

ROBERTS, LEWIS (1596-1640), merchant and writer on economics, a Beaumaris man

Name: Lewis Roberts
Date of birth: 1596
Date of death: 1640
Spouse: Anne Roberts (née Williamot)
Child: Ann Hanger (née Roberts)
Child: Delicia Nelson (née Roberts)
Child: William Roberts
Child: Gabriel Roberts
Parent: Gabriel Roberts
Gender: Male
Occupation: merchant and writer on economics
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Economics and Money; Literature and Writing
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

His family (J. E. Griffith, *Pedigrees*, 96) is an interesting example of Welsh infiltration into the English boroughs of north-west Wales. Its first member known to us is a Gruffydd Llwyd (died 1375), who lived in the bond vill of Penhwnllys in Dindaethwy commote, i.e. on land which had once belonged to the house of **Ednyfed Fychan** - by 1413 these lands were in the possession of **Gwilym Gruffydd of Penrhyn** (see **Penrhyn family**), and in the Elizabethan age, **Sir Edward Herbert**, afterwards **lord Herbert of Chirbury**, had inherited them.

The surname 'Roberts' does not emerge in Gruffydd Llwyd's family until we come to the sons of one of his descendants, ROBERT AB IFAN. But it is clear that the family was by that time domiciled within Beaumaris borough. This Robert's first wife (J. E. Griffith, *op. cit.*, 74) was Margaret, daughter of 'Old' Richard Johnson - the Johnsons and the Thicknesses (connected by marriage) were the commercial magnates of Beaumaris, and we note the intromission of Welshmen from the countryside into the privileged Englishry of the borough. Robert ab Ifan's second wife was a Welshwoman; a son of this marriage, LEWIS ROBERTS, married a daughter of 'Young' Richard Johnson, and had a son named GABRIEL ROBERTS (his will, proved in 1614, reveals that he was a father and grandfather). His first wife was Anne, daughter of John Hawarden of Appleton near Widnes. Two of this Gabriel's sons call for notice:

GABRIEL ROBERTS, merchant

Executor of his father's will. By his time, in consequence of **Henry VII's** charter of 1507, and later of the Act of Union of 1536, the monopoly of the Englishry at Beaumaris (already undermined, as the preceding paragraph has indicated) had totally disappeared; Gabriel Roberts was one of the chief merchants there, if not indeed the chief. Unlike his English forbears, the Johnsons, he took no part in oversea trading, but confined himself to purchasing wares at Chester and distributing them in Anglesey. He was not only a burgess but (before 1612) a 'capital burgess.' He amassed great wealth, and then took the next step, so common among prosperous merchants of his day - becoming a landed man. He had acquired lands in Dindaethwy and when, in 1605, **lord Herbert** sold his mother's lands in that commote, Roberts combined with another merchant named Arthur (it would seem from *Cal. Wynn Papers*, 1160, that they were cousins) to buy the **Herbert** lands, sharing them between them. Thus was formed the estate of Castellior (Llechylched), on which Gabriel Roberts's descendants were to live for generations. His descendants are shown in J. E. Griffith's table (*loc. cit.*). The elder line of them ran out with an heiress, who married **James Bulkeley (1717 - 1752)** of Baron Hill.

ROBE-LEW-1596 LEWIS ROBERTS (1596 - 1640), merchant and writer on economics

Born in 1596 at Beaumaris, second of his father's three sons. He typifies another result of the Acts of Union - the migration into England of younger sons of well-to-do Welsh families. In 1617 he was in the service of the East India Company (of which he later became a governor) and of the Levant Company; he was also 'factor' to the family of the famous physician William Harvey. In 1623 (*Cal. Wynn Papers*, 1160), we find him at Constantinople. In 1626 he married Anne, daughter of Edward Williamot, 'merchant, of London' - it may not be amiss to note that the surname turns up also in the records of Beaumaris. He wrote three books. The most important of these is *The Merchantes Mapped of Commerce*, 1638, the fruit, says he, of twelve years' travel. It is a kind of traders' reference-book, of geographical detail, information on the products of various lands, their currency, etc. It is prefaced by complimentary verses written by his great friend Izaak Walton the angler, by his own kinsman (J. E. Griffith, *Pedigrees*, 74) Robert Roberts of Llanfair-yng-Nghornwy, and by his little son Gabriel (below), then aged 9. The book was reprinted. From another quarter we get a hint that Lewis himself wrote verse - in English. He died in 1640 (buried 12 March). Another of his books, *The Treasure of Traffike*, was published in 1640; here, he turns to the theory of political economy (as that was understood in his day); he held that the Government should control commerce by channelling it, so to speak, through mercantile companies or corporations - he would not have competition between individual venturers; it is interesting to find him advocating the nationalizing of insurance.

Of his children, the eldest was Sir GABRIEL ROBERTS, 'Aleppo merchant' and vice-governor of the Africa Company, knighted at New Year, 1678. His name recurs frequently in the *Memoirs of the Verney Family* (iii and iv - indexes), which speak very highly of him. His brother, WILLIAM ROBERTS, is taken by M. P. Ashley (*Financial and Commercial Policy of the Protectorate*, 1934) to have been the 'Sir William Roberts' who was a commissioner and auditor of the Treasury under the Commonwealth (Firth and Rait, *Acts ... of the Interregnum*, indexes); but it is hard to see how one born at the earliest in 1630 could have risen so high by 1649; and in the *Verney Memoirs*, William is invariably styled 'Mr.' Clearly, he was living at Aleppo in 1662, superintending his brother Gabriel's 'factory' there; his 'pride and stubbornness' are spoken of. Of Lewis Roberts's two daughters, ANN married George Hanger, a wealthy Levant merchant, whose son John became governor of the Bank of England, and DELICIA (qu. Diliys) married John Nelson, a 'Turkey merchant,' and became the mother of **Robert Nelson**.

Authors

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Revised by the editorial team, 2012

Sources

On the elder Gabriel Roberts, and on the family origins, the unpublished M.A. dissertation 'Medieval Beaumaris and the Commote of Dindaethwy,' by Colin M. Evans (at N.L.W.)

on Lewis Roberts and his children, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Palgrave's Dictionary of Political Economy (London New York 1894)

other references given in the article

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