

# A1 Life in Stuart Times

## Monmouthshire and the Wider World in the late 1500s early 1600s<sup>1</sup>

In the 1580s, when the Croft barn was erected, Queen Elizabeth I (1558 – 1603) had been on the throne of England for over 20 years and the Church of England (which covered Wales) was Established and using services from the Book of Common Prayer. In 1577, a recusant, George Catesby of the Lower Dyffrin, Grosmont, was charged in court with 'not coming to church and for having an altar erected in his wood' where a well-known local Roman Catholic priest, Roger Johns, celebrated mass.<sup>2</sup> Another example of not accepting Protestantism was the seizure of a clandestine Roman Catholic printing press in north Wales in 1587, the press was used to print Y Drych Cristianogawl (The Christian Mirror) the first book published in Welsh. A year later, Bishop William Morgan produced the Bible translated into Welsh Y Bibl Cyssegr-Ian, though copies would not circulate for many years.

This was the age of the discovery of other lands: Francis Drake circumnavigated the world (1577-1580) and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in April 1581 for this achievement; Martin Frobisher explored the Arctic and landed on Baffin Island (1577); Sir Walter Raleigh laid claim to Virginia (1584). Nearer to home, the County of Monmouthshire had been established in 1536 by the first 'Act of Union', which introduced early notions of public services and a system of royal taxation so that all those owning land were uniformly subject to taxation, though this took some years to implement. The Act confirmed the right of the Marcher Lords to continue to hold courts baron and other local courts with limited powers.

There was no national police force or standing army. Some of the aristocracy could summon their own men to deal with riot or affray. The first parliamentary elections for the new county of Monmouthshire took place in 1542, the first time that Welsh people were represented in the House of Commons.

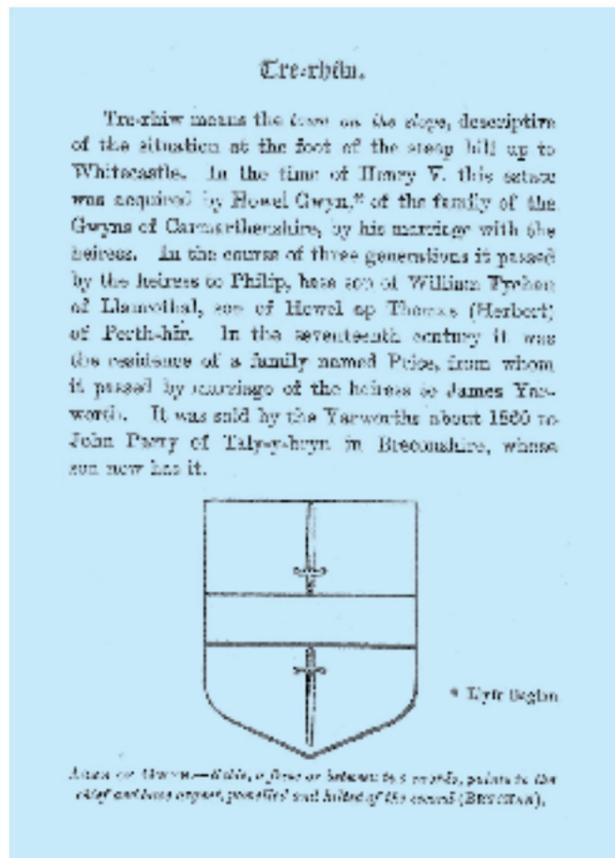


**Using a flail. A tool to beat grain and separate the grain from the chaff**

1. The Gwent County History Vol.3 The Making of Monmouthshire 1536-1780 Eds. Madeleine Gray and Prys Morgan

2. Phillip Morgan 2008 A Grosmont Miscellany p.10

Political, social and economic power was in the hands of a small elite such as Sir William Herbert of St. Julians, Newport, who lived in comfort on the income from his substantial estates. The only resident Monmouthshire family of the aristocracy were the Somersets of Raglan Castle, who at times, held land in the lordship of the Three Castles (White Castle, Skenfrith and Grosmont.) The proximity of White Castle to the Croft Barn and the Great Trethew estate must have had a powerful influence on local lives. Henry of Grosmont, first Duke of Lancaster, was granted the Lordship in 1351; the Duchy retained the Lordship of the Three Castles until the 1800s and our present Queen is, still, the Duke of Lancaster. Minor branches of the Herbert and Morgan families and a handful of other families, would normally be styled 'esquire'. It was reported that there were twenty gentlemen resident in Monmouthshire at the close of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Below these, the middling gentry would be plain 'gent' and local office holders such as justices of the peace and parish officials such as churchwarden and overseer of the poor could also be styled 'gent'.



The Arms of Gwyn  
Great Tre-rhiw



Hay Rake



Stubble Rake

## The Right to Bear Arms

The right to bear arms was very important and the majority of the Monmouthshire gentry were from old *uchelwyr* [free landholders] families, who could trace their ancestry back generations. In the social order, **yeoman** were of similar status to gentlemen. Below these were **husbandmen** who farmed small-holdings which produced enough for their family's needs, using family labour. **Labourers** were men without land who worked for day wages. Their lives were hard, lived according to local custom. Hours of work, laid down by statute in 1563, were from 5 am until 7 or 8 pm in the summer and from dawn to dusk in the winter with two and a half hours allowed for meals. Wages were low, 6 or 7 pence per day; jobs were seasonal: mole-catching and hurdle-making were common occupations when there was no work in the fields. Servants also worked long hours regulated by statute, but could go up in the world with a generous employer. The lowest class of **paupers** were those without any means of support who depended on charity<sup>4</sup> or thieved to survive.



Map showing the location  
of Great Trethew and  
surrounding areas

3. Ibid. p.21

4. Ibid. Judith Jones pp 178-9



Clothes worn by Charles William and his wife Joan Baker in the 1600's

Land was inherited, acquired through purchase, and by acquisitions through debts and mortgages. Substantial wealth and property was also acquired by marriages between the gentry and aristocracy; most daughters of these families received a dowry when they married, which could be of land and estates. Betrothals could be enacted between children as young as ten and betrothed boys could be sent to live with their future wife's family so they grew up together. Indeed, it was common for children to live with relatives either as proxy sons and daughters or as servants.

Homes and furnishings in the late sixteenth century for the lower orders were simple and basic. The main room (or only room) was the hall, with its flagstones or beaten earth floor, and was where the family lived. Cooking, eating, spinning and rush-light-making all took place in the hall.

There could be a small area with a couple of chaff beds with rough sheets and a few blankets, a table-board and stools, a coffer or chest for storage and iron pots and cooking utensils. Clothes were made from plain woollen cloth and under-garments from undyed linen or cotton. Clean linen was a sign of respectability, so it would be laundered as often as possible and bleached in the sun, or in a solution consisting largely of urine, a ready source of ammonia. A travelling pedlar carried needles, thread, tapes and buttons. Shoemakers and glove-makers supplied shoes and gloves.

### Resources:

Clothes of Charles William and his wife Joan Baker, Steward of the Duchy of Lancaster and Mayor of Grosmont, copied from examples on their tomb stone in Grosmont Church.

Typical clothes of a farmer, William Phillips, shown on the AR (Augmented Reality).

Typical clothes of a labourer shown with tools.

Visit: Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nelson, Treharris for experience of 1600s manor house and its people.