

THE PLATTS OF OLDHAM

A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF A CAERNARVONSHIRE PARISH*

May 1st, 1860, was a great day in the history of Llanfairfechan. It was the day of the official opening of the Llanfairfechan Railway Station. It may seem a little surprising that so substantial a village and, as one late Victorian guide-book puts it, "so much-frequented a watering place" should have had to wait until 1860 for a railway station. The Chester and Holyhead Railway, which passed through the parish, had been built in 1848, twelve years before. The neighbouring parish of Aber had boasted a railway station since 1849; and even Penmaenmawr had been provided with a railway station long before Llanfairfechan acquired one.

The fact is that until the end of the 1850s it would probably have been an act of charity on the part of the directors of the Chester and Holyhead Railway to have built a railway station at Llanfairfechan. Llanfairfechan in the mid-1850s was small, poor and insignificant. In 1851, the population amounted to no more than 809 persons, and there was, besides, nothing in the parish which, apparently, could draw visitors. The early nineteenth century writers of tourists' guide books usually wrote at length about the mountain of Penmaenmawr and also about Aber, with its waterfalls and its historical associations with the medieval Welsh princes. But as for Llanfairfechan, they hardly ever made a mention of the place. And it must be confessed that there was nothing there to interest the visitor. The building of the turnpike road in the mid-eighteenth century had brought some life into the parish, but, on the whole, Llanfairfechan was a place through which travellers merely passed. And when, in 1848, the Chester and Holyhead Railway was built, taking almost all the traffic away from the turnpike road, Llanfairfechan became even more a place through which travellers passed without being aware that they had done so.

One grave disadvantage under which Llanfairfechan laboured at the time was the fact that no great man lived in the parish, if we except the rector. And although the rector at the time was, undoubtedly, a very great man indeed within his parish, in the eyes of the directors of the Chester and Holyhead Railway he was nobody in particular. Had there been a rich and important personage resident in the parish, the Railway Company would, probably, have considered it worth their while to erect a halt, if not a railway station, at Llanfairfechan.

As it was, the largest landed proprietor in Llanfairfechan in the early 1850s was Sir Richard Williams Bulkeley, and he lived across the Straits at Baron Hill, Beaumaris. He owned most of Llanfairfechan. The Bulkeleys had acquired land in the parish in the sixteenth century, mostly during the life-time of the famous Sir Richard

*The address given at the Annual Meeting of the Society, November 10, 1956.