



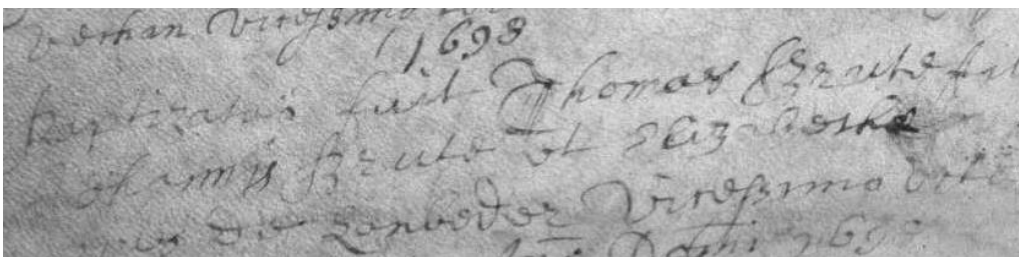
Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS) Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog Newsletter 90 - Winter 2020

The Angels of Breconshire

Scattered around the countryside of Breconshire and its borders are many churches containing beautifully carved monuments of angels wreathed in flowers and fruits. In their original state these would have been gilded and painted although time has weathered many of them. The monuments were the product of a family of stonemasons known as Brute. During the 18th century and over three generations they plied their trade, interspersing their love of carving with more prosaic projects such as the design and construction of bridges. As well as plying their trade in Breconshire Liz Pitman in her article¹ cites monuments in 15 churches beyond this boundary; 10 in Monmouthshire, 3 in Radnorshire and 2 in Herefordshire. These are only a small proportion of the monuments traced which cover all forms including chest tombs, vertical tombstones, mural tablets and internal and external wall plaques.



The Brute family, Thomas [1698-1767], Aaron his son [1731-1801] and John, his grandson [1752-1834], lived and worked at Llanbedr Ystrad Yw from the family home Glanyfron. Whilst the family had probably always been masons, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a growing belief that the dead should be commemorated more visibly. As a result of this monuments became more common and the Brute family were able to tap into this development. Whilst the wealthy had always created monuments to their dead the lesser echelons of society had not so the increasing amount of disposable wealth of a growing middle class which saw the provision of a memorial to the dead as an illustration of family grief as well as a lasting symbol of that person's life and a nod to the "status" of the person commissioning it.



Baptism of Thomas Brute 1698 Llanbedr Ystrad Yw

This month on our website AGM 2020

This was via a postal and email vote
See our News page for full details



Thomas Brute was born around 1698 possibly the son of Thomas Brute and Elizabeth. Find My Past has a baptism for a Thomas Brute but it

is difficult to read and has not been indexed (I paged through the images). No marriage has been traced either but the records are rather untidy and as many have not been indexed on FMP it is not possible to be sure whether there was one or whether it just hasn't been found and indexed.

Records for the family in general are very sparse. The National Library of Wales only records one Administration for Brute and only two marriage bonds are listed, both for women of the family. A search of the general catalogue produces no entries of any note apart from one entry for John Bruite (sic) of Llanbedr concerning the commission by Llanover and Trethin Highway Surveyors in 1713 to

*“erect and keep in repair for 3 years a firm and substantial bridge of stone on the Afon Llwyd river between Trevethin and Llanover”*²

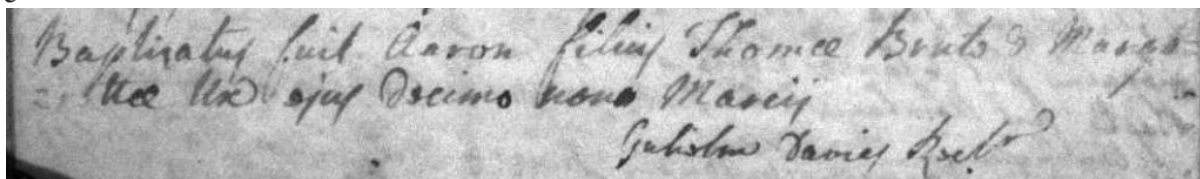
It's probable that the family supplemented their income from monument carving by general construction projects as there are two more entries at the NLWs. One for the Gwernyfed Estate concerning a Heads of an Agreement with Aaron Brute, mason, to

“...build a new room at Thomas John's” 1770³

and another in a deposit of Solicitor's records whereupon John Brute of the parish of Llanbedr and Thomas Brute of the parish of Talgarth, Masons agree to build a stone bridge upon the highway from Talgarth to Bronynllys called the Castle Bridge (April 19th 1715).⁴ It is not clear what the relationship is between these two but they are likely closely related.

There is no information as to who Thomas John was or what the nature of the room might have been but again it illustrates that as stonemasons the Brutes probably couldn't maintain a steady income from producing monuments and memorials alone.

We do know that Thomas, born 1698, although not the first mason in the family was perhaps the best known purely because of the amount of monuments attributed to him. He was followed by Aaron his youngest son and then Aaron's son John.



Baptism of Aaron Brute to Thomas and Mary 19.3.1732
Llanbedr Ystrad Yw



Baptism of John Brute son of Aaron and Elizabeth. 19.6.1752 Llanbedr Ystrad Yw

Thomas's work whilst being more prolific is also found further afield from Llanbedr than those of his son and grandson with examples in Defynnog, Painscastle and Llanarth. Aaron tended to stay closer to home with monuments appearing around Llanbedr although a couple of examples can be found in Talgarth and Gwenddwr. An article by Liz Pitman in Brycheiniog¹ outlines in some detail where the monuments and memorials can be found and how many types have been found. It is a concise and detailed article and is well worth a read.

In style the Brute memorials can largely be identified by their rococo style and the prolific use of wreaths of flowers and fruits surrounding the cheery faced angels. These depictions of fruits and flowers remind one of the carvings of Grinling Gibbons but whether the Brutes were aware of these or just liked stylizing we cannot say. Some of the works are signed but many are not so their distinctive designs and the careful way in which the lettering is formed are often the only way to identify them as potentially being by one of the Brute family.



Brute “signatures”

There were of course copycats but many are not as accomplished and show weaknesses in relation to the formation and placing of the lettering suggesting either the work of a Brute apprentice or a mason not connected to them in any way.

The monuments themselves range from wall plaques to chest tombs. Those sited in churchyards are the most difficult to identify as most are not signed and the ravages of time have left many in a perilous state of decay. One external monument, a gravestone in Llanwenarth Churchyard, is adorned with an angel that looks very like those found in the church memorials. The stone is not signed but it may well be by one of the Brute family. Although it might be expected that the monuments were created from welsh slate they were in fact carved from sandstone which is much softer and perhaps more suited to the softness of the stylized patterns and the application of colour and gilding.

As the wealth of the middle classes grew monuments to those who in earlier generations would have been consigned to the earth and then forgotten began to proliferate. Memorials and monuments to cordwainers and carpenters as well as dyers and surgeons can be found.



Llanwenarth St Peters

St Catwg’s Llangattock has a collection of Brute memorials many of which are found in the tower. One to a midwife Anne, the wife of Richard Lewis, is carved with the epitaph

“...she was instrument in the hand of Providence to bring into this world 716 children”

She was 72 and died in 1773.

Another is signed T Brute and is to Jane and Anne Pritchard who died in 1660 and 1731 respectively. The date of this monument precedes the birth of Thomas b. 1698 so the T Brute who signed is possibly his father illustrating how the practice of stonemason ran through generations of the family.

St Issui at Patricio also has some memorials. The church is small and remote even by today's standards and is situated on a mountain amidst difficult terrain.

Wall plaque signed by T Bruce



Whilst some of the memorials are more extreme in their rococo style others are much plainer although this might be because the original colour and gilding has faded. One is in St Martins Cwmyoy and is in a romano-greek style with the only indication that it might be a Brute carving being the small angel's face at the top. Another in Llanbeddr church is slightly more ornate with a frame inset with small flowers and curlicews on which some of the colour and gilding can still be seen. In St Peter's Llanbeddr there is also a memorial to the infant son of Thomas Brute.

In memory of Thomas, ye son of Thomas Brute, vide Mason, who died ye 5th Day of February A.D 1724



He perhaps had the wealth to enable him to place such a memorial but the life of a stonemason was not always one that produced wealth. They would usually have a place in the local community but this did not always correlate to their income and many would have died in some poverty. The Administration for Thomas Brute's father who died in 1770⁶ reveals he left only

- 6 old chairs
- 2 old tables
- 1 flock bed and bedstead
- 1 iron pot
- And was owe debts of £5.00

Memorial in St Martins Cwmyoy



Another Brute example in St Issui, Patricio



St Peter's Llanbeddr. Angel adorning an external wall.

Despite this the Brute memorials stand as examples of best craftsmanship and that they can still be seen in their glory is tantamount to the high standards and quality that marks out the work of all the Brute family.

Sue Ashton

References & Sources

1. Gilded Angels. The 18th Century funeral monuments of the Brute family of Llanbeddr. Liz Pitman. *Brycheiniog*. V. 32 (2000) pp 85-101
2. Gwent Record Office D1210142768 – Cordell Museum, Blaenavon.
3. Gwernyfed Estate Records 1718-1808. Archives and Manuscripts. National Library Wales.
4. DTM Jones, Solicitors Records. Archives and Manuscripts. National Library of Wales.
5. Administration of Thomas Brute late of Llanbedr. 1770. Wills. National Library of Wales
6. The story of St Catwg's Church, Llangattock. Llangattock PCC, 2009



The Beacon

This free A5 monthly glossy magazine distributed in Brecon and its surrounding villages contains a "Your History" column, contributed by the BLFHS, which often offers an interesting article about the area. Latest issues cover the public houses of Brecon

The Coaching Inns of Brecon

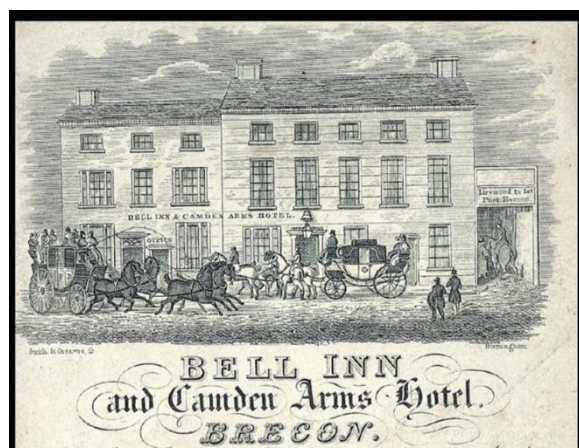
Brecon was situated on the major highway, the A40, from Pembrokeshire to London. It was well served by coaches during the Georgian and Victorian periods. Travellers could connect with coaches in other towns and in that way, reach most parts of Britain and Ireland. This connectivity helped Brecon become a town of fashion, selling high class merchandise and experiencing top-quality entertainment.

There were three coaching Inns in Brecon.

The **Castle Coaching Inn** was an important stop for coaches. George Evans, a coach proprietor lived at the Inn. By 1835 an impressive list of coaches called at the Inn and made journeys to London, Aberystwyth, Bristol, Carmarthen and Llandrindod on the Castle Inn coaches or the Mail Coach.

The **Bell Inn & Camden Arms** was also a Coaching Inn. Situated on High Street Superior and Bell Lane, the writing on the wall, "Licens'd to Let Post Horses" is still visible in the archway of Bell Lane, which led to the Inn's stables (see next page for photo). The upper room was used as the venue for plays put on by the high-class strolling entertainers, such as the Ward family, whose daughter, Sarah Siddons, was born in the town.

The **Golden Lion Inn** on Lion Street with stabling in Lion's Yard was owned by Thomas Longfellow, and in about 1740 he acquired the Bell Inn & Camden Arms. Longfellow kept both the Golden Lion and the Bell Inn & Camden Arms until 1792, when he gave up the Bell Inn & Camden Arms.





Sign in Bell Lane

Longfellow was a member of the influential Brecknockshire Agricultural Society, which was established and had its meetings on the first floor of the Golden Lion. Other Societies and fancy balls for the gentry were also held there. The Agricultural Society paid communities to repair lengths of the highway and so Longfellow was able to advertise the following, in the 1750s:

“Brecknock Coach through Monmouth in 4 days. Sets out from the Bolt and Tun in Fleet Street, London, every Wednesday morning early and will arrive at Brecon at 12 on Saturday, returning from thence on Monday morning at 8 o’clock and arrives in London on Thursday. Price as usual. Each passenger will be allowed 14 lbs weight, and to pay for all above. Outside Passengers and Children in lap half price, and no luggage allowed. Thos. Longfellow, John Turner, Giles Greenway, Proprietors.”

Other public houses include (with their modern house number/property identifications):

Dorlangoch

White Horse (26) house named the White Lodge.

Free Street

Markets Tavern (36-37) also known as New Market Inn and Market & Railway Hotel, in business.

Watton Junction with Free Street

King’s Arms (36), now King Morter Proud & Co Accountants

The Watton

Camden Arms (20-21), in business. The Fusiliers (21) was at rear of Camden Arms. Clarence Inn (25-26) also called Barley Mow, in business.

Fox & Hounds (29), now a house. The Bank Bar & Kitchen (37) was the Puzzle Tree, in business. New Inn (38) now Dixie’s Corner military shop. Borderer’s Guesthouse (47) was the Lamb Inn. Gremlin (48-49) was the Cock and Horse, in business. Rugby Club (63) was the Blue Boar. King William IV/ Vaults (81-82), a house. Military Arms (89) now Bo Country Restaurant and Twenty Eleven Tattoos. Prince of Wales or Plough & Harrow (90), a private house. Prince of Wales or Cambrian (91) a private house.

George Street, The Struet, Castle Square & Street, Market Street, Priory Hill & Pendre area Public Houses

George Street

George Hotel, now in business as Wetherspoons.

The Struet

Old Star Inn (17) is a private house. Greyhound (47) is a private house. Bulls Head (86) is unoccupied (see next page for photo).

Angel Hotel (100/101) is the RAFA Club. Black Cock/Griffin Inn/Wine Vaults (103) is Zeera Indian Restaurant and Morgans the Butcher.

Castle Square,

Castle Coaching Inn/ Castle of Brecon Hotel is still in business.

Castle Street/ Struet Junction

New Golden Lion/ New Lion Hotel/ New Lion Coffee Tavern (2 the Struet) is an empty commercial premise.

Castle Street

Black Lion Hotel (14) demolished for the Inner Ring Road.



Bull's Head, Struet

Market Street

Queen's Head Hotel is the Market car park. Queen's Head Vaults beneath the Market Hall is now Brecon Volunteer Bureau.

Priory Hill

Golden Sceptre (10) is a private house.

Pendre

Rising Sun (15) a private house.

Tredegar Place

Tredegar Arms (7) a private house

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It's coming up to that time of year again! Here are a couple of timely recipes from an old Brecon cookery booklet published around the period before the Second World War. The recipes appear to have been sent in by various people on the area. Thanks to Colvin Parry for allowing us to reproduce parts of it.

Christmas Pudding.

Ingredients :—4 lbs. flour, 3½ lbs. suet, 2½ lbs. currants, 2½ lbs. sultanas, 2 lbs. raisins, 1 lb. mixed peel, 1 lb. bread crumbs, 1 lb sugar, ½ lb. chopped almonds, 2 tablespoonfuls ginger, 1 nutmeg, ½ teaspoon spice, 1 tablespoon salt, 1 quart. milk, 1 teaspoon baking powder, 8 to 12 eggs.

Method :—Mix all well together and boil from 10 to 12 hours. This quantity makes about 8 puddings.

Miss M. Prosser, Tygwyn.

Mincemeat.

Ingredients:—1 lb. each raisins, sultanas, currants; 2 lbs. apples, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. mixed peel, 1 teasp. each ground ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg; $\frac{1}{2}$ teasp. spice, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. chopped almonds; 1 lb. brown sugar; 1 lb. chopped suet; 1 teasp. salt; juice and grated rind of 2 lemons and 2 oranges; $\frac{1}{2}$ pt. brandy and sherry (optional).

Method:—Mince and mix well together, put in jars and cover.

Miss F. Prosser, Tygwyn.

An amusing snippet!
Brecon & Radnor Express
1.1.1914 p.5

Breconshire Doctor's Claim

HEALTHY SENNYBRIDGE.

At an inquest held at Brecon on Monday the Coroner (Dr. W. R. Jones, Sennybridge) said he had 550 names on his panel under the Insurance Act, and he had not had a single death yet since the Act came into force.

The foreman (Mr W. R. Price) said it was a very satisfactory state of things, but it was probably due to the fact that they had plenty of fresh air at Sennybridge.

Don't forget – I am always looking for interesting article subjects so let me know if you have anything you would like to share!!!!

I am looking for interesting subjects on which to base the lead article. If you are passionate about a subject which you think would be interesting to our members please let me know by sending me an email at the usual address editorblfhs@outlook.com

Meeting Reports

Meetings have been suspended for the time being due to the Covid-19 virus.

Website

Website

Our website address is www.blfhs.co.uk

Facebook

The society now has a Facebook page. Check it out at www.facebook.com/breconblfhs

Future Meetings

Meetings for the foreseeable future have been cancelled in the light of developments around the "Covid-19" virus.