

He came to West Wales to find Rebecca

He came to West Wales to find Rebecca, and stayed here for 56 years. George James was born in Hatherop in Gloucester in 1820. He joined the Metropolitan Police in 1841 and started helping to police the capital. A year after arriving George married Mary of Wimbledon in Surrey. Certain South Wales counties were experiencing unrest because of the Toll Gate tax riots. They were known in South Wales as The Rebecca Riots. Different army regiments were sent in to the counties but were not very successful. They would talk freely to the children, and so there was no security. After much discussion it was decided to send Metropolitan Police to the area. And soon they met with success. At one skirmish on Pontardulais Bridge one officer and three magistrates accompanied by eight policemen, armed with pistols and cutlasses defeated 150 Rebecca Rioters, and took prisoner the leader.

One of those policemen who volunteered for duty in South Wales newly married and desirous of earning extra money, as well as a desire for adventure was Police Constable George James. At first he was stationed in Swansea, where his wife bore him a son named Grantley, christened at St. Marys Church. He was one of 150 Metropolitan Police sent to the Three Counties to preserve the peace in addition to 1,800 soldiers. The soldiers were housed at Llanelly and Carmarthen's workhouses. Cottages were hurriedly built for the police. There were 28 built at Llanelly Copperworks, Mr. Nevill being a magistrate gave permission. These were named Copperworks Barracks. There were six built at Furnace, around Furnace House occupied by Commander Charles Henry Ross, Harbour Master at Llanelly. Other gentry in the area included Charles N Broom collector of harbour dues, also doing duty as a Wesleyan Methodist minister, living at Ynis Y Cwm house. The Toll Gate at Furnace which had once stood alongside The Royal Oak public house, and both had been burned down by the rioters, was now relocated to the opposite side of the road next door to The Stradey Arms public house.

The cottages built for the Metropolitan Police at Furnace were known as The Barracks at Pontyberem. The Gwendraeth iron works employed over 200 men and over £100,000 had been invested in the works and collieries. The works manager had been threatened with death. Three houses named The Barracks were built for the Metropolitan Police to protect the site.

Sadly George James, Metropolitan Police constable, lost his wife, who had come to live at Copperworks Barracks, giving birth to their second son Richard. Mr Nevill became aware of this and relieved him of duties with the force by appointing him works Constable and building a Police lodge at the gates of the works for him and his sons. This was in 1851. Eighteen months later George met a visitor to Llanelly. Her name was Anne. She was a sister of a master trading to Llanelly from Cornwall with copper ore. and returning with a cargo of coal. Anne was born in Chittlehampton, Devon. Other imports from Cornwall were china clay for the pottery.

George fathered three children with his new wife, one son named George, a daughter named Mary, and a daughter Amelia. Over the years the cottage the family lived in changed its name five times, Copperworks House twice, Cottage in Copperworks Yard once, and Copperworks Lodge twice. George the policeman was a busy man about the works and also his duties included the docks. One of the wharfs was named London Wharf. From here would be shipped the valuable metals extracted from copper ores, including silver, which amounted to a considerable number of ounces annually. Our present Glanmor Road was once called London Road. On the left hand side leaving the station, the row of cottages leading to Siloah Chapel, was known as Windsor Castle Terrace. Before then, they were simply known as The Cottages near Siloah or Bethel Chapels.

Metropolitan Police constable George James stood six feet tall and with his top hat on, would have presented a fearsome sight, if he also had his cutlass and pistol about his person, the mob would have run for miles. His first son Grantley is thought to have emigrated to America, his second son Richard became an accountant at the Copperworks, married Hannah, and lived at The Marine Hotel New Dock.

Anne James pre-deceased her husband George, who died during 1898, at 78 years of age. George was succeeded by two men, Samuel Brown watchman, and Police Sergeant John Brown his son both born in Scotland. The Rebecca Riots affected Llanelli severely. The alleged leaders of the attack on The Sandy Toll Gate, were Francis McKeirnon, born in Shropshire, and George Laing born in Yorkshire. Francis was the landlord of the Ty Melyn pub in Park St, and coach proprietor. George was the landlord of the Star public house in Swansea Road. I wonder what were George James thoughts, when 15 years after the riots there came to live near him in the Penrhos Scale House, near the Copperworks. A man named Francis McKeirnon, an engineer at the brickworks in New Dock Road. Born in Pembrey, Metropolitan Police Constable George James' descendants still live in this area.

By Gerald Grant
Local Seaside Historian

After reading our article we received the following information from Roy Davies of Ledbury. Our thanks go to Roy for his permission to print the article.

*"One of those policemen who volunteered for duty in South Wales newly married and desirous of earning extra money, as well as a desire for adventure was Police Constable George James. At first he was stationed in Swansea, where his wife bore him a son named Grantley, christened at St. Marys Church. He was one of 150 Metropolitan Police sent to the Three Counties to preserve the peace in addition to 1,800 soldiers. The soldiers were housed at Llanelly and Carmarthen's workhouses. Cottages were hurriedly built for the police. There were 28 built at Llanelly Copperworks, Mr. Nevill being a magistrate gave permission. These were named Copperworks Barracks. There were six built at Furnace, around Furnace House occupied by Commander Charles Henry Ross, Harbour Master at Llanelly. Other gentry in the area included Charles N Broom collector of harbour dues, also doing duty as a Wesleyan Methodist minister, living at Ynis Y Cwm house. **The Toll Gate at Furnace which had once stood alongside The Royal Oak public house, and both had been burned down by the rioters**, was now relocated to the opposite side of the road next door to The Stradey Arms public house."*

In this it implies the Royal Oak was destroyed along with the burning down of the Furnace Toll Gate which I believed happened in 1843. However the Royal Oak (which was originally owned by my great-great-great-grandfather Jonah Thomas) was still listed in Hunt's Directory of Gloucester, Bristol & Welsh Towns - 1849, with Jonah Thomas as the owner. It was also still listed in the 1851 census. I doubt there were 2 Royal Oak's in Furnace at this time and therefore would be interested in your thoughts on this matter. Some additional information is given below:

"Thanks for this it provides a very valuable insight and would explain why in 1841 the Royal Oak was listed next to Furnace Gate and in 1851 it was Stradey arms listed as next to Furnace gate.(this is in reference to the article above on your site)"

After a bit more investigation I am beginning to unravel things. The Royal Oak did not become the Stradey arms (there was speculation that this was a possibility) as both are listed in the 1851 census (Ho.107/2468, District Llanelly 1g,

page 53 and Ho.107/2468, District 1h page 53 respectively). As you said earlier the "Furnace Royal Oak" in 1851 was now owned by a Hector Morris. However his wife was Phoebe and he had several step children with surname REES. In Jonah Thomas's will he left the Royal Oak to his wife Elizabeth and widowed daughter Phoebe REES. Therefore it looks like Phoebe REES (nee Thomas) married Hector Morris and he came to live at the Royal Oak with Phoebe and the children from her previous marriage. Phoebe's mother Elizabeth was living next door with her granddaughter Mary who she took in after both Mary's parents died within a year of each other from T.B. (her young brother John Thomas went to live with his mother's grandfather Henry Williams, Mary joined John later on when Elizabeth died). The house that Elizabeth and Mary were living in I suspect is the "house joining Royal Oak" that Jonah originally left to his other daughter Elizabeth Phillip in his Will. She is living elsewhere at "Furnace" in 1851, a Weaver's widow with her 6 children. In 1851 there is no mention of the Royal Oak being a pub anymore and I suspect after her father Jonah died Phoebe (and her mother Elizabeth) had no interest in continuing running it as a pub and it became a residential property. Certainly in 1861 Hector and Phoebe were just listed as living at "Furnace", however although it does not necessarily mean they are geographically close in the 1861 census they are living next door to the Stradey Arms which is next door to the Toll Gate!

I have limited access to the 1861 census and would be grateful if someone could check whether there was still a Royal Oak in Furnace in 1861 (Hector and Phoebe could have sold it on to someone else)"

I am only too pleased for you to include this information your site. For reference Jonah was originally a Carpenter by profession and it looks like at some stage (I presume as he got older) he also became a Publican. When he actually acquired the Royal Oak I don't know, and whether he bought it or inherited again I don't know. If there are Trade Directories for the area prior to 1841 they might help on this. He died on 28th April 1848 from "Asthma 3 years, Hydrothorax 3 Weeks Certified". I guess the Asthma may have been a "occupational disease" picked up from inhaling sawdust over the years.

Benita got back and she said she has no reference to confirm the burning down of the Royal Oak, and books she has on the Rebecca Riots only mention the burning of Furnace Toll Gate. So this remains a mystery. My current thoughts are maybe a pub did burn down, but it wasn't the Royal Oak. She did suggest "One thought, have you tried the Carmarthen Journal or the Cambrian newspapers, they would have carried reports about the local riots in 1843? Unfortunately, Llanelli did not have their own newspaper until 1863". This is something I am unlikely to be able to do for a long time as I live in Ledbury. Do any of your local members visit Llanelli or Carmarthen registry offices as I believe they have some of these old newspapers? If they do, would they be able to see if they can find a newspaper article from the time? I would be most appreciative if they could.

I have also attached something else you might be interested in including on your site with my permission.

It is the story of the tragic drowning of 3 young boys on Cefn Sidan Sands, Pembrey on 18 Mar 1859. Two of which Evan (14) and David (13) Davies were sons of my

great-great-great grandparents John and Esther Davies. The third boy Henry Morgan (9) was obviously a friend of theirs as his Father and Mother are listed as living (at the Butcher's Arms) next to Evan and David's parents in the 1861 census. (As an aside and carrying on the pub theme, I have concluded the name Butcher's arms came from the fact that Henry's father William was a Butcher. There is no mention of William and Henry Morgan's (when he is 9 months old) address being a pub in 1851, the address is just given a "Lando" and William is just listed as a Butcher, but in 1861 it is called the Butcher's Arms and William is listed as a Victualler and Butcher. I believe there is still a Butcher's arms on Lando Road, Pembrey today so it may be the same one as in 1861 (!), which again may be of interest to local historians. John and Esther Davies lived next door at Cryglan, Crylont (it has various spellings!), but I doubt if it there any longer.

I came across the boys' deaths by chance as on the Carmarthenshire-FHS web site as it gave a reference for the death of David Davies, but said there were also 2 other entries. All 3 deaths are registered under the same number Llanelly 11a 379. I don't have a copy of the certificate, but Llanelly says there was an inquest. Unfortunately queries with the National Archives suggest no inquest records for Carmarthenshire prior to 1930 survive. Llanelly did say that the certificate said they were all working as "barge drivers" which was unusual and I would have thought they were a bit young for? When I found out about the deaths I put a post on Rootschat for more information and someone very kindly e-mailed me the attached newspaper article (article on the boys is at the bottom).

Heartrending Occurrence on the Welsh Coast.—Three Youths Drowned.—During the late disastrous gale two vessels, one a French lugger, belonging to the port of Bordeaux, and the other a Dutch brig, which had come to England with corn, were stranded on the Ceefen Sidan Sands. Their presence has, as might be supposed, been of considerable interest to the inhabitants of the surrounding district, and between the tides, when the sands have become sufficiently dry to admit of their being walked over, the wrecks have been visited by a large number of persons. Among others who went over to Ceefen Sidan were two brothers, named Evan Davies and David Davies, and a companion named Henry Morgan, all of whom resided at Pembrey. Late in the afternoon the boys, who had gone without the knowledge or consent of their parents, began to make their way homeward, shaping their course for Kidwelly Quay. Unhappily they had remained too late for the tide, and the waters rising rapidly, they soon found themselves surrounded on all sides and without hope of escape. The mental agony which the youths endured on seeing themselves as it were in the very jaws of death, can be better imagined than described. They were seen from the shore by parties who had no means of rendering them any assistance, running frantically backward and forward, raising their hands, and shouting and screaming for help, until the merciless waters overwhelmed them, and they sank to rise no more.

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