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RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Aspire, persevere and indulge not’: new wealth and gentry society in Wales, c. 1760–1840

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Abstract

This article examines the various ways new wealth infiltrated the Welsh gentry during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, considering the behaviours and actions of new men, together with the processes they followed to assimilate into the world of the old families. This study emphasises a level of openness of landed society to new arrivals able to comport themselves according to the expectations of the existing social elite. It demonstrates that acquiring land and property, which served as a visible display of their wealth, was only one strategy deployed by new wealth to secure gentry status. Other approaches included building country houses, consuming fashionable goods, undertaking public duties, political representation, drawing on culture and living heritage by projecting an image of ancient lineage (Welsh gentry understanding of Welshness was heavily reliant on lineage) through name-changing, adopting coats of arms and family mottos.

Introduction

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many landed estates in Britain were acquired by men who had few or no links with the elite. These men had, however, succeeded in generating sufficient wealth to attempt to assimilate into the ranks of old families. While landownership was seen as a sensible economic investment, providing security and a means of protecting fortunes, a landed estate was also a visible marker of an individual's wealth and status. As Michael W. McCahill explains: ‘the estate with its country house was the owner's domain, the symbol of his social superiority.’¹ In this context, purchasing a landed estate proved an attractive prospect to newly wealthy individuals with ambitions of joining elite society. John Habakkuk drew attention to the diverse variety of new men who purchased landed estates in England during the two hundred years following the Restoration.² They included politicians, merchants, bankers and money-lenders, soldiers, sailors, eminent architects, diplomats, successful doctors, industrialists, those involved in government finance, ecclesiastics, war contractors, lawyers, nabobs, and West Indians.³ In Wales, merchants, bankers, industrialists, and imperialists were prominent among the newly wealthy.

For years the traditional view that English landed society was open to newcomers prevailed.⁴ However, this interpretation was challenged in the 1980s by Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone.⁵ Based on a survey of three English counties of varying nature (Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Northumberland) and focusing on the county elite (i.e., landowners of estates encompassing more than two thousand acres), as opposed to the smaller parish gentry, the Stones concluded that the concept of an open elite was no more than a ‘hoary myth’. Others such as John Cannon, J. C. D. Clark, and Edward Royle similarly inferred that the landed

elite was a largely closed group.⁶ Nonetheless, the Stones' thesis was called into question, most notably by David and Eileen Spring, who argued the data presented by the Stones could be interpreted in order to prove the existence of an open elite.⁷ Indeed, the boundary between the 'upper middling sort' and the minor gentry could be fluid, as argued by Amanda Vickery.⁸

While much has been written about the degree of openness of the elite in England, the purchase of landed estates in Wales by new wealth is an under-researched area in the historiography. References are made in studies of the Welsh gentry to estates being purchased by newly wealthy individuals, including the works of Peter R. Roberts, Philip Jenkins, David W. Howell, Melvin Humphreys, and Leslie Baker-Jones, and although Jenkins made significant contributions to the debate through a series of articles focused on the case study area of Glamorgan, there yet remains a comprehensive examination.⁹ While there is scope for a statistical survey of patterns of landholding in Wales, in order to determine the degree Welsh gentry society was open to newcomers, this article will focus on examining the various ways new wealth infiltrated the Welsh gentry. The behaviours and actions of new men, together with the processes they followed to assimilate into the world of the old families, will be analysed. Patterns emerge through a focused study of a sample of new families who acquired landed estates in Wales during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The study shows a level of openness of landed society to new arrivals able to comport themselves according to the expectations of the existing social elite, and demonstrates that securing land and property was only one of the strategies deployed by new wealth to secure gentry status. In sum, this article seeks to develop and extend the discussion of how new families behaved in their new social surroundings by focusing on Wales, with its own cultural context, as a case study, thereby adding to the social mobility debate.

The case study: Wales

At the beginning of the period of study, Wales was largely rural and agrarian, but was to witness rapid economic and industrial development. The pace of industrial change in Wales quickened during the eighteenth century, with the introduction of new technologies, the influx of capital from England with fortunes invested in new industrial enterprises, and the impact of war (the Seven Years' War, American War of Independence, French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars) stimulating demand. These factors precipitated major industrial and economic changes in Wales, with a growing population, urbanisation, changes in agriculture, expansion in trade, outside investment, improvement in communication, services, and trading leading to economic growth.¹⁰ From 1750, the population of Wales was growing, due to an increasing birth rate, and influx of migrants drawn by employment opportunities in the newly emerging industries. The population of Wales in 1750 was estimated to be c. 489,000, rising to c. 530,000 in 1780, and by the time of the first census in 1801, reaching 587,000. The counties of Denbigh, Flint, Glamorgan, and Monmouth saw the largest population growth, coinciding with economic development in these areas. It is estimated that at the start of the nineteenth century, 80 per cent of the people of Wales lived in rural areas. Into the nineteenth century, with the emergence of industry, agriculture became a declining feature of the Welsh economy. Nonetheless, agriculture remained a significant element in Welsh life, as a source of the majority of the growing population's food, but also, the ownership of land providing a source of power and position in social and political life.¹¹

Within this context, the status of the landed interest in Wales was secure. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the gentry dominated Welsh society, local politics, and the church, as Philip Jenkins remarks: '[t]heir ancient mansions and parks provide a visual symbol for this long continuity, and helped give gentry rule an aura of inevitability.'¹² John Davies describes '[t]he century after 1660 was a golden age for the members of the landed class', as landlords of great estates enhanced their landholding at the expense of smaller squires.¹³ Into the nineteenth century, Wales continued to be predominantly a nation of a few large estates, but mostly of

small- to medium-sized estates, dominated by a number of mainly gentry families and some nobles (there were fewer peers in Wales in comparison with its neighbour, England). The latter included the Cawdor family of Stackpole Court, Pembrokeshire, and Golden Grove, Carmarthenshire, the Morgan family of Tredegar, Monmouthshire, the Marquesses of Bute in Cardiff, the Pryse family of Gogerddan, Cardiganshire, the Vaughan family of Trawscoed, Cardiganshire, the Wynn family who held land in Montgomeryshire, Merionethshire, and Denbighshire, and the Pennant family of Penrhyn Castle, Caernarfonshire. Regional variation could be seen, with estates in the south-east growing rich from mineral rights as industrial enterprises flourished. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *Return of Owners of Land* (1873) concluded that 571 substantial estates of more than one thousand acres occupied over 60 per cent of the land of Wales.¹⁴ However, while the influence of the landed interest continued in Wales into the nineteenth century, estate ownership was changing as new families emerged, including those with no prior connections with the gentry. Philip Jenkins has published on the demographic decline of the old Glamorgan gentry families and the creation of a new gentry community.¹⁵ Jenkins argues that between the early sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible to identify 'two distinct patterns of continuity': old families who held power within their local communities during the Tudor and Stuart eras who 'fell into almost total eclipse by 1750', and the gentry who emerged between 1760 and 1810 who owned estates in Glamorgan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁶ Although many were newcomers, in order to project an image of antiquity and sense of belonging to the locality, Jenkins argues that new families deliberately cultivated 'local history and tradition, either scholarly or mythical', and adopted ancient names to try to disguise any breaks in lineage.¹⁷

New wealth in Wales

There is clear evidence to show that landed estates in Wales were acquired by a variety of newly wealthy individuals. Many came from England and Scotland, suggesting that Wales may have been seen as a more affordable place to establish oneself. There were a few instances of Welsh estates being purchased with imperial wealth, for example, Sir William Paxton (c. 1744–1824, knighted in 1803), a native of Scotland who purchased the Middleton Hall estate in Carmarthenshire. The son of a clerk, Paxton was born in Edinburgh but spent much of his early life in London before joining the Royal Navy at twelve years of age. He sailed to India as an officer on a private British merchant ship, eventually becoming Master of the Calcutta Mint and setting up a successful agency house, Paxton, Cockerell and Trail. In 1789 he purchased the Middleton Hall estate for around £40,000.¹⁸ Another East India Company man, Thomas Philipps (c. 1749–1824), the son of a Pembrokeshire tanner, also purchased a Carmarthenshire estate. Philipps had travelled to India c. 1768–70 and rose through the ranks to become Head Surgeon with the East India Company. Having invested £25,000 in the Company's funds by 1800, on his retirement a few years later he was awaiting a substantial pension. Philipps left India in January 1805, lodging in London while his newly purchased country house at Aberglasney was being prepared for his arrival, which eventually took place in April 1807.¹⁹ Among the most powerful and influential of the returned East India Company men was Walter Wilkins (1741–1828). Wilkins became first Governor of Chittagong province and Member of the Supreme Council of Bengal. He returned to Wales in 1772 and used his Indian wealth to purchase Maesllwch Castle in Radnorshire. His substantial fortune, which on his death in 1828 amounted to around £250,000, made him one of the richest men in Wales. Through his links with the East India Company's Court of Directors, he helped several local men forge the relevant Company links and secure their passage out to India, proving he held much sway in the local community.²⁰

From the West Indies, the merchant Nathaniel Phillips (1730–1813) purchased the mortgaged Slebech estate in Pembrokeshire. Born the illegitimate son of a merchant from Mile End, in 1759

he followed in his father's footsteps to the Caribbean, where he became a planter and benefited from a prudent marriage to the heiress of the Pleasant Hill sugar plantation in St Thomas, Jamaica.²¹ Also from the West Indies came Edward Hamlin Adams (1777–1842). Born in Kingston, Jamaica, he was educated in England but returned to Kingston where he trained in the law, becoming a partner in the counting house of Atkinson, Mure, and Boyle in 1807. His granddaughter, the author Violet Paget (writing under the *nom de plume* Vernon Lee), suspected he had made his fortune 'by questionable commercial practices during the Napoleonic wars'.²² Records show he was involved in the contracting of enslaved labour in Jamaica where he also managed coffee estates on behalf of the absentee Earl of Balcarres.²³ Adams purchased the aforementioned Middleton Hall estate in 1824 following the death of Sir William Paxton.²⁴ Stephanie Barczewski has shown there was a sharp increase in the number of country houses purchased by imperial wealth across Britain between 1760 and 1810. Mid- and south Wales saw more connections with empire, with Radnorshire in particular attracting returned Company men. Comparatively, there were no such purchases in Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, Flintshire, or Merionethshire.²⁵

In addition to those who had profited through imperial projects, individuals who had grown rich through the professions, administration, and trade purchased landed estates in Wales. For example, Rowley Lascelles (1807–1895), called to the bar at the Inner Temple, later secured Pencraig, while another Cardiganshire property, Peterwell, was bought by another legal man, Albanny Wallis (1713–1800), a successful lawyer from London who practiced off the Strand at Norfolk Street.²⁶ Peterwell was again sold during the early nineteenth century, this time to a wealthy Bristol merchant involved in West Indian trade, who later in 1794 became a banker, Richard Hart-Davis (1766–1842). Hart-Davis had generated fortunes amounting to £200,000 by 1810, and was rumoured to be worth up to £500,000 at the very peak of his wealth.²⁷ Another banker from England who secured a Welsh estate was Sir Benjamin Hammett (d. 1800), when around 1792 he purchased from the Penygored Company the Castell Malgwyn estate, in Pembrokeshire, complete with ironworks on site.²⁸ There were other industrialists from beyond Wales, such as Peter Birt (b. 1723), of Airmyn Hall, Yorkshire. A merchant, he later made substantial profits through the Aire and Calder Navigation in Yorkshire, which allowed him to purchase several substantial boats on the Navigation and coal mines in the West Riding. Birt purchased the Wenvoe Estate, near Cardiff, for £41,000 in 1774 from the Thomas family, who were forced to sell to settle their debts.²⁹ As well as investing heavily in mines in Glamorgan, the industrialist Chauncey Townsend (1708–1770) bought the Gwern-Llwyn-Chwith estate near Swansea and in 1750 built a new house on the site.³⁰ Sir Joseph Bailey (1783–1858, baronet 1852) amassed a considerable fortune through his iron works in south-east Wales and purchased multiple estates in Glamorgan, Breconshire, Radnorshire, and Herefordshire, taking up residence at Glanusk Park, where he lived the remainder of his life following retirement in 1830.³¹ Jenkins argues that due to Wales having undergone industrialisation early, many of the newly wealthy industrialist families had emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century and forged social contacts within gentry society. He draws attention to marriage alliances between old and new families, and industrialists undertaking public duties and holding parliamentary seats. He suggests the old and new families possessed a shared 'ethos of landownership'.³² In north Wales, Gabriel Davies (1757–1828) made his fortune as a wholesale hosier in Bala, and his son John Davies (1781–1848), a wealthy grocer himself, described by Richard Fenton in his *Tours of Wales* as the 'son of the great Stocking Merchant of Bala', inherited the bulk of his father's wealth. The son made an advantageous marriage to Jonnett, daughter of John Jones, Tŷ'n-y-Ddôl, who gave permission for the couple to build a new country house on his land. Fronheulog was built c. 1813.³³

As seen in the case of John Davies, a shrewd marriage was another means of acquiring land. Due to a demographic crisis in the eighteenth century, with an increasing number of gentry families failing to produce male heirs, future prospects were aligned with heiress.³⁴ The newly wealthy saw marriage to members of the gentry as a means of establishing themselves in society. As was

often the case in such unions, newly acquired wealth could save an impoverished gentry family, while genteel status was conferred on the ambitious newcomer. Welsh estates did indeed pass into the hands of the newly wealthy through marriage, as occurred at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch in Merionethshire in 1789 when the heiress, Margaret Griffiths (d. 1809), married the newly wealthy William Oakley (d. 1811), son of the Reverend William Oakley, from Forton, Staffordshire.³⁵

As well as a means of securing an estate, marriage was also seen as a way for successive generations of the family to integrate into gentry society. The previously mentioned Edward Hamlin Adams instructed his son of the importance of a good marriage and the financial benefits it could bring: 'One single marriage makes up to you the difference & replenishes your circumstances, if ever misfortune or indiscretion surprises you.'³⁶ Heeding his father's advice, Edward Abadam secured matches with local gentry families from Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire for his children, while a grandson, Ryle Morris, married into European aristocracy when Countess Alice Margit, the daughter of the Count and Countess Hoyos of Castle Soos, Austria, became his wife.³⁷ The two surviving children from the second marriage of Nathaniel Phillips of Slebech also married into noble families, Louisa Catherine Phillips marrying Lord Anson who later became Earl of Lichfield, and Mary Dorothea Phillips marrying Charles Frederick, the Baron de Rutzen, of Courland, Riga (part of the Russian Empire), who would set up home at Slebech.³⁸

Symbols of status: the country house

The most visible, dramatic, and expensive means of displaying gentry status was through the country house. It stood as a visible and lasting legacy of the owner's achievements and success. In his study of small classical houses of the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world, Stephen Hague explores how newly wealthy individuals used these structures 'to construct social position and identity', asserting how considering them as an element of the 'consumer revolution' reinforces their central role in the process of status creation.³⁹ Barbara Burlison Mooney provides a useful comparison with the Virginia colony in America when describing how families attempted to cement their comparatively newly established and precarious social status through architectural and material display.⁴⁰ Purchasing a landed estate with an existing suitable mansion was preferable. New men were often well into middle age before they were in the position to reap the rewards of their fortune. Immediately moving into their new home with little time-consuming alterations or rebuilding work was the ideal scenario. The former East India Company surgeon Thomas Philips returned to south-west Wales following over thirty years overseas. At nearly sixty years of age by the time he moved into his newly acquired country house at Aberglasney, a ready home merely requiring cosmetic work would prove an attractive prospect to a late purchaser.⁴¹ Alan Wilson and Richard Mackley explain how newcomers purchased modestly sized estates, and if they had dynastic ambitions, these estates were often enhanced and expanded by successive generations, a practice long adopted by the social group they were emulating.⁴² While Thomas Philipps left no legitimate heirs, his nephew inherited Aberglasney on his uncle's death in 1825, and, in keeping with the vogue for building and rebuilding, made considerable additions to the house, including a substantial portico with Ionic columns.⁴³

The building of a new mansion was often costly and time consuming. On purchasing the Peterwell estate, the Harford family did not take up residence at the mansion, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, having been unoccupied for several years. Instead, a new mansion, Falcondale, was built nearby on the site of another estate they had purchased locally.⁴⁴ Some older houses were replaced by new, more fashionable ones. Sir Benjamin Hammet replaced the earlier house at Castell Malgwyn with a three-story Georgian residence c. 1795.⁴⁵ Similarly, the Oakley family rebuilt the Tan-y-Bwlch mansion at Maentwrog, being the centre of the estate, which spanned from Llanelltyd to Pwllheli.⁴⁶

Employing a well-known architect to design the new house added a certain degree of status, such as when William Paxton commissioned Samuel Pepys Cockerell to design a new mansion at Middleton Hall in the neoclassical style, which was built between 1793 and 1795. Cockerell famously designed houses for other East India Company men, most notably the Gloucestershire houses of Daylesford for Warren Hastings (built 1790–6), and Sezincote House for his own brother, Colonel Charles Cockerell (built in 1805).⁴⁷ Tillman Nechtman describes how most Company men preferred neoclassical or Palladian houses, choosing to conform to the fashions of the day to assimilate into elite society.⁴⁸ Accounts vary, but Robert Adam has been suggested as the architect of the newly designed Wenvoe Castle, commissioned by the new owner, Peter Birt, and built 1776–7. Henry Holland, the son-in-law of Capability Brown, is another potential candidate, although letters between Birt and the surveyor of the building work at Wenvoe, Thomas Roberts, seem to suggest that the latter was in fact the architect. Notably, Roberts referred to ‘his’ sketches when reporting the building of the kitchen, and declared: ‘nothing but death should prevent me executing [*sic*] my plan.’ His letters present a detailed account of the process of building Wenvoe Castle.⁴⁹

Within the country house, new men could project their cultural capital through their libraries. Mark Girouard writes of the increasing importance during the eighteenth century for gentlemen to present a cultivated image, as ‘culture became an essential part of the image of a worthy ruling class.’⁵⁰ The country house demonstrated the culture of its owner, through its architecture, with neoclassical styles, displays of art collections and furniture, but also through a library well stocked with classical works – these provided methods for new men to display their cultural capital.

The gardens surrounding the country house were also of significance when considering the manner by which new families attempted to convey a gentrified image, as Tom Williamson explains: ‘gardens, like houses, were certainly expressions of wealth and status.’⁵¹ Paxton had built an innovative double-walled garden in sight of his new mansion at Middleton Hall and set about an extensive scheme to establish a pleasure park. This picturesque landscape was later captured in the watercolour paintings of Thomas Horner. Commissioned by Paxton, Horner visited Middleton Hall in 1815 to paint a series of landscapes of the lavish parkland, complete with water features and bathhouses.⁵²

In addition to laying out new gardens, enacting agricultural improvement was also a symbol of social status. Given the varied geography of Wales, with terrain ranging from plains to mountains, newly wealthy purchasers of land were faced with various opportunities, but also challenges. William Oakley oversaw extensive drainage schemes on the marshy lands of the Tan-y-Bwlch estate, as well as other agricultural improvements locally, notably regulating pasture and arable lands, for which he was awarded a gold medal by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts. Oakley’s improvements garnered much admiration from other estate owners. Following his tour of Wales, Sir Christopher Sykes of Sledmere, Yorkshire, praised the work undertaken by Oakley, claiming he was ‘of infinite use to this Country by showing the Welsh Gentlemen what their Country is capable of.’⁵³ Purchasing a landed estate could be a shrewd economic investment by providing further income revenue. There were also opportunities for families to expand their landholding through the process of enclosure.⁵⁴ In Merionethshire, John Davies enclosed and developed the land surrounding his newly built house of Fronheulog into an estate.⁵⁵ The country house, surrounding parkland, and estate represented the new wealth of the individual, and encapsulated their ambitions of acquiring gentry status.

Indicators of wealth: consumption

Consumption provided opportunities to showcase wealth and status. Thorstein Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption focused on the display of spending on luxury goods as a way of exhibiting social status, and explored the emulation of the consumption patterns of social superiors.⁵⁶

Veblen posited that through ownership of property came status.⁵⁷ Paul Langford wrote of the fierce competition that emerged, and how display of wealth, landholding, and property could be highly advantageous, leading to prosperous marriages or the formation of links with other landed families.⁵⁸ Colin Campbell analysed the theory that consumers purchased goods in order to mimic their social superiors in an attempt to become social equals, arguing that too much emphasis had been placed on Veblen's ideas of conspicuous consumption.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu, who did much to shape thinking in the field, suggested that aesthetic taste and cultural capital were marks of distinction that could cement one's social status.⁶⁰ This idea has been developed by Lorna Weatherill, who challenges the ideals of conspicuous consumption and argues that emulating those of higher social rank was not the only motive behind the purchase of luxury goods. Items may of course have been purchased purely on the basis that the buyer desired or needed these items.⁶¹

Some historians suggest this theory of emulation began with the elite themselves as a way of guarding the privileges of their own rank from newcomers.⁶² More recently, Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery's analysis of consumption sees the country house as a produce of everyday life as much as of conspicuous consumption. The country house was also a family home, and consumption, be it luxury or every day, could in addition offer pleasure and comfort.⁶³ With reference to John Cornforth's work on comfort, Jon Stobart and Cristina Prytz note the significance of purchasing specific types of furniture and the importance of arrangement to create polite but informal social settings. They draw attention to the duality of the country house, as a site of informal sociability, but also how its very structure symbolised wealth, power, and status.⁶⁴

New men would endeavour to create social settings befitting their wealth and status ambitions, and one way of achieving this was to adorn their homes with luxury goods. With new men wanting to 'buy themselves into land and leisure', the purchase of luxury goods was considered a symbol of one's elevated social status.⁶⁵ Such items delivered from London, all the way to Wales, were themselves marks of distinction, and a signifier of the individual's taste. At Aberglasney, items bought from London ranged from curtains, carpets, and wallpaper, to vast quantities of silverware, china, and glass. The Philipps family's initials and crest were engraved upon these items as a method of stamping the family's identity on the newly acquired house. One letter in particular is most revealing of Thomas Philipps's exacting nature when adorning his newly purchased country house. Philipps had written to Messrs Savory, Farrard, and Sheldrick, goldsmith, jewellers, and cutlers in Cheapside, London, notifying them of the damage to a pair of urns during transportation to Aberglasney, in addition to an error in the order:

I am also much concerned to observe that my directions about the Hot water plates & Doom [sic] Covers have been wholly misunderstood. I mentioned perticular [sic] that they would occasionally be used to bring vegetables [sic] warm on Table, as well as employed for warm Toast or Muffin. Those you have sent me are too small a great deal and will scarcely hold one muffin. I want them of the size of one of the largest Table Plates, with a Doom [sic] in proportion, fit to bring a lot of Kidney Beans, Peas, or a small Colliflower [sic], or a plate of Asparagus on Table, as occasion might require as well as Toast & Butter, or Muffin.⁶⁶

Philipps's concerns at receiving the incorrect order may have stemmed from his desire to project an image of himself as a man of taste. Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart in their study of the display, acquisition, and boundaries of luxury and taste explain how the newly wealthy learnt how to select, exhibit, and utilise luxury goods effectively in order to cultivate an aura of good taste.⁶⁷ A retired Company man with humble roots as the son of a Pembrokeshire tanner, Philipps would need to conform to polite social etiquette in order to infiltrate into local gentry society, and one way was through the display of wealth and taste through dinnerware. However, returning Company men were noted for their indulgence in consumerism, portrayed as 'the unscrupulous East Indian with an insatiable lust for riches'.⁶⁸ With the growing suspicion of nabobs, and mainly

the source of their wealth, coupled with the high-profile impeachment trial of Warren Hastings for misconduct and corruption, it is no wonder that Company men adopted more traditional styles in an attempt to conform and fit in to gentry society. The detailed plans outlining Philipps's desired dining ware shows an exacting nature and a clear vision of how the food was to be presented, emphasising the aesthetic importance of the presentation of the fare. Philipps was attempting to cultivate an image of himself as a gentleman of taste, hosting successful dinner parties, building this identity in his newly purchased country house.⁶⁹ By engaging in consumption, new men attempted to fit in by projecting visible symbols of their wealth as indicators of taste. This could also have long-term impact into the next generation, as descendants continued to utilise the luxury goods and wares of their newly wealthy ancestors, as an ongoing display of the family's wealth and taste. On the death of John Hammet, Castell Malgwyn, whose father had purchased the estate, a notice for the sale by public auction of his effects described the items to be sold, which included the entire household furniture, pier and chimney glass, mirrors, French clocks and candelabras, an organ, Aeolian harp, a 'library of books, in elegant bindings', along with 'a superb drawing-room suit of rich orange silk hangings, sofas, and chairs . . . Brussels carpet, in good condition'.⁷⁰

The display of status: politics, public duties, and charitable bequests

Beyond the country house and estate, there were opportunities for newly wealthy individuals to undertake the traditional public duties of the gentry. Some represented their borough or county in parliament. Walter Wilkins, on his return home, could rely on the support of the East India Company networks he had forged in Breconshire and Radnorshire. Wilkins represented the county of Radnorshire for thirty-two years, from 1796 until his death in 1828.⁷¹ In an appeal to electors in 1820, Wilkins advocated an accepted narrative of Britain's constitutional tradition, upheld by the landed interest, by declaring his continued support of 'the true Interests of our common Country'.⁷² Fellow Company man, Sir William Paxton's first foray into Carmarthenshire politics was in 1802, the year of the infamous *Lecsiwn Fawr* (The Great Election), one of the most ferociously fought elections in the county's history. As the newcomer to the county, Paxton faced considerable competition from his opponent, the Tory James Hamlyn Williams, whose family, although originally from Clovelly Court, Devon, had acquired the Edwinsford estate through marriage to an heiress. Hamlyn Williams eventually defeated Paxton by 1,217 to 1,100 votes.⁷³ Election campaigns were notoriously expensive, with county elections generally proving more costly than borough elections due to the greater number of electors and larger geographical area.⁷⁴ Large sums of money were spent by candidates of new and established wealth, as in the case of Lord Cawdor, who spent over £12,500 in an attempt to elect his son for Pembrokeshire in 1812.⁷⁵ Following the 1802 election, Paxton was billed for 11,070 breakfasts, 36,901 dinners, 6,842 suppers, a staggering 25,275 gallons of ale and porter, 11,074 bottles of spirits, 8,879 bottles of porter, 4,060 bottles of sherry, 509 bottles of cider, £18 18 s. worth of milk punch, £54 worth of mulled wine, and 4,521 horse hire items.⁷⁶ Paxton's Indian wealth was formidable, allowing him to treat voters in the hope of securing their votes, and did indeed prove a challenge to his opponent. The resentment felt by the Williams family is clear, with references made in private correspondence exchanged during the election campaign to 'the defeat of the Nabob'.⁷⁷ Paxton's Indian wealth did eventually help him secure a seat in parliament when in 1803 he was elected the Carmarthen borough member unopposed. However, there is strong evidence to suggest he purchased the seat from the sitting member, his supporter in the 1802 election, John George Philipps of Cwmgwili, demonstrating how East Indian wealth could help further a political career.⁷⁸

Traditionally, wealthy gentlemen desiring to avoid incurring the costs of parliamentary elections chose to undertake what G. E. Mingay described as 'the more modest offices of justice, sheriff or coroner'.⁷⁹ While the burden of expenses rendered the role of High Sheriff a less attractive

prospect, it did provide opportunities for new men to further their social status in the locality.⁸⁰ Having acted as Thomas Philipps's under sheriff, his nephew and heir, John Walters (who later, under the terms of his uncle's will, adopted the Philipps name) became High Sheriff himself in 1841. He was billed £10 by George Grant Francis, Carriage and Harness Manufacturer, Swansea for a new pair of silk Sheriff banners adorned with armorial bearings, cords, and tassels.⁸¹ Nonetheless, as Cragoe states, securing a 'place in the Commission of the Peace was a more definite sign of social acceptance than having served as High Sheriff'.⁸² A greater proportion of new men in this study served in local offices as opposed to standing for election to parliament, demonstrating how many chose to focus their energies on the local level as opposed to Westminster.

Another way of displaying status was through charitable bequests. Donating money and gifts to the poor, establishing charity schools, and supporting local and national charities were all ways of radiating a benevolent and paternalistic image. Newspapers ensured that such benevolence was promoted by printing lists of subscribers to charities. Peter Shapely argues how involvement in charity cultivated an aura of benevolence, care, and concern, suggesting a moral worthiness, which in turn conferred a higher degree of status.⁸³ The importance of *noblesse oblige* to social leadership was of particular relevance to the newly wealthy, and highlighted how wealth alone would not automatically bestow status. Undertaking philanthropic duties was therefore important to elevating one's station in society.⁸⁴ A. J. Kidd outlines the 'calculated generosity' whereby philanthropic acts were undertaken, not to acquire riches, but to secure power and status. By making charitable bequests, one could build a reputation and establish oneself as a benevolent individual in society.⁸⁵ Kidd draws attention to the power dynamics at play and how the 'general inability of those aided by charity to reciprocate not only created a potential condition of dependency, but, crucially, left the charitable alone in control of the gift as a social mechanism'.⁸⁶ With news of the death of Sir Joseph Bailey of Glanusk Park, the *Monmouthshire Merlin* declared that the town of Crickhowell 'was thrown into gloom', with all the shops 'closed as a mark of respect to the deceased gentleman'. Tribute was paid to Sir Joseph's philanthropy and the locality's dependency on his and Lady Bailey's aid: 'His loss will be greatly felt in this town and the different parishes in the locality, particularly by the poor and needy, to whom Sir Joseph and Lady Bailey were always ready to render assistance.'⁸⁷

Within the framework of the 'urban renaissance' of the eighteenth century, as identified by Peter Borsay, it is possible to see the involvement of new men of wealth in urban development. Indeed, urban centres across Wales were developed through the benefaction of newly wealthy landowners who used urban development as a means to make their mark on the local community. John Scandrett Harford of Blaise Castle, near Bristol, was the son-in-law of the Bristol banker Richard Hart Davies, who had purchased the Peterwell estate in Cardiganshire in 1812. Through this connection, Harford secured Peterwell in 1821. During his time as landlord, he enacted several improvement schemes on the estate and within the wider community, notably in the borough of Lampeter. Cottage allotments were created, and a water supply was brought into the town. Significantly, in 1820 Harford donated three acres of land, known as Castle Field, for the building of St David's College, and funded open scholarships. Although an absentee landlord, his charitable duties secured him an invitation by the Tory faction to represent Cardigan borough during the election of 1849.⁸⁸ Also in Cardiganshire, Reverend Alban Thomas Jones (1751–1819), former Rector of Nately Scures and Newnham, Hampshire, and his heiress wife Susannah Maria (1754–1830), through their benefaction, aided the development of the town of Aberaeron, rebuilding the harbour, erecting a school house, and building cottages within the town.⁸⁹ Rosemary Sweet draws attention to the rapid development of ports and dockyards during the eighteenth century, which was often stimulated by trade.⁹⁰ William Madocks, the son of a barrister, purchased the Tan-yr-Allt estate in Merionethshire in 1798 and developed nearby Porthmadog and Tremadog, building roads and raising tolls, in addition to enacting a large scale reclamation scheme at Traeth Mawr following an Act of Parliament in 1807, and in 1811 building a road to enable its crossing.⁹¹

The elites played a key role in the development of the English spa and seaside resorts, and indeed this was also true of Wales, with the seaside resorts of Tenby, Aberystwyth, Swansea, and later Llandudno enjoying the benefices of local gentry families.⁹² This environment provided the rich and ambitious new families the opportunity to display their benevolence, and to mix with elite society. Rachael Johnson draws attention to the diversity of social ranks visiting fashionable watering places, and while resorts aimed to attract elite patronage, it was indeed the support of the growing middling orders that helped these centres thrive.⁹³ Paxton was involved in the regeneration of the seaside town of Tenby, helping to turn it into a fashionable resort for the gentry at the turn of the nineteenth century. Among his main developments was the building of a bathhouse, which opened in 1810 ‘for the convenience [*sic*] of the Gentry and others who visit this charming Bathing Place’.⁹⁴ Paxton also funded the building of new roads and was responsible for bringing a fresh water supply to the inhabitants of Tenby.⁹⁵ This was not the first instance of such a scheme, as during his time as Mayor of Carmarthen, he was responsible for bringing a new piped water supply to that town.⁹⁶

Markers of status: names and naming

There were also symbolic motifs that displayed social status. It was to instil the image of continuity of lineage that many families changed their names. Although Lawrence Stone and Eileen Spring debated the significance of name changing, both agreed that the practice could be interpreted, as described by Spring, as ‘aristocratic window-dressing’.⁹⁷ The reasons the landed elite changed family names were varied. It could be an attempt to disguise the fact there was no male heir and that a daughter had inherited the family seat.⁹⁸ When in 1797 the Reverend Alban Thomas married his cousin, Susannah Maria Jones, the heiress to the Tyglyn estate in Cardiganshire, he adopted the Jones family name to maintain an air of continuity of lineage. The Reverend later inherited the Mynachty estate after his cousin Lewis Gwynne, and subsequently adopted another additional name, that of Gwynne, to become the Reverend Alban Thomas Jones Gwynne.⁹⁹ Sometimes name changing was instigated by ambitious new men whose daughters married into the landed gentry and wished to see their family name cemented within the elite.

Another motive was an attempt to revive the family name, for example, a son inheriting his mother’s estate and adopting her maiden name, which was the original family name associated with the estate.¹⁰⁰ A subtle change of the family name could align new families with older, established families. Newly wealthy families sometimes changed their family name because of a supposed link with noble lineage, for example, Thomas Philipps who purchased the Aberglasney estate, altered the spelling of his surname from ‘Phillips’ to ‘Philipps’. The newly adopted spelling suggested a link with the aristocratic families of Cwmgwili, Cilsant, and Coedgain in Carmarthenshire, and Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire.¹⁰¹ At Middleton Hall, Edward Hamlin Adams’s eldest son and heir changed the family name by adopting the prefix ‘ab’ by legal deed poll on 9th October 1851. In the family history compiled by Edward Hamlin Adams, Edward Abadam later added a note at the beginning of the manuscript: ‘Now, February 1860, having proved our noble descent through Lord Abadam and the long use of that name in our own Family I have resumed to sign it Edw. Abadam 14th July 1863.’¹⁰² Another example of name changing among a newly wealthy family can be found at Maesllwch in Radnorshire. The grandson of the East India Company man Walter Wilkins, also named Walter Wilkins, obtained a Royal licence on 6th July 1839 to change the name Wilkins to de Winton, believing this was the ancient name of the family.¹⁰³ As Jenkins explains: ‘for the new ruling class, newness was politically damaging, while antiquity could be a considerable asset.’¹⁰⁴

The Welsh gentry placed great stock on noble lineage. The fascination with pedigree and lineage had prevailed in Wales for centuries, however, genealogical activities intensified during the

nineteenth century. The publication of Burke's *Landed Gentry* generated even more interest, along with antiquarian works, such as *The Myvyrian Archaeology* (published in three volumes, 1801–07) and Lewis Dwnn's *Heraldic Visitations of Wales* (1846). While these writings helped to bring genealogy to a wider audience, a few contemporaries wanted to see genealogy treated as a historical science, especially in light of the emergence of suspect and invented pedigrees drawn up during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In the preface to Dwnn's *Heraldic Visitations*, the editor, Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, declared he was confident that forgery was a rare phenomenon that hardly ever occurred, and even then, only in some rare instances, believing that overall the pedigrees were accurate in their claims.¹⁰⁶ However, it seems that the formation of such pedigrees was a more common occurrence. A Reverend John Evans from Bath wrote in 1804 that on studying the statistics of Welsh genealogy, he found that a substantial 7,773 Welsh pedigrees had been registered in the College of Arms up to that point.¹⁰⁷ It is highly likely that a number of these pedigrees had been embellished, or even forged, to portray the image of a family of ancient and noble descent. Should they desire, the newly wealthy could afford to employ someone to devise a pedigree and a coat of arms according to their requests. As the Stones explain, by purchasing a coat of arms, the newly wealthy adopted 'the values and the trappings of the elite'.¹⁰⁸ One such example of a newly wealthy landowner acquiring a coat of arms was Nathaniel Phillips of Slebech, who was known to have devised this heraldic device especially for his family.¹⁰⁹ Adopting family mottos was another method of cultivating a gentrified image. The aforementioned Edward Abadam of Middleton Hall stressed the rather austere family motto 'Aspire, persevere and indulge not', thereby summarising the ambitions of this upwardly mobile newly wealthy family.¹¹⁰

The granting of a title was another method of measuring the success of the assimilation of new wealth into gentry society. It was assumed that while public service could lead to the acquisition of a title, wealth, and most importantly, property, was needed as a foundation for this title.¹¹¹ The former East India Company man William Paxton was knighted at St James's Palace in March 1803. However, a knighthood was not enough for Paxton, as a letter to Lord Liverpool, dated December 1813, reveals his hopes of acquiring a baronetcy. Ultimately, the attempts to secure this honour were unsuccessful, and Paxton was advised not to pursue the matter any further.¹¹² In his family history, Edward Hamlin Adams wrote in 1819 that he wished to acquire 'for the family soon or late if not a peerage at least a baronetcy', believing that:

Nothing indeed but a title, I am convinced, can ever form a lasting foundation for family greatness or even retain wealth to it, & nothing but it, will take individuals out of the common herd of mankind, give them a hereditary voice & self representation in the affairs of the country, put them on an equality with the highest in it . . . There is no security that money will descend to our remote posterity, but of a title, it cannot be deprived; & possessing which, how interested the best feelings of our nature become, not waste the means of supporting with splendour, that, which gives us preeminence [*sic*], & raises us above almost all the rest of mankind, and what an incentive it is, to make our fortunes and give our preponderance increased weight and brilliancy!¹¹³

It is clear that Adams viewed the conferring of a title as a marker of acceptance among the gentry, a sign that the family's rise through the ranks had been successful. For him, the title was the ultimate sign that the family had achieved gentry status. Money could be squandered, but a title provided security. As Adam declared, a title set the family apart from the rest of society, or as he rather dismissively described them, 'the common herd of mankind'. Nonetheless, Langford highlights that the holding of a title brought with it certain responsibilities that could be financially draining. Members of the gentry may have dismayed at the high cost of society life, but the newly wealthy 'cheerfully accepted whatever incidental disadvantage a title might bring'.¹¹⁴ There are also examples of new families acquiring titles in later generations, as in the case of Sir Joseph Bailey, when in 1899 his ancestor, the 2nd baronet was created Baron Glanusk.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

The newly wealthy knew what they needed to do in order to integrate into Welsh gentry society, and emulation was key. This article has provided evidence to show that new wealth did enter the Welsh gentry. In particular, this article focused on how new wealth behaved in order to assimilate into gentry society. As outlined, new wealth invested in land and property, which served as a visible display of wealth and an attempt at cementing status. Conforming to the expectations of a deeply paternalistic society, where people of wealth were obliged to undertake improvements, they enhanced the country house and surrounding landscape, including the parkland and agricultural land. However, securing, managing, and improving their land was not the sole strategy deployed to secure gentry status. New wealth engaged with consumption to signify wealth, but also taste. They strove to display status within the local community by undertaking public duties, charitable bequests, and urban improvement. On the national level they represented their constituencies in parliament. In addition, there were other visible markers of status. Changing the family name, acquiring a coat of arms and family motto, and securing a title were also part of the web of behaviours and actions deployed by new wealth to plant themselves among the old, established landed families. Welsh gentry understanding of Welshness was heavily reliant on lineage, therefore by drawing on culture and living heritage, the newly wealthy were establishing themselves in the local gentry community.

More broadly, the influx of new wealth into Wales had an impact on the local economy, with the building of new country houses and the development of estates providing work opportunities for local architects, craftsmen, and labourers. In that respect, improvements enacted on the estate, and indeed locally, stimulated the local economy. New men became active in public and political duties, and extended paternalistic benevolence through charitable bequests, albeit ostensibly for status building purposes. Families grown rich through industry and trade settled in Wales, adopting positions of leadership as landowners, office holders, and community leaders. New men of wealth demonstrated their economic, social, and political capital as they sought to establish themselves in gentry society, reinforcing wider strategies beyond the purchase of land and property.

The landed interest continued to be a prominent force in Welsh society. As Philip Jenkins has shown, while old families disappeared and new families emerged, 'generally, landed society preserved its continuity'.¹¹⁶ Although the composition of this gentry was changing, with new families emerging, there were attempts at continuity. New families conformed to gentry ideals to bolster their status and assimilate into elite society. On being asked by the historian Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick in 1808 about his family's history and lineage, Reverend Alban Thomas Jones responded by quoting from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, arguing 'Birth of ancestry and that which we have not ourselves achieved we can scarcely call our own.'¹¹⁷ Drawing attention to those who took pride in ancient lineage, and not their personal achievements, was a fitting retort from someone who had acquired his estate through marriage, and subsequently adopted a range of strategies, including philanthropic deeds and undertaking local improvement projects, in order to carve out his place in society. The Reverend ultimately believed his personal merits and successes to be more significant than his ancestry. His marriage to an heiress had secured his social status, and name-changes cemented his links with local gentry families. He had achieved his current landed status despite his non-elite background. In referencing classical works, he was also drawing attention to his cultural capital to advertise his social mobility and arrival among the landed gentry.¹¹⁸ Whether he was accepted by that group or not, it appears that in his eyes, he had successfully integrated into gentry society.

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