

**THE DIARY OF BULKELEY OF DRONWY, ANGLESEY,
1630-1636.**

Introduction

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Of the various kinds of documents on which the historian relies for his raw material, one of the most important consists of private diaries. They are ex hypothesi contemporary, they embody what the diarist saw or heard or did, and they commonly contain much confidential knowledge which he did not care to publish; they are, therefore, often of greater value than any public sources of information.

Very little reliable information regarding the social life of the seventeenth century in Anglesey has been hitherto available, with the possible exception of an article on "Anglesey in the seventeenth century" (1) the author of which is not known.

The catalogues of the Peniarth, Mostyn, Llanstephan, Panton, Cwrtmawr and the National Library of Wales MSS. have been examined for the works of those poets such as Huw Machno, Sion Phylip, Sion Cain, Watkin Clywedog, Rhisiart Cynwal, Robert Dyfi, etc., who flourished during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The " cywyddau " by these poets are, however, of a very stereotyped nature, consisting entirely of elegies to, eulogies of, or soliciting poems addressed to, members of noble families, including a number of Anglesey families. However, among them, no single poem has been found purporting to depict social life in Anglesey during the early seventeenth century. (2)

For that reason we welcome this Anglesey Diary which was recently acquired by the National Library of Wales. It is incomplete as the earlier and later portions are missing, but the part now in the possession of the National Library of Wales consists of 142 pages, closely written in an abbreviated hand, with two columns on either side of the daily entries. In the left hand column is entered the date of each entry. Occasional dates appear in the right hand column but they are merely cross-references; there is generally some connection between the entry in question and the entry which is opposite the date to which cross-reference is made. (These cross-references have been inserted by me within square brackets after the entry for the day opposite to which they appear in the MS., the dates in the left hand column of the Diary are printed in heavy type.)

The Diary was written by a gentleman farmer of somewhat good position who has given a careful account of himself and his work, of his neighbours and their customs from November, 1630, to May, 1636, but there is a blank from March 25 to April 12, 1633. The daily entries are detailed and very interesting, giving information relating to the weather, farming matters, daily events in the life of the writer, amounts spent by him, etc. The writer expresses his sentiments frankly but briefly: he confesses his errors and frequently promises to reform. Its language is almost entirely English, but Welsh is generally used to describe ordinary farm labour and Latin in connection with dinners and religious services.

It is clear that the Diarist was a Bulkeley and lived at Dronwy, Llanfachraeth: his wife was named Besse and he had several children—Cadws, Dicky, Theophilus, Begws, Phoebe, Mary and Jane. The numerous references to his various relatives incline me to think that the Diarist was Robert Bulkeley, M.A., who married Elizabeth, daughter of Rhys ap Hugh of Tan yr Allt, Llanfachraeth, Anglesey. (3)

Apparently he was an "obliging" husband for he "rid to shop to buy Besse a hat" (6/8/31) : she bought him "a paer of gloves at ye fayre" (24/3/32). An amusing incident mentioned by him is the following : "Besse tooke 5d. out of my pocket" (22/1/34), but it took him over twelve months before he had his revenge : "I tooke secretly xijd out of Besse cubbord" (22/2/35).

Evidently, Bulkeley was particular with regard to his personal appearance, for he was regularly "trimd" or "barbed" three or four times a year, the payment being 2d. on each occasion. His tailor was a Richard William, who made him "a hose & Jerkin" (16/10/32): nearly two years later (21/7/34) he had "a hose Jerkin & doublet," and very soon afterwards "a coate, a hose & Jerkin, &c." (26/11/34).

Robert Bulkeley appears to have enjoyed very good health, but in April of 1631 he complained that he was "sicke of an ague." About twelve months later he was troubled with "toothach." To cure himself of this painful ache, he gave "a vagabond a peny wch vnderooke to heale ye tooth ach." (19/5/32). Apparently, the vagabond left the toothache behind him, for on the following day we read that he "sent 2d to shop for vineger" and later thought of driving away "ye toothach* with tobacco." Not until the Easter of 1634 was he again ill and then only for four days.

His son Dicky was taken to "a school (28/6/31) kept by a Mr Gray, who was paid 2/- per quarter for the boy's education (12/8/31.) Dicky's *sententiae* cost' 3d' (9/10/31). Apparently, another teacher—Mr. Humphrey—was found for Dicky, whose education now cost 2/6 a

quarter (12/3/33.) A few months later, Dicky's brother was also sent to Mr. Humphrey (26/9/33) but after two more quarters, the younger brother appears to have been withdrawn from school.

On Saturday Oct. 20, 1632, he chronicles a most important event. " My daughter phoebe was christned, mrs Owen & sorr Jane Bui: & vnckle Hugh parry goships [god parents]: she was borne on thursday before aboute sunset, being st Lukes day,, the moone in taurus." The last phrase is interesting ; when was the belief in astrology given up in Anglesey ? are there any traces of it still left in our social history ?

Two years later a serious accident befell Theophilus:—a son. of the Diarist, for it is stated :

" about sunset the stacke of turves fell upon Theophilus & broke his thigh (god blesse all) "(26/11/34). On the following morning two men—" Jon Pue & moris lloyd closed vp his thigh." Twentyfive days later the same two bone-setters "dressed Theo: his thigh."- A month afterwards Morris Lloyd was paid 2/- " for setting son Theo: bone." Poor Theophilus !

In his religious views he was not disturbed by any religious commotion in North Wales at this time. He had settled down to the new order in the church, and was what one would consider at that time a regular attendant at the services of the church, particularly on Sundays following a serious drunken bout on the day before. One unusual entry in the Diary is this :

" began to read ye holy Bible (Deo ppitio) "(9/7/32).

Why did he only begin then ?(4)

The most serious and common evil of the period throughout the country—England and Wrales—was drunkenness, as is shown by the multiplicity of the " tipplings " and the alehouses.

Frequently, famine was felt in the Island because too much barley had been used in the brewing trade. The natural result was. the prevalent drunkenness of the peasant and clergy, of which there is abundant evidence in the Diary. The open frankness of the numerous confessions of the Diarist's overindulgence is very refreshing. Here are a few instances :

" dranke all night & most of this {next} day: . . .home by sunset."—(2/6/31).

" we went to Croesbeyno, we dranke there a great deale, . . . god help vs."—(4/6/33).

" I went to tho: lewis & dranke a quart aqua vita cost 12d & a quart beere 2d—(16/6/33).

" agreed to goe a waselinge to Jon tho: soe in the eue: we went, when it was day (we) lighted at Rees ap Jo: I owe there 77d in all. J pay for all the wasel, home about 8 aclock (next morning—Sunday.)—(7/2/34-5).

" goe a wasellinge to monachdu, J pd towards the wasell 2s 6d—(8/2/34-5).

" this night J was drunke & lost my hat, god forgive me." —(23/7/35). On the following day " J bought a hat for 2* 8d,"—(23/7/35).

The social life of the period was jolly and light-hearted, with any amount of games and recreations to occupy the time, for the Puritan movement had scarcely touched Wales at this period.

Robert Bulkeley took part in horse-racing, cock-fighting (always in February), football, prison bar, tennis (in the churchyard), bowls, hunting and shooting, attended wakes and plays, also fairs held regularly at Newborough, Aberfro, Beaumaris and Llanerchymedd. Indoors he and his friends played at the dice, shuffle board, cards and mwm, drinking beer ad-lib. It seems that they always played for a stake.

It can be readily seen that what with collecting the rents and tithes for Lady Mostyn he could not complain of want of bodily exercise. Even Sunday was not a day of rest and repose for him.

As a Justice of the Peace, he attended Petty Sessions regularly—generally at Bodedern, the Quarter Sessions, also the Assizes at Beaumaris and the Annual Grand Turne, but sometimes he paid 6d to be saved from Juries and 18d to be kept from Inquests. He attended the " muster " at Beaumrais (1631) where he says :

" J gaue my souldier H: p?: 6d, he came not home till ye next mo?, he lost & broke ye Armour:"—(4/10/31); also at Llandegvan, Talwrn manor, Llanvechell, and Aberfro.

When he attended court he occasionally paid for the sheriff's dinner and his own: often at the sheriff's request he executed commissions in different parts of the county.

In May 1631 he " was served with a warrant to cease a mise (i.e., to levy a tax) to erect " a house of correction " and in the following month he " paid 2/- mise towards a house of correction." Apparently, none had yet been built in the county to serve either as an almshouse for the poor or as a prison for the able-bodied vagabond. Of course, the poor-law system of Queen Elizabeth had been in force in the English counties since the beginning of the century (1603). Annually he paid the muster

master and sturke mise (18d) and the soldiers' mise (9d): in 1633 he paid 7d mise for a way at " penmanmawr," and in 1635 a 3d tax " reparation of ye Shire Halt."

The Diary is singularly wanting in references to public contemporary movements, doubtless due to the sleepy repose enjoyed by the county owing to its utter ignorance of the trend of public affairs in England; it was very far from London and there were neither newspapers nor facilities of communication. There is only one reference to the levying of a mise to provide the Crown with Shipmoney "(5)—the direct cause of the outbreak; of John Hampden and Pym in opposition to the policy of Charles I.

" J pd yes?day xs mise towards ye kings ship."—(28/10/35).

It is abundantly clear that he was regarded as a man of commonsense in the neighbourhood, for the appeals to his wisdom and good nature by people in distress are very numerous and varying in character but it should also be borne in mind that it was quite usual for a justice to act as arbitrator in a dispute, both parties binding themselves to accept his decision.

As a visitor of the sick and bereaved he could have few equals — even in our time.

As a mediator he was in great demand, e.g.

" causd fr: Row: to ride mecu) to llanvechell, intending to agree owen lewis & hugh powell aboute ye fray at llanbeylan, but fayled."—(21/6/31).

" Row: ap H: dd came to seek agreement at my (h)ands " - (9/11/31).

" I went cu fr: Jo: llo: to H: Uoyd for agreement betweene him & H: griffith "... —(29/2/31-2).

" went to Bodedern to agree Hugh prich: & Jon lewis "— (19/8/32).

" went cu H: p: to Robert Jaffrey to agree him & frDcely we warded that frDcely should pay him for all demands 3s, wch I did disburse for her."—(27/11/32).

" at Rees ap wm with Rich: gr: & in ye behalfe of Edw: miller "— (22/1/32-3).

" went to meete Rich: Row: ow: & wm Brwynog to agree between dd ap frDedith and Jon ap Hugh of trefoyesen " —(27/6/33).

" came to wm prich: g? to haue him reconciled to his daughter, wch being graunted, we lighted at Robt Jeffrey."—(14/7/33).

- " J rid wth ff wj price being taken by ye baylife to speake with ye sherife, who vused him very kindly for my sake."—(25/6/35).
- " J went to pencraig to agree betw: le: tho: & Elis Jenkin." - (27/6/35).
- " J rid ... to meete Jon ap hugh & H: pryce ap H: to-agree H: prich: & w] prich:"—(31/10/35):
- "J rid cu H: p: Jon prich: Benet, H: po: &c. to lewis., prydd: for reconciliation to Jon pric: & his wife."— (11/1/35-6).
- " J went to agree EdfrD g?: & Jon w] taylor to dd ap owen " (10/4/36).

Were the Anglesey farmers a quarrelsome lot—more so than the farmers of other counties ?

As a matchmaker he was most successful, e.g.

- " J rid with H: p: & vn: H: to dd ap fruedith aboute matching H: p: his sonne "—(18/6/31).
- " J rid to Bodegri to agree touching a mar betw: John gr: & Robt ap holts daugh!."—(30/12/32).
- " J & Salomon went to Tho: ap Jen to aske his daughter to m)redith Carrog "—(25/7/33).
- " coinge home aboute 9 a'clock J lighted at H: llo: & was pulte at his wedding."—(20/10/34). (6)
- " J was at Bottan all night watchinge sor Cat from goeing away wth H: g:"—(11/4/35).
- " J (pmised so? Cat! 5U for desisting her purpose."—(12/4/35).
- " to tregwehelydd to speake wth dauid ap Morris aboute a Marraige betw: Grace uch hugh & his sonne."— (11/8/35).
- " J rid to grace uch Hugh Bowens weddinge, J offered 2d, & gaue the Musicke 4d,"—(18/8/35).
- " J went to visite Jon prich: Benet who had caried away lewis prydderch daughter & are married."—(3/1/35-6).

He went on many errands of mercy to assist persons to secure loans of money from others, himself often becoming surety for substantial amounts, besides making bonds, drawing up wills, copying rentrolls, etc.

When he spent his evenings at alehouses he bestowed money freely upon fiddlers, harpers, musicians (7)

He was a regular attendant at funerals, of rich and poor, far and near, and he carefully notes the sum he " offered " on each occasion to

help pay the funeral expenses—1d. or 2d. according to the needs of the bereaved.

The custom of lending and borrowing was very common between him and his neighbours, and, as a rule, the debts of our Diarist were very numerous, though not very heavy. His own family were particularly obliging and kind to him. As an example, this is his story for the first fortnight of 1630-1:

Jan. 2. " Besse lent me 8d.

6. J bor? of fr: Jon pryce 2s to pay ye fuller, J owe f?: Jo: p?:
21s Besse gaue me 9d, & dicky lent me 6d,

Jan. 10. J rid to CarrDvcn cu) vn: H: & had but 6d in my purse
wch J bof of Begus."

It is certainly true of him that he was in constant need of ready cash, for in his drinking bouts "with great company" he, more often than not, met his bills by borrowing from the men he had treated or by requesting the " lady who served the beer " to score him", i.e., to make a note of his debt. Evidently he was thoroughly honest, as there is not a single instance of his doubting or repudiating the amount due from him.

As the inhabitants of his district could neither read nor write, his help was frequently sought in this direction—as the writer and reader of letters, e.g.,

" J writ a lres for tho: le: at his howse."—(29/12/20).

" J rec lres from Oxford from John Roberts to be com-unicated to his father."—(4/6/31). And so on, all the year round.

Probably the most permanent value of the Diary is the light thrown on the prices of commodities during the first half of the 17th century. To the social historian and economist the manuscript is a gold mine of solid and true information. It gives the detailed price of every sort of commodity—nails, pins, paint, ink, sugar, wool, tobacco, etc., also all animals and all marketable goods. The condition of the market and the variations in prices can be clearly traced. Examples of these are too numerous to quote at length, but all references to them and to other aspects of the Diarist's activities will be found in the Index.

As a farmer he gives the state of the weather and the direction of the wind every day. He gives us the exact times at which he housed his cattle in winter and at what time they were let out in the spring, and he keeps a detailed record of their increase and decrease with a frequent "God bless ye " for their prosperity.

After perusing the Diary, one cannot help but regard the writer of it as a jolly hail-fellow-well-met country gentleman, full of fun and good humour, who drank heartily and who freely borrowed money which he repaid in full as soon as possible. We leave him in peace with the last entry in his Diary :

" Tues: May 10, 1636—" At home all day. J have donne sowing. God be praised."



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