

Bulkeley the Courtier, a most assiduous purchaser of land and acquirer of property. The story of how Sir Richard the Courtier managed to obtain possession of land in Llanfairfechan is in itself a fascinating chapter in the history of the parish, a chapter, moreover, which has important links with that being dealt with in this paper. In the mid-sixteenth century, the principal landowning family in Llanfairfechan was a family who later adopted the surname of Roberts. They had been in Llanfairfechan for generations. They were substantial gentry, living in the *plas* at Llanfairfechan, a house which stood where the farmhouse still known as *Plas* stands today. If it had not been for the improvidence and folly of some of its members and the ruthlessness and drive of Sir Richard Bulkeley in acquiring land, this family might have retained its position as the leading landowning family in Llanfairfechan, and might eventually have acquired almost all the land in the parish. If that had been so, the history of Llanfairfechan would have been very different. There is no time now to tell how Sir Richard Bulkeley managed gradually to buy up the land of the Roberts family, eventually forcing them to sell to him even their ancestral home, the old *plas*. Sir Richard sent his second son, Thomas, to live at the *plas* in Llanfairfechan and Thomas lived there until 1640 when, upon the death of his nephew, he succeeded to the Baron Hill estates. Thomas Bulkeley was the first and last Bulkeley to live in Llanfairfechan. Thereafter the old *plas* was occupied by succeeding tenants of the Bulkeleys and became a farmhouse. As for the Roberts family, they by no means lost all their lands in Llanfairfechan. They retained a fairly substantial amount of property on the Aber side of the Llanfairfechan river and, in the absence of the Bulkeleys, they eventually came to rank as the squires of the parish and held the office of justice of the peace. It was the Roberts family who, sometime in the latter half of the seventeenth century, built a modest mansion house at Bryn-y-Neuadd in Llanfairfechan. There, at Bryn-y-Neuadd, one Humphrey or Thomas Roberts after another lived quietly as country squires until, in 1773, the last Humphrey Roberts died. He left an only daughter, Mary, who had married in 1751 a Denbighshire squire, Robert Wynne of Plas Newydd and Garthmeilio. After her father's death, she and her husband do not appear to have lived at Bryn-y-Neuadd. The house was at some periods let to tenants. Peter Bailey Williams, in his *Tour of the County of Caernarvon*, published in 1820, refers to it as an "old neglected family seat, at one time the property of Humphrey Roberts, Esq."

The marriage of Robert Wynne to the heiress of Bryn-y-Neuadd brought bad luck to the family. Poor Mary Roberts went mad; and her son, John Wynne, in the course of pulling down the old mansion at Bryn-y-Neuadd and building a new one in its place, became entangled in serious financial difficulties. This happened about the year 1832. The Wynnes had to sell their estate in Llanfairfechan, the purchaser, it seems, being a Mr. Hughes of Bangor.

The new mansion at Bryn-y-Neuadd was left unfinished and remained empty and deserted for twenty-five years. In the mid-1850s, it is said, "its windows were full of holes and its staircases covered with sheep skins drying".

This, then, was the state of affairs in Llanfairfechan a hundred years ago, at the beginning of 1856: a small, somewhat impoverished parish, sparsely populated, with nothing but poor farmhouses and peasant cottages, a church and rectory, a small school and one deserted unfinished mansion. There were, it should be added, a Methodist chapel and, of course, two or three inns or alehouses. People living in Llanfairfechan at the beginning of 1856 probably never dreamt that soon great changes would be taking place in their parish and that the old order with which they and their forebears had been familiar for generations would be swept away. And yet, within a few years of 1856, Llanfairfechan was to be almost completely transformed. The transformation began when in August 1856 considerable portions of the Baron Hill estate were sold, amongst them lands in Llanfairfechan which the Bulkeleys had held for over two centuries and a half.

The Bulkeley sale of 1856 was an important landmark in the history of Llanfairfechan. It gave an opportunity for new developments to take place. The more enterprising and prosperous tenants bought their farms and in certain parts of the parish were soon to build boarding houses for the accommodation of well-to-do visitors from the Lancashire cotton towns, who during the summer months were already beginning to find Llanfairfechan, with its mountain scenery and walks and its sands and sea air, an agreeable place in which to stay. But the developments initiated by the local people were far outshone by those undertaken by the principal purchaser at the Llanfairfechan Bulkeley sale. He was Mr. Richard Luck, a wealthy Leicestershire solicitor. Mr. Luck had bought most of the land adjoining the old *plas* in which Thomas Bulkeley had once lived but which by that time had lost almost all traces of its former importance. This land Mr. Luck proceeded to transform into a neat little estate with carriage drives, plantations and coverts. He built a new mansion which he called Plas Llanfair to replace the old *plas*. Plas Llanfair today, by the way, is owned by St. Winifred's School. But no sooner had Mr. Luck settled in Llanfairfechan than an event occurred which brought about far greater changes. This event was the advent into the parish of John Platt of Oldham.

The Platts of Oldham were a most remarkable family. Within a short space of time they rose from practically nothing to a position of great opulence and power. Their story is a saga characteristic of the Industrial Revolution in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Platts originally came from Dobcross, Saddleworth, Yorkshire. It was there that John Platt was born in the year 1817. His father, Henry Platt, earned his living by making