

From **A Topographical Dictionary Of Wales (First Edition) by Lewis Samuel, 1833**

MACHYNLLETH (**MACHYNLLAETH**), a market town, borough, and parish, comprising the townships of Machynlleth, otherwise Y Dre, Is y Garreg, and Uwch y Garreg, each of which separately maintains its own poor, in the lower division of the hundred of Machynlleth, county of Montgomery, North Wales, containing 2381 inhabitants, of which number, 1657 are in the township of Machynlleth, or Y Dre. 39 miles (W. by N.) from Montgomery, and 209 (W. N. W.) from London. This place, which is of considerable antiquity, is supposed to have been the site of the Maglona of the Itineraries, a Roman station where, in the reign of the Emperor Honorius, the captain of the "Numerus Solensium" was stationed, under the Dux Britanniarum, to keep the mountaineers in subjection. Connected with the principal station, which occupied the highest part of the hill, was an outwork called Cevn Caer, or "the ridge of the city", about four miles from the present town, in the adjoining parish of Pennal, in the county of Merioneth, of which there were formerly some remains, and at which place several Roman coins have been at various times discovered.

From the departure of the Romans till the time of Henry IV, few circumstances of historical importance connected with this place are recorded. In 1402, Owain Glyndwr, flushed with repeated successes, assembled the estates of the principality in this town, where he held a parliament, which solemnly acknowledged his title to the sovereignty of Wales, of which kingdom he caused himself to be formally invested with the crown. At this parliament Davydd Gam, who had married the sister of Owain Glyndwr, but was, notwithstanding, a zealous partisan and adherent of Henry IV., attended, apparently for the purpose of promoting Owain's pretensions to the crown, but with the disguised intention of assassinating that chieftain. In this attempt, however, he was happily frustrated by a timely discovery of his treachery, and, being seized and imprisoned, would have been instantly executed but for the intercession of Owain's most zealous friends and partisans. In resentment for his treachery, Owain burnt his house and laid waste his lands, and detained him in confinement at Machynlleth till the year 1412, when he was finally ransomed by his father and other vassals of the English crown.

Charles I, on his route to Chester, had a bed prepared for him in a house in this town, called "the Garrison"; the bed and furniture, which have been carefully preserved, are now deposited at Esgair Llyveren, in the county of Merioneth.

The town is situated near the western extremity of the county, about a quarter of a mile from the southern bank of the river Dovey, and on the turnpike road leading to Aberystwith from the principal parts of North Wales and also from Shrewsbury. It is romantically embosomed in mountains which encompass it on every side, and from which a beautiful view is obtained of the vale of the Dovey, abounding in highly picturesque and richly diversified scenery, with the winding course of the river, from above the parish of Cemmes to its influx into the bay of Cardigan. The streets are wide and spacious; the houses are in general neat and well built; and the whole town, which is amply supplied with water, has a regular and prepossessing appearance. A book society has been established, which is much patronized; and a news-room has been opened, which is well attended and respectably supported. The environs are pleasant, comprehending much beautiful scenery and many interesting objects. At Uwch y Garreg, a township in the parish, is Pistyll Rhaiadr, one of the finest waterfalls in the principality; though inferior to some in the beauty of the scenery immediately adjoining, it is not surpassed in romantic grandeur by any.

The manufacture of flannels, principally of the coarser kind, is carried on to a considerable extent, and some webs are also made in the town and neighbourhood. In this manufacture more than forty carding- engines and seven fulling-mills are employed in the town and its vicinity. The weaving is done by the workmen at their own dwellings, and about two hundred pieces, averaging about one hundred and fifty yards each, are sent to the market at Welshpool, which is held every alternate Thursday.

Lead-ore is found in the parish, and mines of that metal have been opened in the township of Is y Garreg ; but they are not at present in operation : there are quarries of good slate, of which some are worked upon a moderate scale. The river Dovey is navigable to Derwenlas, within two miles of the town, and affords a facility of conveying the produce of the quarries and mines to their destination, and of supplying the neighbourhood with various commodities.

The average annual exports from this place are five hundred tons of bark, forty thousand feet of oak timber, one hundred and fifty thousand yards of oak poles for collieries, one hundred tons of lead-ore, and one thousand five hundred tons of slate. The average annual imports are, five thousand quarters of rye and wheat, one thousand tons of coal, five hundred tons of culm, two thousand tons of lime-stone, eleven thousand English and foreign hides, and groceries and other shop goods to the amount of £14,000 in value.

The market is on Wednesday, and fairs are held annually on the first Wednesday in March, May 16th, June 26th, July 9th, August 7th, September 18th, October 10th, and November 26th, for cattle, horses, and wares : a statute fair is also held on the Wednesday before Easter.

This place was one of the contributory boroughs, which, together with Llanidloes, Welshpool, and Llanvyllin, returned a member for Montgomery : the elective franchise was originally granted in the 27th of Henry VIII., and was exercised without interruption till the year 1728, when, by a vote of the House of Commons, it was disfranchised, and the right of election was restricted to Montgomery alone. But this resolution being at variance with a previous vote of that house in 1680, which confirmed the right of election, the burgesses had, by a statute of the 28th of George III., the privilege of asserting their right to vote for a member for Montgomery before any future committee of the house, and of appealing against any subsequent decision within twelve calendar months. By the late act for amending the representation of the people, this town has again been declared one of the contributory boroughs within the county, which return one member to parliament: the right of election is vested in every male person of full age occupying, either as owner or as tenant under the same landlord, a house or other premises of the annual value of at least ten pounds, provided he be capable of registering as the act demands : the number of tenements of this value within the limits of the borough, which are minutely detailed in the Appendix to this work, is between seventy and eighty. It has also been made one of the polling-places in the election of a knight for the shire.

The town-hall, or market- house, a plain and commodious building, was erected in 1783, by Sir W. W. Wynn, Bart., father of the present owner of Wynnstay, who is lord of the manor, and holds courts leet twice in the year. The county court is held alternately here and at Montgomery; and the petty sessions for the hundred are held here occasionally.

The parish comprises an extensive tract of mountainous country, computed at five thousand acres, the greater portion of which is unenclosed and uncultivated, affording only pasturage to numerous flocks of sheep, that feed on the declivities of the hills : the lower grounds are fertile and productive, and peat, which constitutes the principal fuel of the inhabitants, is found in various parts of the parish. The living consists of a rectory and a vicarage, which were united under the provisions of an act of the 29th and 30th of Charles II. ; the rectory, which was a sinecure, is rated in the king's books at £11. 10. 7, and the vicarage at £ 6. 6. 0 ; it is locally in the archdeaconry, and in the diocese, of St. Asaph, and in the patronage of the Bishop. The church, dedicated to St. Peter, is a handsome structure, in style resembling that of the later English architecture, rebuilt, with the exception of the tower, in 1827, and containing eight hundred and seventy-three sittings, of which three hundred are free, in consideration of a grant of £ 300 from the Incorporated Society for the building and enlargement of churches and chapels : the interior is well arranged and neatly fitted up, and the ancient tower has been raised a few feet higher, and crowned with battlements and crocketed angular pinnacles. There are places of worship for Independents and Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists.

National schools were established here in 1829, by John Jones, Esq., a native of this town, who gave in that year £1000 three per cent, consols, for their endowment, which sum has been augmented by a prior bequest of £200 by John Owen, Esq., for teaching children, and by a legacy of £34 from Mr. Humphrey Morris, for the same purpose. Commodious buildings were erected at the same time by subscription, occupying three sides of a quadrangle, with a projection in the centre. In these schools, which are supported partly by the above endowments and partly by subscription, ninety boys and forty girls at present receive gratuitous instruction. There are Sunday schools also in connexion with the several dissenting congregations, in which about four hundred children are gratuitously taught.

Isaac Pughe and Humphrey Morris gave each two small houses to the poor ; Lewis Humphrey and Humphrey Morris bequeathed each £20 for apprenticing poor children ; and an unknown benefactor gave £10 for the same purpose. Thomas Pugh bequeathed £ 60, Rowland Owen gave £40, and Gwen Owen and John Davies £20 each, the produce of which several benefactions is annually distributed among the poor.

On a hill immediately above Penyrallt House are the remains of an ancient fortification of great strength, within sight of Cevn Caer, and commanding all the passes in this part of the country. Part of the senate house, in which Owain Glyndwr assembled his parliament is still remaining: it was built with the slate stone of the country, and, from the appearance of the spacious entrance, which is still in good preservation, seems to have been an edifice of no mean extent. The old building called "the Garrison" is situated near the Wynnstay Arms, and it is supposed that there was formerly a subterraneous passage leading from this place to the fortification at Cevn Caer, in the adjoining parish of Pennal. Adjacent to the town is a field called the "Garshion", at the extremity of which is a copious spring, from which the town is supplied with water.

Dol Guog, near this town, was for some time the retreat of the celebrated Llywarch Hen, an eminent bard who flourished towards the close of the sixth, and at the commencement of the seventh, centuries: he was chieftain of a part of Cumbria, or Cumberland, but having survived twenty-four of his sons, who fell in fighting the battles of their country against the Saxons, and falling into poverty in his old age, he retired, under the protection of Cynddylan, Prince of part of Powys, to this place, where he devoted himself to the pursuits of poetry. He died at the advanced age of one hundred and five years, and was buried at Llanvawr, near Bala. Many of his compositions while in retirement at this place have been published in the *Welsh Archaeologia*, and in a separate volume by Dr. Pughe. Howel Swrdwal, a Welsh bard, was minister of this parish about the middle of the fifteenth century; as was also, for many years, Ievan Llawdden, an eminent poet of the Vale of Loughor, who flourished from 1430 to 1470. Dr. Davies, head master of the grammar school at Macclesfield, was a native of this town.

The average annual expenditure for the maintenance of the poor amounts to £995, of which sum, £505.10. is assessed on the township of Machynlleth.

From a visit in 1796:

‘We are now enjoying ourselves at the Three Eagles in Machynlleth, feasting on salmon trout, which we would in part give up for the prospect of a clean bed and sheets. However, those who cannot accommodate their ideas to inconvenience, must never take a Welsh Tour, which would be an Elysium of delight, if we did not sometimes mix a little of the bitter with the sweet.’

(Lady Sykes, University of Hull, DDSY(3)/10/11, p. 212)