

Notes from Local Interest Group 27th October 2022

Apologies:- Dainis & Wendy Ozols, Joan Lloyd, Ann & Howard Dean

Present: Mo Lloyd (ML), John Price, Allan Lloyd (AL), Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Celia Jones, Jackie Mills, Joan Hughes, Gina Goodge, Helen Barnett, Sue Lawler, Malc Gonnella, Jane Lloyd, Allison Joyce, Gaynor Price, Helen Duggan, Cherry & Victor Williams, Dawn Richards, Ann Jones, David & Anwyn Price, Roy Lloyd, Tim Francis

On Zoom: Sylvia Illingsworth, Jane Nicholls, Gareth Jones, Janet Russell, Marilyn Price, Vicky Lykke-Dahn, Grace Davies, John Lewis.

ML welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the speaker, Mr Allan Lloyd from Kington, who was going to speak on Hergest Court and its residents.

AL began by saying that the most important family was the Vaughan family, however Hergest Court was only one of 14 houses belonging to the Vaughan family in the middle ages, in central Wales and the Welsh Marches, each independent, and all jealous of each other, so tracing the Vaughan family is not an easy task. Lewis Vaughan in the early 1500s was described as being of Llanbedr, Painscastle and Rhulen. However, whether his father Watkyn was a brother of the first Vaughan at Hergest, Thomas, or whether he was a son of Thomas, AL was not sure, and he was probably illegitimate.



Hergest Court,
as it is today

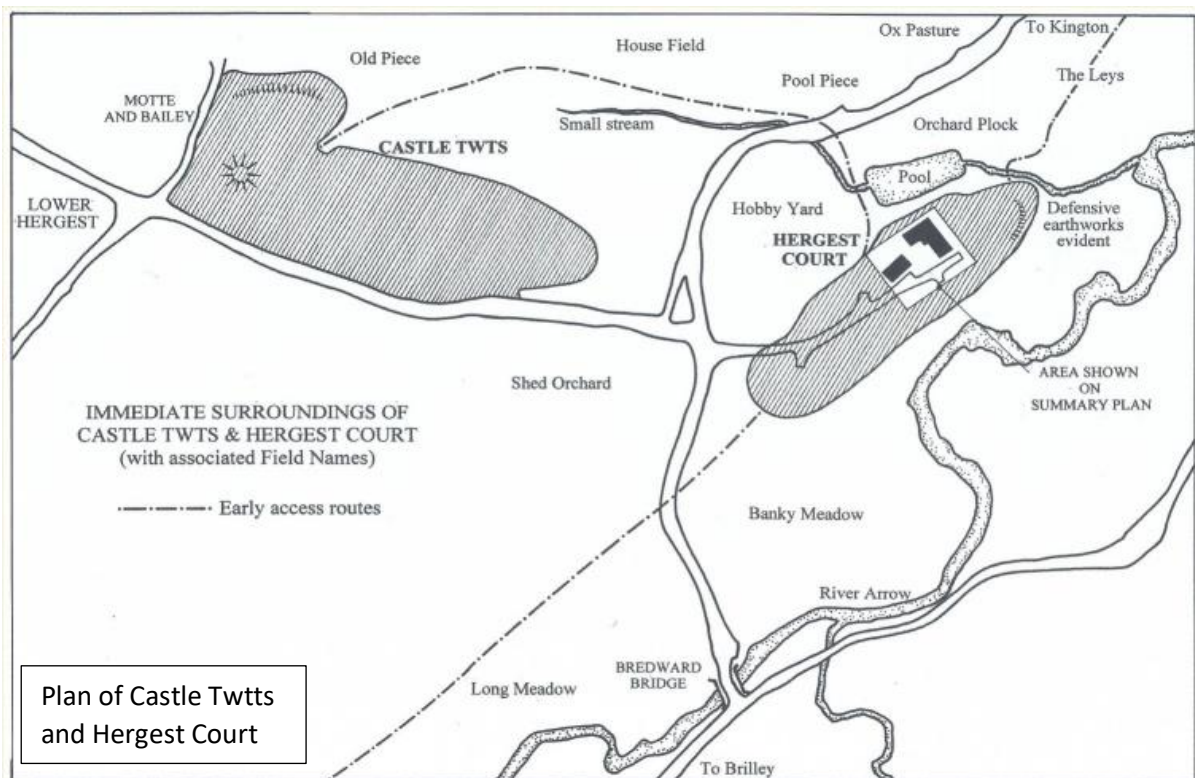
AL began with a photograph of Hergest Court, some of which is a “black and white building”, and explained that, although this type of building is associated with antiquity, in this case this part of Hergest Court is not the oldest. In fact, except for the infill, the black and white section is the most recent. However, that building of about 1550 and the work of Charles Vaughan, the fourth generation of the Vaughans and the father of Margaret Vaughan who became Lady Margaret Hawkins, is situated on top of the oldest part that now exists, a stone cellar of 1267. On top of the cellar was a solar and the private quarters of the elite, and just to the south and adjoining it, was the actual aisled hall. That was a wooden building of which nothing remains. It had a very steep roof almost reaching to the ground, and was supported by two rows of pillars so that we have a central area or hall where everything took place, but there were cubicles on either side in the aisles. Some of the timbers were cut down in 1267 and were re-used in the roof of the first solid building on that site.

The earliest reference for Hergest Court is 1251 when there is an inquisition (when someone dies) which records Hergest Court. The next building on the site was a replacement solar building which

faces south; built in 1320, this was still before the Vaughans came to Hergest. The next building on the site was the East Wing and this was built by the Vaughans; they came to Hergest Court in 1422. AL went on to explain that, as an appendix to his book on the history of Lady Hawkins' School, there are about 20 pages devoted to the various members of the Vaughan family. On page 150 in that book, there is a quote from Lewis Glyn Kothi, the most famous bard of the 15th century. He was a frequent visitor to Hergest Court as his patron was Thomas Vaughan, the first of the Vaughans. "Prosperity without one hour of exception, be to the land and houses of Herast; timber banded houses in stone towers, land with 8 towers to give wine, compact houses of Thomas ap Rosser" (Thomas Vaughan, son of Roger). Of the eight houses, the aisled hall was one, the solar was another, and the east wing yet another, but there were five others so this was large and impressive property.

In 1863 when the Cambrian Archeological Society visited they recorded a building behind the solar, bigger and taller than anything on the site. There is nothing there now - it is covered by an agricultural building. Much was destroyed in the 1800s and the stone was used for farm buildings. AL showed a plan of the area which illustrated how the present site is small compared with its area in medieval times.

Hergest Court is about a mile from Kington, set on a natural mound which is a terminal glacial moraine, and it sits in the waist of the valley, which is quite narrow at this point. It broadens out to Kington and also to the south west towards Brilley. There were two pools on the northern side of the site, while to the south it slopes sharply down to the River Arrow. So, this was a good defensive site, as well as being in a position to control movements into and out of Wales. The old route is through the site and is still traceable in the meadows on either side. It was west of Offa's Dyke and was a Welsh court, being Welsh up until the 1800s, although the families sided with the English.



The precursor of Hergest Court is Castle Twtts, a short distance to the east north east. This was the defensive structure prior to 1267; the motte and the first of the three baileys were built in 1078, incredibly early. The land was owned by Bernard de Newmarche and he did not build his castle in

Brecon until 1092. Castle Twtts was occupied for about 170 years. Today the site looks as if the hedge line coincides with the position of the palisade when it was occupied in the 12th century. The road alongside the site is quite sunken and could well be the fosse or dry ditch, part of the defences of the castle. The original entrance was from the north.



Hergest Court – The Solar

Hywel ap Meurig, who was from Gladestry, possibly the illegitimate son of Rhys Grug the most active son of Rhys ap Gruffudd of Gwynedd, was the last controller of Castle Twtts and the first of Hergest Court. He married Matilda, daughter of John ap Thomas Clanvowe, and fought repeatedly against Llewelyn ap Gruffudd. In 1276 he took up arms against Llewelyn with 2700 men from the Middle March. Llewelyn captured him in 1266 and put him in prison in New Radnor castle, but he was soon released. Hywel ap Meurig supported Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, and Roger Mortimer. Edward I awarded him the title of Justiciar of Wales. He was very ambitious, his wife, Matilda came from Llanfawr, northwest of Bala, and his son Philip took on the name Clanvowe to be more English, and more politically acceptable. He made the aisled hall quite important because in 1290 he had staying there Richard Swinfield, the Bishop of Hereford. Philip's younger brother, Rhys, was vicar of Kington from 1278 to 1313; the family were quite noticed. It was Philip Clanvowe who built the replacement solar. This may not look that much to us today, but it is the most significant piece of domestic architecture in the Welsh Marches. Although it has a new roof, when used for agricultural purposes, all the apertures on the first floor are original 1320. The actual doorway here is original, 7ft 5 inches in height. All of this was stable; animals occupied the ground floor, which sent heat up to the solar on the first floor, and there was a huge fireplace, 10ft wide, and the windows were glazed, showing how wealthy this family was. Before the Vaughans, the original entrance was by wooden steps into the first floor doorway. The small window to the right was thought by Richard Parry, in his "History of Kington", 1846, to be a chapel. But the Clanvowes were Lollards, the sons and grandsons

of Philip were supporters of Sir John Oldcastle who died in 1417. In fact, the Clanvowes wrote the Lollard thesis, "The Two Ways", so this was not the chapel, it was where the ladies spent their day. This is probably where Philip's children were born. The stone for the building came from a local quarry towards Kington, in the immediate area of the Murder Bridge over the River Arrow. The two grandchildren of Philip Clanvowe were John and Thomas Clanvowe. Thomas, the younger son, died in 1422. He was quite important; he was member of parliament and sheriff for Herefordshire and he was captured by Owain Glyndwr at Pilleth in 1402, but he survived. Sir John Clanvowe, born at Hergest, probably spoke Welsh to his supporters. He was a crusading knight, and a member of the court of Edward III; he was also one of the elite chamber knights of Richard II. He was a contemporary and a friend of Geoffrey Chaucer, and some of the early works attributed to Geoffrey Chaucer have now been accredited to Sir John Clanvowe, for example "The Book of Cupid God of Love" transcribed by Wordsworth in 1801 and called "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale"; original documents have now been found with Sir John Clanvowe's signature on them. There are other works and this was the centre of medieval literature. This was a highly influential family, but both John and Thomas died without issue and Hergest Court passed to the Vaughans in 1422. Thomas Vaughan was the constable at Huntington Castle and was a cousin with a common ancestor of Rhys Grug. The coat of arms of the first Vaughans was quartered and one of those quarters was that of the Clanvowes.

So there we have the first line of the family connections with Hergest Court. The father of all the Vaughans was Moreiddig Warwyn, ancestor for all the 14 houses. He was the son of Drumbenog, Lord of Brycheiniog, King of the Mountain Tops, and Gwennlian, living at the crannog on Llangorse lake. He was the second son and became known as Moreiddig (Mighty Jealous One). He was married to Eleanor, not too successful a union but they did have offspring. His name is significant because it led to the Vaughan coat of arms. Warwyn or Gwar Gwyn means white neck and the arms were three boys' heads each having a serpent around their neck. AL related some folktales which could have aided the development of the coat of arms. Sir Roger Vaughan was the father of the Kington Vaughans; there is an effigy of Sir Roger in St Andrews church in Bredwardine. The Vaughans had a castle there on the banks of the River Wye, which was hit hard by Owain Glyndwr, as was the church. Sir Roger Vaughan was knighted on the field of the battle at Agincourt in 1415, when he, together with his father in law, David Gam, and Watkin Lloyd, died defending Henry V, and around his collar are the letters SS (Self sacrifice). He was a Lancastrian and he had three sons: Watkin, the eldest, went to Porthamal; the middle one was Thomas who came to Kington; and, the younger one Roger went to Tretower Court.



Effigies of Thomas (Black) Vaughan and his wife Ellen in Kington Church

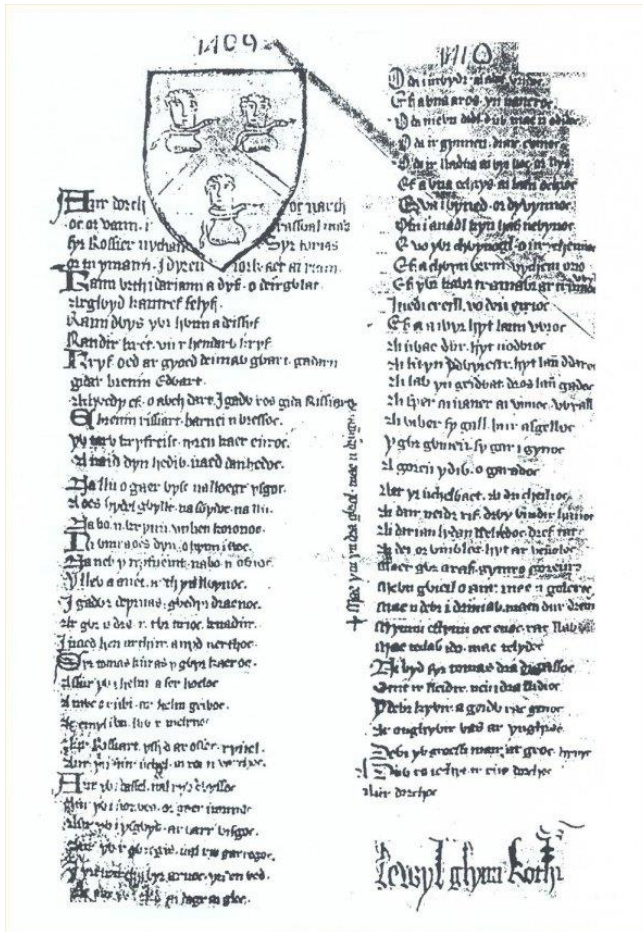
In Kington church there are figures of Thomas, the first of the Vaughans, and his wife Ellen, daughter of Vaughan of Tyle Glas near Talgarth. She was nicknamed Ellen Gethin (Ellen the Terrible). AL liked this character, and he said that she had a suitable coat of arms, a medley of lions and red boars with tongues and tusks of gold. Her mother died when her younger brother David was born, and Ellen looked after him. When he got of age, their uncle, Sion Hir (Long John) ap Phillip Fychan, murdered David so that he could take the estate. In vengeance, Ellen dressed up in archer's uniform, went to Llanddewi Ystradenny to an archery tournament and, taking aim at the target, moved slightly and pierced the heart of Sion Hir ap Phillip Fychan; in the ensuing chaos she escaped.

Thomas was known as Black Vaughan, probably because of his black hair. He died at the Battle of Banbury on 26th July 1469, fighting for the Yorkists. He was captured, put in prison at Northampton and he and others were executed. Only the body was returned to Kington where he was buried in the church and this led to superstitions about the spirit of Black Vaughan. Anything that happened was blamed on the spirit of Black Vaughan. So they exorcised the spirit with bell, book and candle, the bell to summon the spirit to the church, the book was the bible, so that the more that was read the smaller the spirit would become, and the candle was the light of God. The spirit was put into a candle snuff box and secured. It was then placed under a stone in the pool and even today there are some remaining superstitions based on Black Vaughan. There was also his dog, probably a black Irish Wolfhound, "a foul thing, a great big beast" (Arthur Conan Doyle's words in the Hound of the Baskervilles). I think this is the one that Arthur Conan Doyle wrote about. He visited Hergest Court and he was related to the Baskerville Mynors of Dunfield House, and it is said he wrote part of the story "The Hound of the Baskervilles" there. AL said John Price had just told him that Arthur Conan Doyle had sold farmland, including Upper Bettws, the property of his late wife, to one of the Baskerville family. There were family links between the Vaughans and the Baskervilles.



The East wing of
Hergest Court

The East wing of Hergest Court was built in the 1400s; the Vaughans came to Hergest in 1422. This is their legacy, with the original huge chimney and on the inside a huge fireplace. There were stone steps on the left hand side up to the first floor which have now gone. The ground floor was for cooking and the servants. The first floor was the chamber and also a library of 362 folios or parchments of calfskin, written by hand in three different hands - on both sides, divided into columns and the last hand writing was that of Lewys Glyn Kothi. He was there for decades travelling back and forth. He lived near Carmarthen in the Cothi valley, and was the 15th century bard of supreme output. There are still 230 poems of his in existence from the middle of the 1400s. 'He signed his name with a K for political reasons. These folios were put together and bound in Moroccan red leather. This is now known as the Red Book of Hergest. And is one of four ancient books of Wales still in existence. The folios were started by the Cistercian monks from Margam Abbey, and they may have been written for and at the request of Hywel Fychan ap Hywel Goch of Builth. We know these folios were at Tretower Court, and we know they were transferred from Tretower in 1465, in the time of Thomas 'Black' Vaughan. It was one of the ancient books of Wales, possibly the most important, and it includes all eleven of the legends and myths of ancient Wales, including possibly the earliest attributed to Gwenllian the Welsh equivalent of Boadicea, who was killed in battle in 1136. It contains the only elegy to Llewelyn ap Grufudd, the last native Welsh Prince of Wales. It also includes many of the remedies of the physicians of Myddfai. There was also a White Book of Hergest, written by Lewis Glyn Kothi. We do not know what was in it because Roche Vaughan, the last of the female Vaughans, in 1808, sent it to Covent Garden to be re-bound, but it was destroyed in the Covent Garden fire of that year. Sylvanus Vaughan was the last of the male Vaughans, and he had died a century earlier in 1706. Roche married the Hon & Rev John Harley, Bishop of Hereford, and her granddaughter was Lady Langdale and she was at Hergest Court in 1874. It then lay derelict and much of it was taken down. In 1912 the Banks family of Kington took it over and Richard Banks is there today. He opens the house to visitors with Allan Lloyd as the guide, and the money goes to charity.



The Red Book of Hergest

All the photographs and illustrations kindly supplied by Allen Lloyd

One of the questions asked was about the relationship of The Mabinogian to the Red Book. The Mabinogian is a copy of the eleven myths and legends from the Red Book, Lady Charlotte Guest worked on its translation between 1835 and 1845.

ML then thanked Allan Lloyd for an absorbing talk on one of the most important medieval houses of Wales and the families that played such a significant role in Radnorshire history. She thanked John Price for his technical expertise in facilitating another hybrid meeting so enabling digital access along with the hall audience. Tea, coffee and biscuits was then served.

Next month, Thursday November 24th, Rev Janet Russell will give a talk on the history and restoration of Rhosgoch Mill.