

CHAMBERS, WILLIAM (1774-1855), industrialist and public figure

Name: William Chambers
Date of birth: 1774
Date of death: 1855
Child: William Chambers
Gender: Male
Occupation: industrialist and public figure
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Royalty and Society
Author: David Williams

By the will of **Sir John Stepney**, dated 9 August 1802 (recited in ' An Act to enable William Chambers...to grant leases of certain estates,' 1840, copy in Cardiff Public Library), his property, in twenty-four parishes, was devised not to his brother, **Thomas** (who succeeded to the baronetcy on **Sir John Stepney**'s death, 3 October 1811), nor to the heirs of his two sisters, but to six legatees, unrelated to the family, and their male heirs, in reversion, of whom one was William Chambers of Bicknor in Kent. After Chambers's death, in default of issue male, the estate should revert to **Sir Thomas Stepney**, and, afterwards, to the heirs of his two sisters. Very remarkably, one legatee after another died in quick succession without heirs, so that the estate passed to William Chambers on 18 December 1824. (**Sir Thomas Stepney** died without heirs on 19 September 1825.) No explanation is forthcoming of this will, except family tradition that **Sir John Stepney** had quarrelled with his brother and sisters. William Chambers was born in London and educated at S. John's College, Cambridge (matric. 1792, B.A. 1795, M.A. 1800). On succeeding to the **Stepney** estates he settled in Llanelly House (by the parish church) which had been deserted by the Stepney family for sixty years. He became high sheriff of Carmarthenshire in 1828. He and his son played outstanding parts in the industrial development of Llanelly, notably by the establishment of the South Wales Pottery in 1840 at an outlay of £10,000. He died at Llanelly on 9 February 1855, aged 81.

As the above Act states that he had no issue, it must be assumed that his son, WILLIAM CHAMBERS, junior (1809 - 1882), was illegitimate. He was born at Valenciennes in France, 24 May 1809, educated at Eton and S. John's College, Cambridge (admitted 1826, matric. Easter 1828; he does not seem to have graduated). He married Joanna Trant, daughter of Capt. Payne, R.N., on 20 July 1835. They had five children. He died 21 March 1882, aged 72. William Chambers, junior, was a man of markedly liberal opinions. He was one of the founders, in 1839, of the Llanelly Reform Society. Although a magistrate, he took the chair at the Rebecca demonstration at Mynydd Sylen on 25 August 1843. But he took part, also, in the capture of Rebecca leaders in the attack on gates at Pontarddulais on the night of 6 September 1843, and suffered reprisals from the rioters. (See **John Jones**, fl. 1811-58, ' Shoni Sgubor Fawr. ') He gave important evidence to the education commissioners (1847). He became, in 1850, the first chairman of the Llanelly Board of Health, which replaced the corrupt oligarchy of burgesses which administered the town's estates. After his father's death, the Stepney estates reverted to the heirs of **Sir John Stepney**'s sisters, although only after a prolonged law suit (Court of Chancery, 1865). In 1853, William Chambers, junior, purchased Hafod (which had twice changed hands since the death of **Thomas Johnes**). He, in turn, surrendered it before he died.

The son of William Chambers, junior, JOHN GRAHAM CHAMBERS (1843 - 1883), athlete and journalist, was born at Llanelly, 12 February 1843, educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge (matric. 1861, B.A. 1865). He was a rowing 'blue,' 1862 and 1863, and president of the university boat club, 1864-6. He was reputed to be the best walker in the university. (For details of his career, see *D.N.B.*) He died in London, 4 March 1883.

Author

Emeritus Professor David Williams, (1900 - 1978)

Sources

An Act to enable William Chambers; ..., as above

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Bye-Gones, relating to Wales and the Border Counties, 1882, 43

Arthur Mee, *Llanelly Parish Church, its history and records, with notes relating to the town* (Llanelli 1888)

John Innes, *Old Llanelly* (Cardiff 1902)

Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and Field Club, 1943-4, 21-63

Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 1944

information from Mr. Griffith Thomas

see also under **Morris, Ebenezer (1790 - 1867)**

Further reading

Cofflein: [Llanelli House](#)

Sporting Landmarks: [In search of John Graham Chambers: sport's serial law maker](#)(accessed August 2020)

Llanelli Community Heritage: [The Grave of John Graham Chambers](#)(accessed August 2020)

Llanelli Community Heritage: [John Graham Chambers Llanelly House](#) (accessed August 2020)

Wikipedia Article: [John Graham Chambers](#)

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Wikidata: [Q8006681](#)

Wikidata: [Q327410](#)

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