gentlemen in the district, I have had it reprinted, and I have retained the spelling exactly as it was in the original edition, which, according to Mr. Halliwell, was an exact copy of the MS.

In addition to the Welsh tradition upon which Sir John Gwynn has based his work, the existence of forest beds at Rhos, Rhyl and other places, show there must have been several alterations of level, and that the coast must, at some former time, have extended further to the North. The subject has been treated by Messrs C. R. Hall and H. F. Hall in papers published in the Proceedings of the Liverpool Geological Society (1864-1866), and by Mr. A. Strahan in the Geological Survey Memoir of 1885 on the Geology of the districts adjoining Rhyl, Abergele, and Conway.

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to the Librarian of the University Library, Cambridge, for the kind permission given to make use of the University Library copy of Sir John Gwynn's work.

W. Bezant Lowe

Cae Carw
Llanfairfechan
N.Wales
June, 1906

Preface to this reprint

The present booklet reproduces this fascinating relic once again, with a little ornamentation. The interest it still holds derives as much from its references to the early road across Penmaenmawr and the now-destroyed hillfort of Braich-y-Dinas, as from its having given rise to the apocryphal legend of Helig and his *llys*, curious though the natural feature which bears that name actually is.

Halliwell's version as printed by W. Bezant Lowe is given, with the variations found in Wright's text added in brackets where they occur. Where the texts differ grossly, footnotes are sometimes used. Obvious typesetting errors in the previous editions are also noted. Otherwise all spelling and punctuation, however eccentric, is adhered to.

When anything relevant can be said to illuminate the narrative, this is also added in footnotes. Some illustrations of a roughly contemporary sort have been included, together with one or two modern photos..

T. P. T.Williams
September 2008

Acknowledgements

The cover illustration is an early view of Braich y Dinas hillfort on the summit of Penmaenmawr, reproduced in *The Sphere* of November 19th 1910, during the controversy over the fort's imminent destruction by quarry expansion. I am most grateful to Mr Peter Crew, formerly Snowdon National Park Archaeologist, Plas Tan y Bwlch, Maentwrog, for letting me use his copy of this fascinating print. I am grateful also to Mr Nigel Bannerman for the photographs of the ancient tree remains and of Llys Helig reef.

Introduction

The manuscript now called *An Ancient Survey of Penmaenmawr* but originally entitled *Notes to bee*[1] *observed before you lett your Survay passe your handes* has been the subject of speculation for centuries; it is the main source of the legend of the lost lands of Helig ap Glanawg, whose *llys* or court was said to have been situated in the low-lying region now covered by the shallow waters of Conwy Bay.

Although generally supposed to have been composed by Sir John Wynn of Gwydir before 1627, its true author is in fact not known for certain. The famous antiquary and Keeper of the Oxford Ashmolean Museum, Edward Lhuyd seems to have seen a copy before the end of the 17th century, as he notes in *Parochial Queries*.[2] His notes additional to Bishop Gibson's first edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1695) make mention of a manuscript written by 'a person of quality in the reign of Charles 1'.

Another copy made by, or at least for, the Rev. David Lloyd in 1720 is in the National Museum of Wales.[3] Its existence seems to have become known to Gibson, who revised his second 1722 edition of *Camden* to note that 'Sir John Wyn of Guydyr' was the 'person of quality' in question. This note of Gibson's is the only direct authority for ascribing the *Notes to bee observed* to Sir John Wynn.

The work has been printed several times before. Angharad Llwyd[4] printed a portion of it as *The History of Helig ap Glanawg* in 1831.[5] The tourist J. O. Halliwell,[6] later to produce almost the last great description of travels in North Wales, *Notes on family excursions in North Wales* (1860), printed a very small edition of 30 copies in 1859, which was re-printed privately by W. Bezant Lowe at

1 *be* in some printed versions

2 Edward Lhuyd *Answers to Parochial Queries etc.* MS written before 1699; under the entry for Halkyn, Flintshire, Lhuyd writes in his usual polyglot 'MSS penes D=num Watkyn Owen apud Gwydyr in Arvonia .... 6. Of Gruff: ap Kynan's Family etc. this contains some acct. of Penmaen Mawr Prestholm 7. Papers abt Helyg ap Gwdanog[sic] etc 8. Vita Gryff. Conani Lat. Fol. Sen.' *Arch.Camb.* Supplement 'Parochiala' 1909 Pt. 1 pp 84-5

3 N.L.W Additional MS No. 27 which formed part of the Sir John Williams Collection. It bears the manuscript title *A Copy of Sr John Wynn of Gwiddir Baronet's Manuscript*. Sir John Williams is thought to have bought the MS from the Soho bookman William Pamplin, who in turn had it from Lloyd himself

4 Angharad Llwyd 1780-1866; the most famous Welsh female antiquary of the 19th century, author of *A History of the Island of Mona* Ruthin 1833; see Mary Ellis *Angharad Llwyd* in *Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society* vol.26 1973-4 pp.52-95,continued in vol.27

5 *The Cambrian Quarterly Magazine and Celtic Repository* vol. iii 1831; in a letter to A.J.Johnes of Sept. 17th 1829, she writes 'Let me know if the *hanes* of Helig ab Glanawg suits the Cambrian, that I may transmit the sequel, which I have transcribed out of a MS written in 1699 from an older one; evidently the orthography has been altered, although the style seems to be the same.' *National Library of Wales Journal* Vol.10 1957-8 p.241

6 Otherwise known as Halliwell Phillips, the name he used when writing his life of William Shakespeare

Penmaenmawr in 1906.[7] Halliwell acknowledges the original MS to be the property of the noted antiquary Thomas Wright.

In 1861, Wright independently caused a version to appear in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, which was also copied from the MS which Halliwell mentions.[8] There are many minor differences between the two versions. Neither author attempted any commentary and both printings contain occasional typesetting errors over and above the transcription errors presumably introduced from the various readings of the source MS.

The geologist and cartographic historian F. J. North discussed these matters at length, firstly in his book on the *Llys Helig*[9] legend. Much later, he revisited the whole question in *Sunken Cities*,[10] a book dealing with the whole range of inundation legends in Wales. North was able to locate an even earlier version of the *Notes.*[11] He felt confident in dating this to the early 17th century, but it is not in the handwriting of Sir John Wynn, which is well known from other documents. He also felt confident that MS 820D is the actual manuscript once owned by Thomas Wright, and therefore also Halliwell's source.[12] He was less certain whether it was also the exemplar for David Lloyd's version, but ultimately decided that it was. North was unable to reach a firm conclusion about authorship. He favoured Sir John Wynn, but was forced to admit that[13]

> the internal evidence that Wynn may himself have compiled the *Notes* (he did not ... actually write [MS820D]) is not altogether conclusive; it lies mainly in the spelling peculiarities...

He also considers the possibility that Syr Thomas ap Wiliem of Trefriw was responsible, noting the reference by Thomas Pennant[14] to the hillfort on Penmaenmawr

> previously described by Sir Thomas ap William, medicus, M.A but his account never appeared in print.[15]

7 This text, reproduced below, is hereafter referred to as *H.BL*

8 Thomas Wright 'Carnarvonshire Antiquities' *Arch. Camb.*Series III Vol. vii (1861) p.140 hereafter referred to as *C.A.*

9 F. J. North *The Legend of Llys Helig - A supplement to the Proceedings of the Llandudno, Colwyn Bay and District Field Club* Llandudno 1940

10 F. J. North *Sunken Cities* Cardiff 1957

11 National Library of Wales MS 820D

12 North *Sunken Cities* p.26

13 *ibid.* p.3

14 Thomas Pennant 1726-98 of Downing, Flints. British zoologist and antiquary. Author of *Journey to Snowdon* London 1781and *A Tour in Wales 1773* London 1783-4 as well as *British Zoology, History of Quadrupeds, Genera of Birds etc*

15 Pennant *Tours* p. 320

The most interesting new suggestion to have emerged since North's time is that of Prof. J. Gwynfor Jones,[16] who has proposed a fascinating scenario whereby the *Notes* were prepared for the use of none other than John Speed the cartographer, probably at the request of the famous antiquary and indefatigible copier of ancient manuscripts, John Jones of Gellilyfdy. It seems certain that such a request was made, and the correspondence exists to prove it. Whether the *Notes* were intended for Speed, and if so, whether he ever received them, is more elusive. In his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*[17] he acknowledges the help of the noted English antiquary Francis Tate. Tate was a founder member of the original Society of Antiquaries of London, as was Justice Richard Broughton, who Sir John describes in one of his characteristic riveting asides as[18]

> the chiefe antiquarye of England, a man to whome his country is most behouldinge preferringe nothinge more than the honor thereof w'ch he most carefully raketh out of the ashes of oblivion in searchinge coatinge and copyinge to his great chardge all the auncient recordes he can come by

Between 1599 and 1604 Broughton was on the North Wales circuit, and in a position to impart Welsh antiquarian lore to his friend Tate. John Jones of Gellilyfdy, also a member of the Society of Antiquaries, was certainly approached by Tate for this purpose.[19] Did Sir John become involved in Speed's enterprise through this network of antiquarians, and were the *Notes* part of his response? In the humble view of the present writer, the only opinion worthy of such a satisfying theory is that expressed by Sir Winston Churchill, writing about King Arthur:- 'It is all true, or it ought to be; and more and better besides'.

16 J.Gwynfor Jones 'Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and John Speed: aspects of antiquarian activities' *National Museum of Wales Journal* Vol. XX pp.253-264

17 ed. 1676 p. 99; the first edition appeared in 1611, others in 1614 and 1627

18 *The History of the Gwydir Family* Ed. J.Gwynfor Jones Gomer Press 1990 p.7-8

19 see Nesta Jones 'Mr. Jones and Francis Tate' *Trans. Cymmrodorion. Soc*. 1968 p. 99