

ADAM OF USK (1352? - 1430), in contemporary notices 'Adam Usk,' lawyer

Name: Adam Of Usk
Pseudonym: Adam Usk
Date of birth: 1352?
Date of death: 1430
Gender: Male
Occupation: lawyer
Area of activity: Law
Author: John Edward Lloyd

He drew his origin from the town of Usk, on the river of that name. He owed his start in life to **Edmund Mortimer, 3rd earl of March**, who held the lordship of Usk as part of the inheritance of his wife, Philippa, and who in 1369 gave Adam the means to study civil and canon law at Oxford. In due course, he took the degree of doctor of laws and settled as a teacher of law in the university, where, on his own confession, he was deeply involved in the armed conflicts of 1388-9 between the Northerners and the Southerners (including the Welsh). Later, he left Oxford, and for seven years practised his profession as advocate in the court of the archbishop of Canterbury.

The connection with Arundel determined his political attitude. He sat in the Parliament of 1397 and in his chronicle does not conceal his hostility to Richard II and his supporters. When the tables were turned in 1399, he was on the winning side; he accompanied Henry IV and the archbishop from Bristol to Chester, and on the way made up a quarrel between Lancaster and his own friends in Usk. He was a member of the commission appointed to find legal grounds for the deposition of Richard, and saw and heard him during his captivity in the Tower.

He was now on the highroad to success and in receipt of an income from various clerical sources, which supplemented his professional gains. One of these led him into trouble; his title to the prebend of Llandygywydd, Cardiganshire, in the college of Abergwili, was contested by Walter Jakes, alias Ampney, who had obtained it by exchange in 1399. This was clearly the cause of the affray between the two at Westminster in November 1400, which gave rise to proceedings against Adam and his company for highway robbery. Their course is unknown; they did not put an end to his activities as lawyer in 1401. But early in 1402, for whatever reason, he resolved to quit the country for a stay in Rome, where his legal accomplishments would be appreciated and rewarded. The sanction of the Crown was given and on 19 February he set out.

He was not long in winning papal favour, having in January 1403 taken care to obtain the king's pardon for the Westminster misdeed. Boniface IX and still more readily Innocent VII were prepared to bestow upon him a British bishopric. But Adam had now, as the result, it may be, of the growing power of **Glyn Dwr**, to meet the bitter hostility of the king. Return to England was impossible, and a further heavy blow was the riot in Rome of August 1405, which drove the pope from the city and reduced his protégé to severe straits. These experiences and a dangerous illness turned Adam's thoughts homeward; he left Rome in June 1406, and made his way to Bruges. With the door still closed against him, he spent two years in France and Flanders, earning his living by his profession. At Bruges, he gave an ear to the overtures of Northumberland, then plotting against the king, but, luckily for his future, did not go so far as to involve himself in the earl's overthrow.

In 1408, he made for Wales, landing at Barmouth, and hoping, as his chronicle avers, to get to the lordship of Powis, then held by **Edward Charlton**, whose first wife's dower included Usk. Whether this was his real intention or not (and **Owen** was plainly doubtful of his allegiance), he achieved that purpose, and for some years lived, under **Charlton's** protection, as a poor chaplain at Welshpool. It was not until March 1411 that a full royal pardon gave him freedom once more, and enabled him to rebuild his broken fortunes.

But his heyday was over, and he spent the rest of his life in comparative obscurity. He died early in 1430 and was buried in the priory church of Usk, where his epitaph, composed in the Welsh *cywydd* metre, is still to be seen. His will has also been preserved, in which he makes many bequests to religious causes in the diocese of Llandaff and to persons bearing Welsh names. Among his legacies was one to his executor and relative, Edward ab Adam. This was his copy of Higden's *Polychronicon*, and it seems likely that with it he left the material for his own chronicle to 1421, which some twenty years later was entered up by various hands in this very MS. The chronicle is Adam's chief title to fame. It supplies much useful detail of contemporary events in Britain and abroad, as well as the record of his own experiences; in particular, it illustrates fully the **Glyn Dwr** movement. Sir E. Maunde Thompson edited it in 1876 from B.M. Add. MS. 10104; in 1904 he was able to supply the missing close from a Belvoir MS.

Author

Sir **John Edward Lloyd**, (1861 - 1947)

Sources

Introduction to 1904 edition of the Chronicle

The Episcopal Registers of the Diocese of St. David's, 1397-1518 (1917-20), 118

Y Cymmrodor, xxxi, 112-34

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Adam of Usk](#)

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