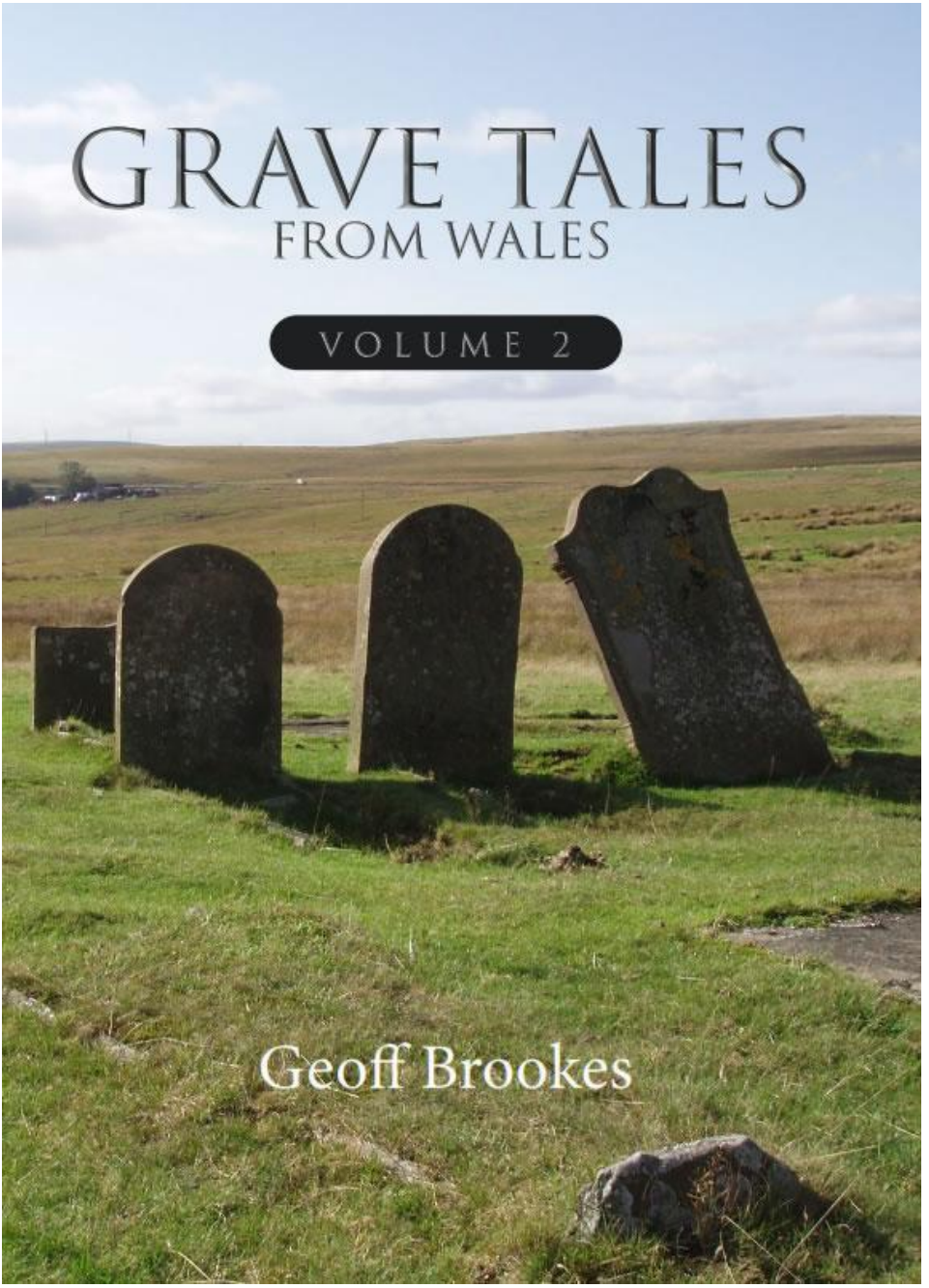
GRAVE TALES
FROM WALES
VOLUME 2
Geoff Brookes

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On behalf of the author, we thank you very much for taking the time to look at this and we hope you enjoy reading it.

GRAVE TALES FROM WALES 2

More 'Stories in Welsh Stone'

By

Geoff Brookes

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Before the winter fire, I will still be dreaming.
I have no thought of time.
For who knows where the time goes?
Who knows where the time goes?

Sandy Denny

All photographs were taken by the author, Geoff Brookes, apart from the photograph of the grave of Alice Douglas-Pennant on page 46 which was taken by Will Greenwood and I am grateful for his permission to use it.

For more books by Geoff Brookes, please visit his website at

https://www.geoffbrookes.co.uk

Cover image

The Cholera Cemetery, Cefn Golau, Tredegar

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Introduction

This book follows the same pattern as Volume One of Grave Tales of Wales.

This time there are 35 graves from across Wales and each one opens a unique window into our history. Those graves, the physical representations of a life, connect us instantly to the past in a way nothing else can.

All of these stories appeared in one form or another in Welsh Country Magazine during the fifteen years I was writing for them. Once again, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Ian and Kath and their team at the magazine, for the loyal encouragement I received throughout that time. I loved writing for them and discovering these different aspects of Welsh history that would otherwise have remained unknown to me. I appreciate their generosity in permitting me to present these pieces in this way.

In Volume Two, I have also included stories from our military history. As you will be aware, I do not share the talent of the poet Wilfred Owen but, like him, I have never had any desire to repeat the old lie about how glorious war is. I hope I have been able to show the people behind the medals, to show how, in so many cases, their wartime experiences became a burden they carried with them for the rest of their lives.

I have also included a small number of memorials where graves no longer exist or are inaccessible, but where is a story that should be told. We have also travelled outside Wales to track down some of those who are buried elsewhere, but still have a story that needs to be preserved. The terrible story of William Jones is justification enough for such journeys, in my opinion.

At the very end of the book, I have also included a bonus piece,

the Murder Stone of Cadoxton, which I have written about before. When I saw it for the first time I was astonished; I still am. Quite simply, it is the reason why I started to write about local history. The book in which I first examined the story behind the stone (*Stories in Welsh Stone)* is now, sadly, out of print, but so many people have asked me about the gravestone, that I thought it was appropriate to repeat the story here for new readers.

You can visit any of these places, and I hope the directions I have included are sufficient to help you find them. I am completely convinced that if you do visit and take an opportunity to place your hand on the grave or the memorial, it will not only deepen your understanding, but also remind you of your own place in history. It might sound fanciful, but I do not doubt it.

Neither do I doubt that there are still remarkable stories waiting to be unearthed in every part of Wales. We merely need to find them.

Abbey Cwm Hir, Powys

Llywelyn, Ein Llew Olaf, 1282

Tricked, Trapped, Eliminated

When you seek out Llywelyn's grave, the search takes you deep into the heart of Wales, the country of which he was prince. It is a journey that also takes you deep into the past, to an unfamiliar and unknown world. A world of warfare, bloodshed, torture and treachery. A world where Llywelyn was the first - and last – native prince to be recognised by the English crown, a man still mourned almost eight hundred years later.

Where the body of Llywelyn may have been buried

Abbey Cwm Hir, the abbey in the Long Valley, is a remarkably beautiful place. On the A483, north of Llandrindod Wells, you will find a narrow road signposted Abbey Cwm Hir. This quiet road follows the Clywedog Brook and after 4 miles of twists and turns you will find it. The abbey is now a scenic ruin, a skeleton, incomplete walls, broken pillars. And where the High Altar may have been, there is now a memorial slab, marking, perhaps, the grave of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. The last true Prince of Wales. This is where tradition says his body was put to rest.

But not his head. Oh no. They hacked that off and displayed it on a stick in London to great celebration, proof of the death of a feared enemy.

These were turbulent times. It required strength, determination and ruthlessness to maintain the fragile alliances that bound the different Welsh factions together. If you were a ruler, you couldn't even trust the rest of your family. The motivation of these tribal leaders was not the noble ambition of a unified and independent Wales. Self-interest and self-preservation came first. Maintaining unity was a full-time job, and this may go some way to explaining the background to Llywelyn's death. He had confronted the English since his succession as ruler of Gwynedd in 1255. He was a skilled military leader and a shrewd politician. In 1267 he had been recognised by the treaty of Montgomery as Prince of Wales by Henry III. This was a significant moment and the high point of his career. Such recognition had never happened before and would never happen again.

Things changed with the accession of Edward I. Failed plotters against Llywelyn were soon given asylum at the English court.

Edward declared war on Llywelyn in 1277 and outmanoeuvred him, forcing harsh terms upon him at the end of a short campaign. These terms created increasing resentment against English rule. A rebellion sparked into life when Llywelyn's brother Dafydd attacked Hawarden Castle, near Chester, in 1282.

Initially the Welsh had great success.

They defeated the English forces comprehensively at the battle of Moel y Don near Bangor on 6 November 1282. Perhaps they could indeed drive the English out of north Wales once and for all.

On the back of this success, Llywelyn seems to have decided to move south, leaving his brother in control in the north. Quite what it was that drew him south is not clear. Perhaps he needed to establish new alliances, perhaps he had received messages. Whatever it was, this march led to his death and destroyed his army.

We know that Llywelyn died in the late afternoon of Friday 11 December 1282 and the precise details are unclear. However, it is possible to piece together a coherent story, though there is much, of course, that will always remain speculative.

Where tradition says that he died

The key figures in his death appear to be Roger Mortimer and his son Edmund, who were leading the English forces in the area. Many now believe that they had created an elaborate plot to eliminate him and by so doing paralysed the Welsh insurrection. If this was their plan, then it worked perfectly.

Llywelyn arrived at Abbey Cwm Hir with a large force on 10 December and was well received by the locals, though whether their support was genuine is unclear. It could have been part of a planned deception, to draw him deeper into a trap.

The next morning he went towards Builth, leaving behind the main body of his troops. There was, it is said, a question mark over the loyalty of troops from Brecon to the English cause, and perhaps he therefore hoped that he could recruit them to his side. He must have received some indication that they might be ready to do so.

Was this, as many now believe, the final piece in an elaborate plot?

His small party was ambushed somewhere near the river Irfon at dusk on Friday 11 December 1282; traditionally believed to be at Cilmeri. All of his party were killed in a brief engagement. In such a moment history changed forever.

Evidence from letters of the Archbishop of Canterbury certainly suggests that he had been tricked, tracked and eliminated. All of Llywelyn's party were killed, even a priest. A witness silenced perhaps.

Llywelyn's head was hacked off and taken to King Edward, who had it displayed in triumph on a pole on the Tower of London for all to see. An enemy vanquished.

The rest of Llywelyn's body was taken back to Abbey Cwm Hir and buried under the high altar. Today the clear outlines of this modern tribute stand in sharp contrast to the ruins that surround it.

When the prince's head was removed, so was the head of the Welsh forces. Fortified by their success in this ambush, the English-led forces attacked the leaderless Welsh early the next morning and slaughtered them. Contemporary sources report over three thousand dead and not one English casualty, but how accurate this is we will never know. In a letter Roger Mortimer said *'Llywelyn is dead, his army defeated and all the flower of his army dead.'*

Perhaps the story of a plot and a conspiracy merely reflects the paranoia of our own troubled time. And certainly there are other stories, other myths. Believe what you will. In the end it might be better to believe the myths, than to accept that the Prince of Wales was betrayed by a Welshman.

The implications of his death were considerable.

Wales could no longer regard itself as a country separate from England. But the country needed a prince and Edward, it is said, promised the Welsh that he would give them such a prince, one who had no a stain upon his honour, one who was born in Wales and one who could speak no English.

So it was that Eleanor, Edward's queen, gave birth to a son in Caernarvon Castle. Perfect in every detail and neatly fulfilling all the criteria. He was formally declared to be Prince of Wales. It became the custom that the title was not inherited but conferred through investiture. The honour of becoming the recognised leader of the Welsh people was now a gift of the English king. It mattered little whether or not the recipient was acceptable.

The insurrection staggered on without Llywelyn for another six months in the north under the leadership of his brother Dafydd, who declared himself the new Prince of Wales. It ended in June 1283 when he was handed over to the English by *'men of his own tongue.'* The poor man was taken to Shrewsbury where he had the very dubious honour of becoming the first man to face death by being hanged, drawn and quartered. His head was sent to join that of his brother, still staring sightlessly out at London.

By the spring at Cilmeri

Every year on the anniversary of the death of 'Our prince Llywelyn,' patriots meet to remember him in a ceremony at the memorial in Cilmeri and gather around a simple stone on a mound, a piece of granite from Caernarfon where he was born, to mourn this turning point in Welsh history. The dream of an independent Wales may well have died with him on that winter's afternoon, all those years ago.

In the far corner of the site, you will find a short but steep flight of steps that leads down to the well where they might have washed his severed head before packing it away to take to the king. Lift the wooden lid and look. There always a few coins at the bottom of the well, appeasing the ancient gods who turned against the Prince.

Even if you have the place to yourself, you will be aware that others have been here before you; there are always flowers here, for Llywelyn is still remembered.

The first and last Prince of Wales.

Aberystwyth, Ceredigion

James Williams 1857

Shot in the rigging

The gravestone is ignored these days. It might have been an event once important enough to be mentioned in Parliament, but it is now long forgotten.

The stone is one of the many that line the Pay and Display car park at the end of King Street in Aberystwyth. It was moved and placed here some time ago. It is next to the church of St Michael which lies on the edge of the town, up against the sea.

The castle grounds, neat and picturesque, protect the church from the sea, though the church was not always able to protect its congregation from its dangers. There are many graves that remember death at sea – sailors lost overboard, for example. You will find such graves in all of our seaports in Wales. Men who went out to sea and never returned to their families.

When we went there to visit James Williams, generations of families were stretched out on the grass, enjoying the unexpected sun. They still had to shelter from the traditional wind off the Irish Sea that always seems to throw itself at Aberystwyth, but children played on the grass, alongside these re-sited gravestones, their histories and their stories less important now than their role as a border.

You will find an arch way in the south corner where there is a lovely inscription, which begins with the arresting words,

Stop Traveller, stop and read. This stone was erected by those who fully appreciated the integrity and fidelity of David Lewis, alias The Old Commander.

David Lewis died in 1850 at the age of 66. He had fought on the *Conqueror* under Nelson at Trafalgar and for 13 years he had been the respected Deputy Harbourmaster. He had had an opportunity to build a longer life of achievement than James Williams, the young man whose grave we had come to find.

Down by the arch, you will find the Williams boys. Squeeze past the bumpers of the cars and you will see them. Their stone has slipped down to cover those beneath it, but it remains thankfully undamaged and in excellent condition. There were three brothers. Their father James was a mercer and he and Mary had the dreadful duty of burying their three sons. John, William and James. How difficult that must have been.

The parental grief that it describes is hard to imagine. William died in July 1841 and John, their second son, who died in 1825, was only 7 weeks old. It was the death of their surviving brother, James, that had drawn us to this functional, ordinary car park.

His fate? To spend eternity in a car park.

At the time of his curious death at the age of 21, he was serving in the merchant navy on the schooner *John and Edward*. Just another boy from Aberystwyth working at sea; just another boy from Aberystwyth who died at sea.

His ship had left Bordeaux, heading north for Liverpool, on the 24 May 1857. A contrary wind forced them to shelter in Quiberon Bay in Brittany, in the harbour of Sarzeau on the northeast coast of Belle Isle. Since they had been driven in by the weather, the necessary signals were not ready to be hoisted and they anchored close to the stern of a French man-of-war, the *Maratch*.

The French hailed the *John and Edward* but the captain, James Evans, could not make himself understood. His language skills had clearly not been polished during convivial shore time in Bordeaux. All he could do shout was *'Liverpool!'* loudly which, in truth, did not convey the nuanced meaning required in these circumstances. This was not good enough and, in an attempt, perhaps, to prompt inadequately embedded language skills, the French captain ordered a musket to fire a shot – a blank as it turned out - to persuade the British ship to fly its flag. They were keen to know who they were.

Evans, of course, knew what his responsibilities entailed and when his wife quickly produced a flag, he ordered a member of the crew to wave it frantically. It did not have the necessary impact and a second blank shot was fired. This perhaps reflected impatience, rather than a belief that the *John and Edward* represented any sort of threat. James Williams was sent scrambling into the rigging with the flag when there was a third shot - a live one this time - that hit him as he worked to haul up the ensign. He fell to the deck. Mrs Evans later said in a letter… '*He did not sigh or groan'*.

Captain Evans immediately launched a boat and went to the *Maratch* to tell them what had happened. They in their turn, sent their doctor across, but it was too late. James was dead and was buried in Belle Isle.

Mr Lewis Dillwyn, MP for Swansea, outlined these unnecessary events in Parliament and his comments were duly recorded in Hansard. It was the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, who replied to the issues he raised. He confirmed that the first two shots were blank musket rounds. He acknowledged that the *John and Edward* was at fault, for '*no ship ought to enter the harbour of a foreign country without colours to distinguish her nationality*,' but there was certainly no justification in ordering a live round to be fired at the ship.

The French officer from the *Maratch* told an enquiry that he ordered the shot to be fired deliberately high but *'the ball glanced and unfortunately the shot took effect.'*

Even before the British government could complain, the French had called in the British Ambassador in Paris and Count Walewski offered a full apology of '*the most satisfactory and handsome kind,'* according to Palmerston. Orders had already been given to *'dismiss from the French service the officer who had given orders to fire the fatal musket shot,'* which provoked cries of *'hear, hear,'* in the House. Palmerston's reassurances that the French government wanted to *'mitigate the affliction of the family of the unfortunate seaman'* led to cheers. How easily the House was moved to emotion, even in those days. In fact, Palmerston was impressed by the way the whole incident had been handled, certainly in ways which would not impact adversely upon the Williams family back in Aberystwyth. *'Nothing can be more honourable and proper than the manner of their proceeding towards the English Government on the subject,'* he said. International relations restored; a difficulty managed by careful diplomacy. How very noble and supportive. But cold comfort to a family that had now lost its third son.

The Williams family were supported by their MP Captain Pryce, and with his assistance, Sir Anthony Perrier, Her Majesty's Consul in Brest, arranged for James to be sent home. He arrived in Aberystwyth with full honours on 1 August 1857 on the *Bonne Emilie* and was reburied in his home town.

What satisfaction could be rendered has been given by the French Government, and the wishes of the friends of the deceased have been complied with, in having his remains brought here, to be deposited amongst those of his relatives.

The perfidious French. The press did not miss the opportunity to emphasise the patriotic details – a young boy in the rigging, tangled up in the Union Jack and killed by a musket shot that had gone through both James and the precious flag. However you want to present it, the fact remained that he was dead. But a major diplomatic incident was avoided through carefully choreographed compassion. The right things were said, and the world moved on. But a family was left to grieve.

James Williams was an ordinary boy from Aberystwyth who became an unexpected issue for the Prime Minister and then a family tragedy was carefully managed by the Civil Service, so well in fact, that now his gravestone is a forgotten part of the boundary of a Pay and Display car park above the sea in Aberystwyth.

And what of his ship? The *John and Edward*? That was lost too, in a severe storm off Holyhead in October 1858.

Amlwch, Anglesey.

William Williams VC, 1965

Love for Sail

We went to Amlwch to find a man called William Williams. Not difficult perhaps, since there have been lots of men in Wales called William Williams. This one, though, won a Victoria Cross in 1917. In fact, there have been two Welshmen with this name who received the ultimate recognition of their bravery. The other came from Monmouthshire and died in action at Gallipoli. A courageous man certainly, but the grave I went to see represents an astonishing story from Amlwch's past and a remarkable part of our history.

A modest grave for a modest man

William's whole life was based around the sea. His father had been a fisherman – and latterly the town crier – and he enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve as a seaman. But his life was unexpectedly defined by German submarines, which carried out systematic attacks on merchant shipping, in an attempt to destroy the food chain linking Britain and America. Tons of meat and grain sank to the bottom of the Atlantic, lost forever. These secret killers came with no warning. There were no systems available to detect them. The first anyone knew was when a torpedo stuck them. Once the U boat had disabled a vessel, they had sufficient gun power when they surfaced to destroy a ship long before the Royal Navy could arrive to affect a rescue.

The solution was Q ships. The government requisitioned ships from their owners and converted them into armed vessels. They looked innocent enough, but they had heavy guns concealed behind screens. They were crewed by volunteers like Williams, who took remarkable risks. For the deception to work, the crew had to ensure that they were successfully attacked by patrolling U boats. They were instructed that, if necessary, they had to slow down to ensure that German torpedoes hit them. Then the crew would abandon the wounded ship. This was the 'panic party,' who added verisimilitude by carrying stuffed parrots in cages, or sometime by dressing as women. The submarine would surface to destroy the ship and then a second crew left behind would reveal themselves and attack. They had to act quickly and decisively, or the U boat would submerge and finish the job with torpedoes.

Of course, the strategy was fraught with dangers. It was illogical, incredibly dangerous and rather mad. At any point, the Q ship could have been destroyed by a suspicious submarine that refused to consider taking any risks at all. But the loss of a ship – and its crew - was felt to be a price worth paying if it could neutralise just one silent killer. As a result, Q ships stalked the sea like deadly street walkers.

Williams' first action was in January 1917 on board *HMS*

Farnborough, which sank the U 83 off the coast of Ireland. They were hit by a torpedo and began to sink but waited and waited until the submarine surfaced and came close enough for them to attack it decisively. For his role in this action as part of the gun crew, he received the Distinguished Service Medal. You might think that such a close encounter with mortality would have been sufficient, but Williams now had a taste for it. He was transferred to a Cardiff-based ship, initially called the *Vittoria*, then *HMS Snail* but it was as *HMS Pargust* that she sailed into triumph, in her dangerous and deadly seduction of U boats.

In June 1917 she successfully enticed a submarine into a brief but productive relationship. *HMS Pargust* was suddenly hit by a torpedo which ripped a hole in the hull and killed Stoker Radford. The explosion also dislodged the dummy cabin, behind which the starboard gun was hidden. If the structure had fallen, it would have exposed the ship's true purpose, and so the deception needed to be maintained at all costs. And this is the vital part that William Williams played.

The 'Panic party' abandoned ship, whilst U 29 raised its periscope and warily circled the *Pargust,* alive to the possibility of trickery. Eventually, 30 minutes after the initial attack, it was sufficiently reassured. It surfaced and moved slowly round towards the stern of the *Pargust*. All this time Commander Campbell held his nerve, waiting for the best possible moment – which came when the submarine was less than 50 yards away. They opened fire with devastating results. The first shot went right through the conning tower. There were a further 37 shots fired. At one point, the crew appeared to surrender and firing ceased. But when the submarine then tried to escape, like an unfaithful lover, the attack resumed and ten minutes after surfacing there was an explosion and the U boat sank. Only two men survived. Twenty-three men, including the captain, were killed. A U boat which had previously sunk seventeen ships and had been laying mines off the coast of Ireland, had been neutralised. The sea was

a little safer.

The *Pargust*, despite serious damage, did not sink and was towed slowly back to Plymouth, ready to fight another day, ready to establish new relationships. As a consequence, the ship as a unit was nominated for a VC under the 'ballot system.' This permitted the crew to vote for one officer and one seaman to receive the medal on behalf of everyone. One went to Lieutenant Ronald Stuart and the other was awarded to William Williams. The latter was no surprise at all, since the success of the whole deception rested, literally, upon his shoulders. In the initial torpedo attack, the explosion seriously loosened the whole artifice. The screens shielding the guns had started to fall and it was Williams who had supported the whole structure, thus maintaining the deception. In doing this, he ensured that the U boat came within range, whilst sustaining a serious injury to his back which affected him for the rest of his life. But without his strength and his obduracy, the guns would not have remained hidden and the submarine would not have been sunk – and his colleagues would not have survived. Perhaps it was an unexpected way to receive the Victoria Cross, but the fact that he was nominated by his comrades makes the award all the more worthy and significant.

Of course, the crew of the *Pargust* were determined to continue their seduction of submarines. Their deception was addictive. Williams and colleagues volunteered to join Commander Campbell on the *Dunraven*, another Cardiff collier. It was disguised as the *Boverton* and sailed flirtatiously into the Bay of Biscay to charm torpedoes from the cold sea. This time though they were only partly successful. Yes, they did attract the attentions of a submarine. Yes, they were hit by a torpedo. But the German captain, wary and unconvinced, reluctant to establish any sort of relationship, kept his distance and sailed away once the *Boverton* had sunk. You can't win them all – and nothing could detract from the bravery and the heroism of the *Pargust*.

Naturally, Amlwch was immensely proud of Williams. There

was public acclamation and presentations. But the injuries he sustained on the Pargust meant that he was unable to continue his service. He never went back to sea, though he ended his service as the most highly decorated seaman in the Royal Navy. He also received the Medaille Militaire from France – a medal rarely awarded to a foreign national.

Williams was a modest man and anonymity was surely not impossible to find for a man in Wales called William Williams. But in Holyhead and Amlwch there was only one - the one known as '*Will VC*.' Significant recognition. And he was not chosen by distant officers behind a desk, reading reports, but by his comrades, by the men who saw him in action, who knew their lives had been saved because of what he did. He often said, with typical modesty, that he had won the VC *'in a raffle'* - but it must have meant a great deal to have such respect from his comrades. Amlwch loved him too. In June after he had received the Distinguished Service Medal, '*the town was gaily decorated with banners and bunting'* and there was a procession led by the '*Menai Bridge Bugle Band*.' It was all part of what the North Wales Chronicle described as *'Honour for Amlwch Hero.'* He received the VC in July 1917, though the nature of his heroism was never detailed, to preserve the secrecy of the Q ship operation. It was called the 'mystery VC.'

He died in 1965 and the grave he shares in Amlwch Cemetery with his second wife is easy to find. Go through the gates and it is in section on the right-hand side. Square and neat. Well kept. Precise. And it shelters both a brave man and a remarkable story.

Bala, Gwynedd

Betsi Cadwaladr

Buried in Abney Park Cemetery, London

That Wild Woman from the Welsh Hills

What we see here is a memorial to her that was erected in her honour in Abney Park Cemetery in London. She was originally buried in a shared pauper's grave, the location of which has been lost in the tangled neglect and the Victorian splendour.

Finally remembered

In the one surviving picture that we have of Betsi she is sitting, dressed in Welsh flannel with shawl and bonnet, looking rather stern. She might be a mamgu from a low stone cottage in the mountains but in fact, she travelled the world and became one of the first heroines in nursing history.

Elizabeth Cadwaladr was born in May 1789 on a farm called Pen Rhiw, in the hills above Bala. She was one of 16 children and a life of domestic duty and hard physical labour lay ahead of her. However, the death of her mother when she was only five affected her profoundly. She became a rebellious child and to escape the strict rules of her father Dafydd, a Methodist preacher, she went to live with their landlord when she was nine. She learnt all the domestic skills whilst she was there and, most importantly of all, she learnt English. It was this that was to be her passport out of the hills.

At the age of 14 Betsi ran away to see the world. She decided to start in Chester where she had an aunt. When she arrived the aunt gave her the money for the coach back to Bala but instead, she used it to take a boat to Liverpool.

Here she went into domestic service and changed her name. Cadwaladr was far too difficult for the English to pronounce, so she adopted the name of Davis. She worked variously as a maid, a housekeeper and a nurse. With other employers she travelled throughout Europe. In 1815 she found herself in Brussels at the time of the Battle of Waterloo and later told of how she helped to tend the wounded lying on the field in the days following the battle. Back in Liverpool the following year, she became secretly engaged to Captain Thomas Harris but, two days before the wedding, he drowned when his ship, *The Perseverance,* was wrecked.

Her father went to Liverpool to bring her home, but instead she ran off to London. In 1820 she became nanny to a sea captain's family and spent the greatest part of her life sailing the world. Hers was a life full of adventure and incident. At one point she married

an engineer in the East Indies, though how much of an adventure that was, I can't say.

On her return to London however, she somehow lost her savings and had no means of otherwise supporting herself. She began nursing in Guy's Hospital and then caring for private patients in their homes. It was whilst doing so, probably in Southampton, that she read scandalous newspaper reports about the awful suffering of soldiers in the Crimea. She wrote a letter, which is now in the National Archive at Kew, volunteering for nursing service there. In her letter she says

> *My age 44 robust Constution and I will Indevour to do the utmost of my power to sirve the Sufferers in the War.*

Her letter contained one significant falsehood.

She lopped twenty years from her age. And by so doing, quite suddenly, at the age of 65, she entered the most significant part of her life.

As soon as she arrived in the Crimea, she knew she disliked Florence Nightingale intensely. The wounded were brought away from the front to Scutari where there were five miles of beds, all filled, and Nightingale would walk by them all every night, earning herself the name of '*The Lady with the Lamp.*'

But in Scutari, Betsi was a long way from the action and she became frustrated. Nightingale, however, refused to let her nurses go any nearer the front. It was far too dangerous and the front-line hospital was filthy and disorganised. Instead, the nurses were mending shirts and sorting through rotting linen. Nightingale was autocratic and domineering and a clash with the opinionated and frustrated Betsi was inevitable. The latter had come on a mission to care for the wounded and Nightingale seemed to be standing in her way. She let everyone know what she felt.

Florence described her as '*that wild woman from the Welsh Hills*,'

and accused her of upsetting her other nurses through her insubordination. She threatened to send her home, forfeiting her pay. When she maintained her defiant opinions and said she was determined to make her own way to the front line in the Crimea, Nightingale washed her hands of her.

Betsi left and headed up to the front to the hospital at Balaclava. What she found there was truly horrific. *'I shall never forget the sights as long as I live,'* she said later. The first man she treated had frostbite. *'His toes fell off with the bandages. The hand of another fell off at the wrist.'* There were no beds. The men lay on boards, with their coats for pillows.

They were dirty and dying, their wounds had remained untreated for weeks at a time and were infested with maggots, which she removed by the handful.

She nursed these men for over six weeks before being put in charge of the kitchen. Her skills in domestic service were put to good use and she was skilled at foraging for food and for wasting nothing. It was at this basic level of individually focused care, that Betsi was determined to make an impact.

Betsi was a remarkable woman. Full of energy, certainty and opinions. She had no time for procedure and systems. She wanted only to give front-line care. Of such are heroines made. But without the proper structures, such care might remain unfocused and untargeted. It was easy for Betsi to pillory Florence Nightingale, but she gave the job of nursing a professional structure. She created order and systems to channel the emotion and compassion that fuelled Betsi. She on the other hand, was a practical person who had little time for 'management.' A true working-class hero, working amongst her own people. The point of course is, as a patient, who do you need at such times? A bum wiper or a file carrier?

She believed in manual labour to which *'high born gentlewomen'* like Nightingale were not suited. She believed that they

> *hurt the feelings of the men, who were acutely sensible of the unfitness of such work for persons of high station. Ladies may be fit to govern, but, for general service, persons of a different class, who could put their hands to anything, were more useful.*

The world though, is rarely so simple. It was the work of Nightingale that ultimately made nursing an acceptable occupation. And it is to her credit that she came away from two visits to Balaclava with a changed impression of Betsi, even to the extent of recommending her for a government pension.

In 1855 Betsi returned home. Even though she was exhausted by over-work and by dysentery, she continued with her mission to blame Nightingale for the lack of direct patient care. But Betsi was largely unsuccessful, for the legend of Florence Nightingale was already starting to take hold.

Betsi was a girl for getting her hands dirty. Yet fame largely passed her by and it was Florence Nightingale who entered the national consciousness. Now, when Betsi is remembered, she is remembered as the *'Welsh Nursing Heroine.'* She certainly had admirable qualities. She was calm, ordered, compassionate. Betsi never embraced the deep despair that drove some of the other nurses to breaking point as they cared for destroyed and mangled bodies. She saw that something needed to be done, so she got on with it.

Both Betsi and Florence worked tremendously long hours, sometimes up to 20 hours a day for weeks at a time. But Florence had her own servants to look after her; Betsi did not. She cooked and she cleaned and she cared, fuelled only by her own personality and her determination. And at the age she was, she paid a heavy price.

She went to live with her sister Bridget in London and she died, forgotten and in poverty, in Shoreditch in the summer of 1860.

She is no longer forgotten entirely. Her name lives on in her

local hospital trust. And an annual nursing lecture has been named in her honour in Cardiff. She is honoured for having '*advanced the cause of patient care.'* Because this is what she put first. She would accept nothing else and held Nightingale in contempt because of this.

Another Welsh woman too accompanied Nightingale to the Crimea – Jane Evans, known apparently, and unkindly, as 'Plain Jane from Caio.' She also was a practical nurse who acted as a chaplain at times and, like Betsi, altered her age. She was, in fact, fifty when she went out there. There is a plaque in her honour in the Presbyterian Chapel in Pumpsaint in Carmarthenshire.

Bodelwyddan, Denbighshire

Rebecca Macintosh, 1919

The Kinmel Park Camp Riot

It is such a distinctive church. It can be seen for miles, standing tall and pale on the coastal plain. It has an elegant limestone steeple in keeping with its beautiful interior. St Margaret's Church in Bodelwyddan, 'The Marble Church', is an impressive place. It has inside many different types of marble, including beautiful Belgian red marble in its pillars. The style and the decoration are enough to draw the visitor. But it has other interests too.

David Gillan's grave is in the centre

On the south side you will find a host of military graves. There are 34 British graves and then 83 graves of Canadian military personnel who had been stationed at the nearby military camp at Kinmel Park, outside Abergele. They have a memorial cross of red sandstone and their graves are grouped around it.

Our military heritage spreads far and wide, encompassing the legacy of empire and commonwealth. We must never forget that people from across the world have fought and died for us. And some of them rest with us still. Here in Bodelwyddan it is the children of Canadian mothers.

And as they have rested, rumours have grown up about these Canadian graves, rumours of riot and summary execution in the aftermath of war in March 1919. And the question has always been, why did these survivors of the Great War die in North Wales?

The Kinmel Park Camp near Abergele was built in 1914 as a training camp for the North Wales battalions and when the war ended it became a transit camp – a base for soldiers from across the Empire, waiting to go home. The 9th Canadian General Hospital was there too. It contained, in huts and under canvas, 1290 beds. It was a busy place.

In the late winter of 1919, the camp was dirty and over-crowded. The Canadian soldiers were on half rations. They hadn't been paid. 42 men lived in huts meant for 30. There was no coal for the stoves. There was a shortage of bedding and they took it in turns to sleep on the floor. March can be cold in North Wales.

They just wanted to be home, and four months after the end of the war very little progress was being made. There were over 15,000 of them and as far as they were concerned their military service was over.

Repeatedly they were processed and given a place on a ship, which then didn't turn up. Whilst they waited, they continued to

live under military discipline, with drill, parades and forced marches. Local tradesmen who set up stores in adjacent shacks in what they called 'Tin Town', were felt to be profiteering, overcharging men who had little money in the first place.

There are always frustrations when you think you are in a queue and yet others seem to be dealt with first. Sometimes newly arrived troops appeared to be sent home before longer term residents.

Certainly, Kinmel Park camp was not a cheery place to be. Things back at home weren't ideal either, and the Canadians were not sure what they would find when they returned. Unemployment in Canada was widespread and the economy was crippled by war debt. Industrial unrest was growing and the Government was calling in the troops who had then started to fraternize with striking workers. Communists were a hidden, sinister threat, blamed for the unrest.

Canada was uneasy in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Overseas workers, generally Russian immigrants, were being deported to provide work for returning soldiers. But it offered little comfort, for many of them were of Russian descent themselves. This tension reached out across the Atlantic to North Wales.

Strikes at home had held up the repatriation ships. Promises that those who had enlisted first and married men would be sent home first, were not being fulfilled. They were probably being sent home by unit, rather than by date of enlistment. But it was certainly a big issue and the commander of the camp, Colonel Colquhoun, sent Colonel Thackrey to London to discuss the problem. Meanwhile the camp believed with absolute certainty that a troop ship intended for them had been diverted to Russia to carry grain.

Not only that, but Kinmel Park Camp was also a dangerous place to be. Soldiers were dying in the flu epidemic that had reached the camp in October 1918 and which would eventually account for the vast majority of the casualties now buried in the

cemetery.

The 1918 flu pandemic (often called 'the Spanish flu') spread to nearly every part of the world. Unusually most of its victims were healthy young adults, those who had survived the Great War. The epidemic began in March 1918 and went on to kill anywhere between 2% to 5% of the human population. People could be apparently well, then suddenly overwhelmed by symptoms and then dead the following day. The flu provoked huge fear right across the world and the conditions in a place like Kinmel Park were ideal for the spread of the virus.

February 1919 was a particularly bad month, as the dates on the headstones testify. Kinmel Park Camp was clearly somewhere you would not wish to be.

It was inevitable that frustrations would eventually boil over.

The riot started on Tuesday 4 March 1919. A committee was formed with the intention of starting a mutiny that they hoped would spread through all the estimated 15,000 men. The leader of the action was identified as William W. Tarasevich of the Canadian Railway Troops. They began by ransacking the canteen and soon gangs were roaming round the camp, looking for other ways of expressing their anger.

They broke into the rooms of girls who worked at the camp but only to steal overalls. Then they moved on to Tin Town and smashed it up.

Colonel Colquhoun acted swiftly. He ordered all remaining beer to be poured away and all ammunition removed. He tried his best to calm events by moving about through the camp and speaking to the men. In so doing he managed to control the spread of the disorder through his presence. However, there is a suggestion that the rioters looted a brewer's dray on Wednesday morning when it turned up at the camp. *The Times* said that this *'may account for the horrible turn of events in the course of the afternoon.'*

On Wednesday afternoon there was a confrontation between the rioters and those who had remained loyal. Some soldiers on both sides had retained firearms and ammunition. Perhaps it was inevitable that they would be used. A shot was fired and Gunner Jack Hickman took a bullet the heart as he sat in his hut writing a letter home. Another four were killed in the hand-to-hand fighting that followed, including Tarasevich. Then, the riot was over.

Tarasevich was the perfect scapegoat. The rioters had already been described as '*not true Canadians but men with Russian blood*' and his death was especially convenient. Everyone could blame a dead man with a Russian name and then move on.

Official reports blamed Russian Communists for the riot. *The Times* says, '*in the camp itself there is a strong belief that Bolshevism tried to raise its head and was scotched,'* but the reporter himself was more circumspect.

> *To what extent the use of the red flag – it was a piece of bunting that had flown at a canteen – signified a political impulse behind this unhappy business it is difficult on present information to say with any confidence.*

What we do know is that those who died in the riot received a military funeral in St Margaret's, with six pall bearers, a firing party of twelve men, twenty-four mourners and a bugler. Hickman was taken home for burial but the other four are there.

Tarasevich, 30 years old, bayoneted in the abdomen.

Corporal Joseph Young, 36, an Infantryman in the Manitoba Regiment, who died in hospital after being hacked in the face with a bayonet.

Gunner William Haney, 22, of the Canadian Artillery, who was shot in the face.

Private David Gillan, also 22, of the Nova Scotia Regiment, was shot in the back of the neck. Gillan's memorial is a larger, private headstone. It reads, *'Killed at Kinmel Park on March 5, Defending the*

honor of his country.'

Whilst it is believed that the first three were part of the riot, there was no distinction in death. Who can tell what small acts of heroism they had performed during their service in Europe? So, they are rightly buried together.

The unrest faded. General Sir Richard Turner VC, travelled from London and re-assured the troops that four transports to Canada would arrive as soon as possible. He acknowledged that there had been difficulties in shipping in February, but he hoped and promised that things would improve.

Of course, there had to be Court Martials and soldiers were sentenced and imprisoned, but they were soon quietly sent home along with their comrades.

There was some excitement in the press, which was probably the origin of all the myths about the riot that persist to this day.

The riot was carefully planned by Russian Communists, desperate to incite revolution. There have been stories of twelve officers being killed, of Irish Guards being sent in to quell the riots, of summary executions by firing squad, heard clearly by frightened locals, of twenty-one dead soldiers buried secretly in unmarked graves...

But there is no evidence at all for any of this. The Canadian National Defense Headquarters denies it all and the Military Court of Inquiry was quite clear in its careful narrative of these sad events.

Does St. Margaret's Church hold a terrible and sinister secret?

Probably not.

Certainly, a tension exists between the official version and an alternative oral tradition. But it is in the nature of conspiracy theories that they persist. They can give a seductive order to otherwise random events. Life however is generally far too untidy.

There were no mass executions in Kinmel Park. There was no revolutionary uprising that was brutally suppressed. Just a sudden eruption amongst men desperate to get home, men whose sensibilities had been coarsened by their experiences in the trenches and in a grim inhospitable camp, for whom life had a disturbing cheapness.

The truth is probably quite straightforward.

A frustrated, frightened group of soldiers, a long way from home, facing a silent invisible killer in the shape of influenza, living in dreadful conditions, exploited, cold and hungry, were incited to riot. For a brief moment disorder ruled amongst men with guns. And then the madness passed.

On Joseph Young's gravestone is the message: '*Sometime, sometime we'll understand.'* I hope that we do.

Perhaps in the end we need to look no further than the marble cross right at the end of the first row of graves.

In memory of Nursing Sister Rebecca Macintosh, died at Kinmel Park 7 March 1919. Aged 26 years.

Whilst the riot was going on, a member of the Canadian Medical corps was dying of 'flu in the hospital. That was the true killer in the camp. The soldiers had all been heroes, like all the ordinary men who fought in the war. Then they had fought each other in their fear and their frustration.

Those 83 graves in Bodelwyddan are not there because of an act of suppression and brutality. They are part of the damage of a global catastrophe.

Rebecca Macintosh, who died in the Spanish flu' epidemic

Brecon, Powys

Charles Lumley VC, 1858

Wounded at Sebastopol. Died in Brecon.

When I asked about the tomb in the Cathedral, no one seemed to know anything about it. Never really taken much notice of it, I suppose. Just one amongst many. But I found it in the graveyard, where the great and the good of Brecon were surrounded by the falling leaves of autumn.

It is a large and imposing tomb. Well proportioned. Solid. In its time it meant something. It was an acknowledgement of what he had done. Yet today it is neglected, ignored.

In the grounds of Brecon Cathedral

The children from the school, laughing their way along the path close by, were not much troubled by him at all. I watched them as they kicked through the leaves. They were concerned only for life, not for the death all around them, as they called to each other carelessly and made their way home through the grounds of Brecon Cathedral. And why shouldn't they? Their lives are in front of them; they have so much to look forward to.

Charles didn't feel that way. And there is something very affecting about the life and death of Charles Lumley, something that troubles me. For he tumbled into darkness. Charles Lumley, VC. An early victim of post-traumatic stress disorder.

There are life-changing moments for all of us, I think. The trick is recognising them; many of us don't know they've happened until it is too late. It was too late for Charles Lumley.

Charles Lumley was a military man. The details of his early life are sketchy and open to some debate, but the most reliable information would suggest that he was born in Kidbrooke in Kent around 1824, the son of a merchant. In 1841 he appears in the census as a gentleman cadet at the royal Military Academy in Woolwich and then, 10 years later, he is a soldier living with his mother at Shooters Hill. When he was married in 1852 to Letitia Beaulieu in Marylebone, he was described as a Lieutenant in the Army in the Earl of Ulster's Regiment. So far, so good. A career soldier, and in 1854 he was posted to the Crimea.

The Crimea was an awful place, a genuine fore-runner for the stalemate in the trenches of the First World War, just as bitterly cold, just as muddy and just as deadly. The triumphs of the Napoleonic wars were a distant memory. The army appeared incompetent and disorganised, particularly when compared to their allies, the well-provisioned and efficient French. The British soldiers felt neglected and forgotten. 5,000 of them died in battle but 16,000 died of diseases like cholera. Those great battles, remembered in the names of rows of terraced houses, like Alma,

Inkerman, Sebastopol, Balaklava were inconclusive.

But as always, amongst all this hopelessness and incompetence, there were individual acts of heroism which were recognised in the award of the newly created Victoria Cross, one of which was carried out by Charles Lumley.

The key strategic feature in the war was Sebastopol. To succeed the allies needed to take it from the Russians, but they had fortified the city and had strong defensive positions.

Whilst their trenches were slowly getting closer and closer to the city, the only way the allies could take it was in a direct frontal assault. After a bitterly cold and cruel winter, when an inadequately provisioned army had shivered and died, the time had come. 1855 was to be the year they were sure, for a quick and decisive victory, which would be inevitable once Sebastopol had been taken.

The British were to attack a defensive feature called the Redan, against which their efforts had been directed throughout the summer of 1855. The French were to attack a defensive redoubt called the Malakoff.

The Russians came under heavy bombardment for three days prior to the assault. Over 13,000 shells were fired, though to little effect. When the British troops launched their attack at dawn on 8 September 1855, the defences were still intact. The Russian fire was very heavy but British troops still managed to fight their way into the Redan using scaling ladders. The dead and wounded were falling down these ladders as others fought their way up, so it was impossible to get soldiers on to the Russian parapet in sufficient numbers.

One of the first officers into the Redan was Lieutenant Charles Lumley. As he reached the parapet, he could see three Russian gunners reloading their field gun. He attacked them single-handed.

You can read his citation for the Victoria Cross in the National Archive, as it appeared in the London Gazette in February 1857.

> *he…immediately engaged with three Russian gunners…he shot two of them with his revolver, when he was knocked down by a stone, which stunned him for a moment, but, on recovery, he drew his sword, and was in the act of cheering the men on, when he received a ball in the mouth, which wounded him most severely.*

The stone that hit him was most likely to have been a handful of cannon shot, thrown by a desperate Russian who had no time to load his gun. It obviously worked, for it knocked Lumley to the ground. Perhaps it gave him time then to load his gun. The subsequent bullet in the mouth was, of course, most effective.

It was a severe wound, although not fatal, and he was taken back from the Redan to the British lines for treatment.

The rest of the troops withdrew in confusion, despite the best efforts of their officers to rally them, and the Russians held the Redan. The French attack on the Malakoff however, was successful, which did little for British morale.

Charles Lumley was sent home on 29 September 1855. It was up to others now to play out the final few months of stalemate.

Bravery and suffering cut little ice. Although Charles' actions had been recognised and he was promoted to major, he was still put on half-pay until he could find a new position. But, along with the others decorated for their heroism on that day at the Redan, Lumley attended the first VC investiture in Hyde Park in London on 26 June 1857. He was a hero just like the others. But his wound had changed him; he was a much-troubled man.

He was appointed to the 23rd Regiment of the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1858 and was stationed in Brecon. The appointment did not prosper. He found the work difficult and felt that

administrative duties prevented him from being an effective commanding officer. He became eccentric and hot-tempered. Matters suddenly came to a head on Sunday 17 October 1858.

He had had a difficult weekend. On the Saturday he had been behaving oddly. He called his adjutant Richard Davies to his room on a number of occasions, but each time there was nothing that he wanted. In the afternoon he and Letitia had planned to ride, but the groom was not available. He flew into an enormous rage. Later when Davies brought him tea, he refused to drink it and instead walked round and round the barrack square. He was still there when Davies went to bed at 10.00 pm.

On the Sunday morning he was still behaving oddly. Davies said later, '*He was looking at me in a very strange manner. His look that morning frightened me.'*

Mrs Lumley went off to church, as did Davies. Charles was not there when they returned. Letitia noticed that his pistol was missing. She sent Davies to look for him.

He didn't have to go far.

Lumley was in the toilet with the door closed, though not locked. He was lying on his left side, holding the pistol in his left hand. He had clearly turned his head to the left and shot himself '*two inches behind the right ear.'* A single pistol ball was recovered from his brain. Although he was not dead when Davies found him, he died a few hours later.

An inquest was held on the 25 October which decided that he had taken his life '*whilst labouring under temporary insanity'*. Obviously, his mind was disturbed. But the inquest couldn't work out why,

When you look at his story it is clear that the events at the Redan had changed him. A serious head wound had caused a black cloud to settle over Charles Lumley that would not go away.

He felt compelled to complete what the Russians had started

three years before.

It is not only here in Wales that he is remembered. His name appears on Letitia's headstone in Bath, where she lived until she died in 1890. Her husband is still in Brecon, where he fell.

Charles Lumley VC was buried with full military honours in the churchyard of Brecon Cathedral. You will find his tomb quite easily if you look in the north east corner of the churchyard. Walk along the path that the children use and look up to the boundary wall.

Charles Lumley. Wounded at Sebastopol. Died in Brecon.