

Titus Lewis

Commercial Traveller and Poet

1820 - 1887

Resident at St Quentins, Llanblethian

c1863 - 1887

Paper Prepared by G.H. Haynes
Jeff Alden's History Class

March 2000

St Quentin's House, Llanblethian

Titus Lewis

There have been a number of interesting people who have lived at St Quentin's. One of the more interesting characters in the 19th century was Titus Lewis. He lived in the house from about 1865 until 1887.

He outlived a number of landlords who owned the house [a].

1863-1866 Laurence Peel

1866-1870 Frederick Boteler and John Hughes

1871-1893 John Hughes and Richard Formby

These owners were all part of a number of Lancashire people who established themselves in Llanblethian. In addition to the above, there were the Royds, Eccles, Entwistles and Brownell. There were probably all interrelated. At some time, someone needs to compile their history with a possible title of *The Lancashire Clans of Llanblethian*.

Titus Lewis was born in Llanelli in 1820. His father was John Lewis and his mother was born Hannah James. His parents kept a drapers shop on Thomas Street in Llanelli. They were a local couple and had married at St Elli's Church on the 14th May 1813. They both signed their marriage certificate with crosses [b].

Titus had an elder brother called Thomas. They were both baptised at St Elli's [Baptist] in 1833 at the late ages of 14 and 13. From all the later evidence, Titus decided to be as literate as his parents had been illiterate. It appears that he enjoyed school and wrote *dear school-day memories where men form friendships for life.....*[c].

John Lewis died in 1835. By 1840, his two sons were running the shop called 'The Golden Key' and listed as *Thomas & Titus Lewis, Drapers, Hosiers and Hatters* [d]. Their mother lived with them [e].

On the 30th May 1842, Titus married Catherine Davies at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen. She was eleven years his senior having been born in Carmarthen in 1809 [f].

There was a distinct 'commercial' flavour to their marriage. The previous month, the Carmarthen Journal had carried two advertisements. A small one in which Catherine Davies, Milliner & Draper of Carmarthen, thanked her patrons and announced that her shop was closing and that she was leaving town. The second, much larger advertisement, had Titus Lewis thanking the patrons of the late firm of Thomas Lewis & Co of Llanelli and announcing that he would start a Mercery and Drapery store at the London & Manchester House, Llanelli, on the 5th May.

Catherine Davies was the eldest daughter of Isaac and Elizabeth Davies. Her father was a cabinet maker and upholsterer at 53 King's Street. Catherine used part of her father's shop to set up her own. She trained as a milliner and dressmaker at a Mrs Lewis', 195 Regent Street, London. Each year she advertised in the Carmarthen Journal that she had been to London to obtain goods for her shop.

Titus and Catherine probably worked very hard to set up their new business but soon they were to set about raising a family. All their children were born in Carmarthen, with the exception of their second son who was born in Neath [g].

Alfred Merlin	1844
Hannah Elizabeth	1845
John St David	1846
Titus	[it has not been possible so far to find a date]
Catherine	1849
Isaac D.	1850
Eleanor	1851
James Henry	1855

But this was not a good period economically to be establishing a new business. On the international scene popular movements were increasing in Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria and in France where King Louis Philippe was soon to lose his throne. The authorities in almost every European state were nervous of developments and this included Britain where the Chartist movement was making itself heard [h].

Queen Victoria had come to the throne in 1837 but by 1841, following a motion of 'no confidence', Lord Melbourne had been succeeded as Prime Minister by Sir Robert Peel.

Peel's government repealed the Corn law which had protected British grain against competition from imports. Many feared that this would damage local agriculture. They were wrong but the 1845 harvest was later to be a disaster. The Government introduced income tax in 1842 at seven pence in the pound, with the promise that this was a temporary measure of three years [h]. [The three years seem still to be dragging on and the rate seems to have increased].

The income tax was applicable to all incomes in excess of £150 per annum. From the advertisements put out by Titus Lewis he was obviously looking 'up-market' as he would describe his customers as *patrons* and *gentry*. The new tax was bound to have affected the purchasing power of his customers. In addition, the local economic scene was not healthy. Llanelli was dependent on the coal based industries. This was reported as *gloomy with trade rapidly on the decline*. Hundreds of men lost their jobs in the copper works and the collieries [i].

On top of this, local competition was probably strong. In the same street as Titus Lewis, there were two other drapers; London House and J.Howells & Sons [b].

The pressures were too great and disaster came in April 1846 which was to change the profession of Titus Lewis. An insertion in the newspaper indicated that he *did bargain, sell and assign, transfer and set over, all his personal estate and effects* [j]. He was bankrupt and a chain of events was started which would lead to Llanblethian.

For a time Catherine and her three children returned to her parent's home in Carmarthen while Titus took up his new job as a commercial traveller for S.J. Watts & Co. This was a very large Manchester based merchant and warehouse business. It was founded by John Watts in 1796. It sold silk, mercery, drapery, hosiery and haberdashery. Titus was to work for them for thirty years until he retired in 1887. By then the firm had 1400 employed in the warehouse and 150 representatives in the British Isles, Europe and the Colonies. The warehouse itself is described at the time as looking more like a royal palace than a warehouse [k].

Titus was able to participate in the success of the firm and was quickly back on his feet. By October 1847 he was renting a large house at 1 Picton Terrace, Carmarthen. His sales area was Wales and Monmouth, but he also needed to spend time in Manchester and London. He would have been often absent and this is probably why the family continued to live in Carmarthen which is hardly the centre of his area of responsibility. Also, Catherine was near her parents and also her sister Elizabeth who was married to Richard Rowland, an Excise officer. By 1851, the two sisters had eleven children between them [l].

Titus probably also calculated on the Swansea line being extended westward to Haverfordwest via Carmarthen, but he had to wait until 1854 to benefit from this.

The family fortunes improved and also in 1854 Titus and Catherine purchased a larger house further along the road at 13 Picton Terrace. This was obviously needed as now there were six children and James Henry was on the way.

Perhaps to while away the long and numerous train journeys, Titus took up a pastime. He started to compose poetry. His first efforts were comic verse and songs. Pieces such as *The Old Arm Chair* and *The King of the Cannibal Islands* [in Welsh] were rendered at Carmarthen social evenings and reported in the Carmarthen Journal [b].

Titus considered himself a patriot. In 1854, the Crimean War was at its height. That year is remembered for the Battle of Balaclava. But there was also the Battle of Inkerman in which the Russians made a surprise attack on the British army. A minority force of British soldiers resisted the whole Russian line until the French came to their relief, forcing the Russians to retreat. It was, strictly speaking, *a soldier's battle* [h].

Titus wrote and published a long poem called *The Soldier's Wife - a Tale of Inkerman*. This is a short extract.

*The Russian fiends would not the wounded spare
But stabbed them on the field, and left them there.
The cannon poured its deadly shot and shell
Among our troops, - the aim was but not too well.
Our ranks were thinned, but not one inch of ground
The foe could make; more than his match he found.
The shot, the grape, the shell and fatal ball,
Amongst us fell, but none did they appal;*

The poem was published both in London, by Hughes & Butler, and in Carmarthen, by William Thomas. It was priced at six pence and more than 12,000 copies were sold. The book was advertised for sale *in all the principal Hotels in the Principality of Wales* [m]. The years of custom that Titus had given them probably meant that the hoteliers were in no position to refuse. Titus contributed all his profit, in excess of £500, to the Patriotic Fund which had been set up by Queen Victoria for the benefit of the widows and orphans of those killed in the war.

Two copies of the book, one incomplete, are held at the National Library in Aberystwyth. The Library also holds a considerable collection of the works of Titus Lewis. His career as a writer progressed alongside his trade as a commercial traveller, as did his patriotism when the *Star of Gwent* published his poem on the 17th October 1857 entitled *So, My Joe, You're Going to India*. It was written for the soldiers being sent to cope with the Indian Mutiny.

In July 1856, the Eisteddfod was held in Llanelli and Titus read the Prologue before an audience of four thousand people. Titus, writing under the name of *Merlin* also won two prizes [b].

His interest turned to antiquarian matters and he wrote at length across a wide spectrum of subjects including; the Greeks, the Romans, Ancient Britons and the Druids. A lot of this work was published in the *Star of Gwent*. One piece, which the paper serialised was called *Glimpses of the Ancient Britons*. His reward for this came in 1858 when he was made a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Obviously very proud, he described himself, in 1861, as a *Commercial Traveller, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Gratuitous Public Lecturer* [n].

The Llansteffan Census shows that the Lewis's had moved down the River Towy and were living there. This probably dated from 1858 when they had advertised 13 Picton Terrace for lease. Titus owned a two and a half ton yacht and took an active part in the regattas. His son, Alfred Merlin Lewis was one of the organisers in 1863.

At about this time, Titus and Catherine Lewis with some of their children moved to Llanblethian and came to live in St Quentins as by 1864 two sons, Isaac and James, were attending the Cowbridge Grammar School [o].

There appears to be no recorded reason for this move. It was certainly not, as in 1846, due to financial reasons. It probably had something to do with the fact that perhaps as he grew older the travelling distances, beginning and ending in Carmarthen were getting too tiring. There was also the prospect of the completion of the new Cowbridge Railway which would have been convenient to him. It has also been suggested that on one of his trips to Manchester, Titus may have encountered Laurence Peel, the then owner of St Quentins. Or perhaps Peel was also involved with Watts & Co and by one means or another their paths crossed and Titus learnt about the property in Llanblethian.

The Lewises seem to have settled down and integrated themselves into the local community. In 1977, a lady called Miss Evelyn Hopkins was interviewed and recounted a story told to her by her uncle concerning the Lewis's. Her uncle lived in one of the cottages which are at the bottom of the St Quentin's garden. The Lewes's were going on holiday but there was a problem of what to do with the parrot which one of the Lewis sons had brought home as a present. It appears that the parrot was a bit of a disappointment as it refused to speak. Miss Hopkins' aunt and uncle promised to look after it and were told not to give it meat. There was a row of broad beans growing at the back of the cottage and during the day the parrot was tied to one of the supporting canes. It was also given a bone for amusement. The uncle's name was William and by the end of the holiday the parrot could mimic the aunt by saying 'Willy, Willy'. It continued to increase its vocabulary, but the Lewis's were never told about the bone. Unfortunately, either Miss Hopkins or her uncle made a complete mess of what they could remember about the Lewis family which had poor Titus converted into a bank manager by the name of William Lewis. However, there is no reason to believe that the parrot story was not true [p].

In February 1881 there was a terrible accident involving the Cowbridge Railway. Dr Stannistreet lived at and carried out his practice in Caercady House in the High Street. Having missed the train, he opted to walk from Llanharry to Pontyclun along the railway line in a blinding snow storm.

It was never really decided which train actually killed him on that day. The report of his funeral read *Among the rest of the mourners Mr Titus Lewis, of St Quentin's Cottage, Llanblethian was perhaps the most interesting person present. He was the well known antiquary and minor poet, who had collaborated with Dr Joseph Parry the composer and had translated poems written by David Evans (Dewi Haran)* [q].

This was a reference to yet another literary occupation of Titus. Additionally, he was also translating hymns from Welsh to English. This and even more poems deserved him an entry in the 'Oxford Companion - Literature of Wales'.

Further integration with the local community took place in Llanblethian Church on the 27th June 1872, when his eldest daughter, Hannah Elizabeth, married Frederick Ernest Richardson, son of John Richardson of Llanblethian.

At this time, his children were furthering their own careers. Merlin was educated at the Parc-y-Velvet Academy [an Endowed School] and won an Exhibition to Jesus College, Oxford in 1861. He obtained his degree in Literature and Philosophy before taking Holy Orders. John St David followed his father as a Commercial Traveller in drapery. Alfred obtained a BA at Oxford and was a Tutor in 1871.

From Cowbridge School, Isaac went to Lampeter College, where his father sometimes lectured, and also took Holy Orders. Titus junior became a schoolmaster after obtaining his degree at Pembroke College, Oxford. James Henry went to Trinity College, Oxford after Cowbridge School, also took Holy Orders, became Curate of Caldicot before entering the Navy as a Chaplain [b].

The second daughter, Eleanor, also obtained a naval connection by marrying George J. Clow, R.N. in 1883. He was born in Haverfordwest in 1853 and at the time of his marriage was serving on HMS Tyne as the Assistant Paymaster [r]. The marriage was held in the Cathedral of Spanish Town in Jamaica. The couple were married by the bride's brother, the Rev. Isaac Davies Lewis [s].

It seems likely that Eleanor met her future husband because he was a friend of her brother. It is not known if Titus and Catherine attended their daughter's wedding but with a son and a son-in-law both in the Navy, it does give credence to the parrot story of Miss Hopkins.

It appears that Titus used to like the occasional tease. The Carmarthen Journal recounted one of his jokes when they wrote his obituary.

It is stated that one morning a learned brother archaeologist called upon him [Titus] when he and his wife were alone at breakfast. The teapot happened to be an old earthenware one. When his wife left the room Mr Lewis mischievously told the archaeologist that the teapot was an heirloom. 'It had been' he told the credulous antiquarian visitor 'in the Lewis family for 200 years'. The delight of the antiquarian visitor was unbounded. He gazed at it through his spectacles and went on to dwell on Etruscan and other potteries. I believe that Mr Lewis told the visitor that this particular teapot was a fine specimen of ancient British pottery. But Mr Lewis left the room before the teapot had been removed.. As bad luck would have it, Mrs Lewis returned into the room and the visitor instantly dwelt with rapture on the antique British teapot. Mrs Lewis was amazed at the extraordinary interest the visitor took in the article, and especially at the learned name he applied to it. 'Why', said she, 'you can buy one like it in Cowbridge any day for ten pence. I bought this teapot there the other day for that sum' [t].

On the 27th October 1885, Titus made his will in Llanblethian. It shows him to be well off. Perhaps he had a premonition because it would have been not long afterwards that Titus was bitten by a rat. This infected him and he suffered from a type of blood poisoning. For some medical reason, which is not explained, this was to reduce his health for the remainder of his life.

He also had two other reasons to reflect on mortality. He suffered two terrible blows. Firstly, his youngest son James Henry died and then he received the news of the sudden death of Isaac. He had died in Jamaica on 27th January 1885 whilst serving on Her Majesty's Ship, 'The Urgent' [u].

Had he seen it, Titus would have been proud to read his entry in the 'Oxford Companion - Literature of Wales'.

Titus Lewis - Antiquary and poet. Native of Llanelli, Carms., he was engaged in commerce for most of his life and lived at Llanblethian, near Cowbridge. An enthusiast for Welsh literature, he wrote poems in English, including 'The Soldier's Wife, a Tale of Inkerman, 1855 and also translated a number of Welsh hymns and poems into English.

He would have perhaps been even more amused, the boy from Llanelli, with a very modest background, to see himself listed in the Gentry columns of the Commercial directories of Cowbridge between 1866 and 1884; *Harrods, Slaters, Kellys, Winalls, Glamorgan & Monmouth and Owens*, time and time again.

Titus retired from S.J. Watts & Co in 1887, with a pension, after thirty years of service. He went, for a holiday, to stay with part of his family at Llansteffan. He had been prone to bronchitis for some time, his poor state of health and his sadness at the loss of his two boys must have lowered his resistance and he died there on the 9th September 1887.

Catherine continued to live at St Quentins until 1890 when she probably went to live with her daughter Eleanor in Devonport. She died there on the 23rd December 1893 and was buried alongside her husband in Llansteffan Churchyard [b].

Author's Notes

1. *If I have not made sufficient reference in this piece to the article in the 'Carmarthenshire Antiquary' by Edna Dale-Jones, I wish to make it clear that I am exceedingly grateful for a lot of the information she has provided and the help in placing things in a chronological order. It was her indications that first alerted me to Lewis's literary career.*

2. *There is something of a mystery regarding Titus Lewis's date of birth. His obituary in the Carmarthen Journal gives it as 1822 as does the entry in the 'Oxford Companion of Verse'. However, the priest who baptised him must have insisted on the correct age as would have the Census Enumerators who recorded his age on several occasions.*

Glossary

- a *House Deeds, Private Hands*
- b *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary, Titus Lewis, Commercial Traveller and Man of Letters, Edna Dale-Jones, ISSN 0142-1867*
- c *Carmarthen Journal, 12th May 1858*
- d *Robson's Commercial Directory, 1840*
- e *1841 Llanelli Census*
- f *1871 Llanblethian Census*
- g *1871 and 1881 Llanblethian Census*
- h *Outlines of English History, George Carter, Relfe Brothers, London*
- i *The Welshman, 10th December 1841*
- j *The Cambrian, 21st April 1846*
- k *Industries of Manchester, 1888*
- l *1851 Carmarthen Census*
- m *Carmarthen Journal, 9th February 1855*
- n *1861 Llansteffan Census*
- o *A Certaine Schoole, Iolo Davies, D. Brown & Sons, Cowbridge, 1967, p 117*
- p *Interview conducted by Jeff Alden, Cowbridge historian*
- q *Snowstorm Disaster Kills Cowbridge Doctor, Caroline Francis, The Llantrisant & Cowbridge Advertiser, May 1998*
- r *Cambrian Journal, 30th November 1883*
- s *1881 Census, Royal Navy*
- t *Carmarthen Journal, Friday, 16th September 1887*
- u *Cowbridge Parish Magazine, 1885*

OFFICE COPY

VALID ONLY IF BEARING
IMPRESSED COURT SEAL

This is the last Will and Testament of me
Jedus Lewis of St. Quentins, in the parish of Llanblethian, in the
County of Glamorgan, Commercial Traveller, made this Twenty seventh day
of October one thousand eight hundred and eighty five. I hereby revoke
all Testamentary dispositions by me heretofore made and declare this to be
my last Will. I give devise and bequeath all my real and personal
estate of whatsoever kind or nature unto my sons Jedus Lewis now of
Llanblethian, Schoolmaster, and James Henry Lewis now of Bridgend
in the County of Glamorgan both in Holy Orders their heirs executors
administrators and assigns upon trust to sell and convert into money
my real and personal estate or such parts thereof as shall be of a
convertible nature and to get in the other parts thereof. And I direct
my said sons Jedus Lewis and James Henry Lewis hereinafter called
my said Trustees to hold the moneys to arise from such sale conversion
and getting in upon trust thereout in the first place to pay the expenses
incidental to the execution of the preceding trust and my debts and
funeral and Testamentary expenses and to invest the surplus of the
said moneys in manner hereinafter directed. And upon trust to pay
the income of the said moneys and investments to my wife
Catherine Lewis during her life and from and after her decease to
pay the income of the said moneys and investments to my daughter
Catherine Lewis during her life unless she shall marry and upon
her marriage upon trust to pay my said daughter Catherine Lewis
the sum of Five hundred pounds and subject to such payment then
upon trust as to as well the capital and the income of the said
moneys and investments upon trust for all my sons and daughters
then living in equal shares and proportions as tenants in common and
if any of my sons and daughters shall be then deceased leaving
children the child or children of such deceased son or daughter shall
take his parents share I do direct my said Trustees upon the death
or marriage of my said daughter Catherine Lewis and after the death
of my said wife and before they proceed to divide the capital and
the income of the said moneys and investments in accordance
with the directions hereinafter contained to pay my daughter Hannah
Elizabeth Richardson a legacy or sum of one hundred pounds and
I empower my said Trustees to postpone for such period as to them

