

HISTORY OF THE VALE.

DUNRAVEN CASTLE.

STORY OF WRECKS & WRECKERS.

The Legend of Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven Castle.

ARTICLE No. 4.

By Mr T. M. PRICE, Late of Boyerton.

Many thrilling stories and interesting legendary tales have been recorded by several old topographers and historians of wrecks and wreckers in former days on the coast of South Glamorgan, which embraces the fertile and verdant Vale of Glamorgan, designated as "The Garden of Wales," from Penarth headland at its eastern extremity to bright and breezy Porthcawl in the west. Sailing down the Bristol Channel, where in these busy modern days of scientific research and navigation may be seen vast iron argosies or steamships and other sailing craft laden with minerals, etc., from the South Wales and Monmouthshire coalfields, and varied merchandise from the busy, thriving commercial and industrial seaports of Cardiff, Newport, Penarth, and Barry Docks, etc., proceeding to various ports at home and abroad, steadily plough the tide past the glittering verdant hills and dales of the English and Welsh coasts, or the "Gwlad ar Haf," i.e., the Land of Summer—carrying the gay bunting and the British flag of old England.

Probably many readers have read and also heard numerous thrilling narratives of wrecks and wreckers on the Glamorganshire coast in the olden days. This evil and wicked practice of wrecking—happily now a thing of the past—

This discomfiting action seems to have been the fatal turning point in Walter Vaughan's life; and treatment like this produced a re-action in a character which, although ardent and enthusiastic, was rather strongly disfigured by vanity.

Walter Vaughan's Changed Disposition.

Walter Vaughan returned home to Dunraven Castle a changed man. Vanity or conceit was always one of his weak points and failings, and this, apparently having been touched, his whole disposition became soured and changed in a marked degree. The deserted halls of Dunraven Castle once more resounded with revelry. The old watchtower on the cliff was deserted; the punch bowl and the dice engrossed its owner; revelry, sport, music, song and dance ran riot there. He drank to excess, kept an open house, and gambled heavily until his fortune ultimately began to fail—such as we often learn to-day in the world of sport and pleasure. Walter Vaughan was pronounced on all hands to have revived the hospitalities of the old Welsh chieftains, and probably he gained what he vainly coveted—distinction.

In the meantime he had married. It is uncertain whether he broke the heart of his wife or not, but she died just as his fortunes began to decline and fail, leaving four boys, the eldest of whom was on the verge of manhood, and the youngest a child of four years. Man is invariably the same everywhere—prosperity and wealth have many friends; but the Welsh gentry turned their backs, and ignored their prodigal friend when poverty and misfortune struck him, and as time went on the old castle was nearly shut up, and its lord, Walter Vaughan, was left with one solitary attendant—his faithful old

missive and friendly. Mat bided his time. The ancient harpist and faithful dependant of Walter Vaughan seriously warned his master against this evil associate and ruffian, Mat the Pirate, who had gained a notorious name by hanging out false lights, etc., to mislead vessels ashore. Notwithstanding the pleadings of his faithful old harper, the two formed an alliance. They were never seen, however, together during the day time, but those who were abroad in the vicinity of Dunraven in the dark nights averred and declared that they had observed the confederates in company together, and when the shades of night fell the Lord of Dunraven and Mat the Pirate prowled along beneath the lofty cliffs by Dunraven Bay, with their false lights to lure passing vessels to their doom and destruction on the rocky shore.

"A Terrible Retribution."

There is an old traditional story in which retribution, swift and sure, fell upon the two evil-doers. Walter Vaughan and his favourite old harper now spent much of their time in a seabeaten grotto, situated in a wild isolated place on the coast commanding a glorious, uninterrupted view of the sea to the south-westward. One day as the setting sun was descending gloriously towards the horizon the watchers, Walter Vaughan and the old harper, saw the ill-omened form of old Mat the skipper, or Mat of the Iron Hand, as he was more generally known, standing near to them. He was looking steadily and intently towards a rock called "The Twinklers" in olden days (now "The Tuskar Rock"), which was dry at dead low water or ebb tide, but completely submerged and covered at half-flood tide. One fine breezy evening two of the Vaughan family, sons of Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven, took a small boat and rowed it to the Tuskar Rock. They failed to fasten the boat very securely after having landed there, and their boat eventually drifted away under the influence of a surging spring tide. A gleam of exultation shot across Mat the Pirate's face. There was a sharp cry and exclamation, "What boat is that drifting out seaward?" exclaimed old Vaughan. The fatal truth apparently flashed on the impulsive mind of Walter Vaughan. His two boys were stranded on the Tuskar Rock; their boat had drifted a considerable distance away with the strong surging current of the in-coming flood tide. The troubled, distracted father rushed to the beach. His two sons saw him in his agony and despair, but his voice was completely lost amidst the roar of the relentless, turbulent sea and the hoarse sighing of the wind—

"Twas vain; the loud waves hushed the shore,

Return or aid preventing;

The waters wild went o'er his child, and he was left lamenting.

Both the young Vaughans were unfortunately drowned, and this was not all, so the story goes. In the exciting confusion, says an old topographer, the old man rushed home to seek his youngest child, who had been left alone at Dunraven Castle during his absence. He had fallen into a vessel containing whey, and perished about the same time as his two elder ill-fated brothers.

The bereaved parent was naturally stunned and prostrate with grief by a loss so fearful and tragically sudden, and people of the surrounding neighbourhood spoke of it as a just retribution, many declaring fearfully that ill-gotten gain by those following infamous wrecking as a trade or a means of livelihood, who lured and misled mariners to destruction by placing false lights and other nefarious evil practices, never come to any good end.

ruined old Mr. Vaughan. Mat the Pirate and wrecker did not answer, but with a fiendish cruel laugh thrust a cold icy hand into that of his questioner. Old Vaughan was startled and shocked at its icy clay-like coldness. A gleam of light which fell from the drift-wood fire into the wreckers' cave revealed a ring on the lifeless mariner's hand. Old Vaughan tottered and paled, for the hand was that of the rightful old heir of Dunraven, and his only surviving eldest son, homeward bound in the wrecked vessel.

Mat, the one-handed pirate and wrecker, had cruelly murdered him on the wreck, and had thus achieved his terrible revenge.

As to what became of Mat the Pirate divers tales are told. Some traditions state that the old harper shot him instantly on the spot, and others that he was executed a few months afterwards for another cruel murder, which he had committed on a shipwrecked seaman in the neighbourhood of Dunraven and Southerndown.

Walter Vaughan's Tombstone at Tenby Parish Church.

Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven, the broken-hearted father, prematurely old by the tragic and sad family bereavements he had endured, shortly afterwards left Dunraven Castle, and sold the estates, which were heavily mortgaged, to a member of the Wyndham family, and then retired to Tenby in Pembrokeshire, where he subsequently passed away. The grand and stately old Parish Church of St. Mary's at Tenby, which is the largest Parish Church in Wales, contains many beautiful memorial monuments, including the White family, or the Whites of Henllan and Tenby, of whom one in the maternal line was grandmother of Rev. John Wesley, D.D., the founder of Wesleyan Methodism. One of the most celebrated of them was Thomas White, whose beautiful monumental tomb commemorates him at St. Mary's Church, Tenby. It was Thomas White who enabled Henry VII. (1487-1509), when Earl of Richmond, to escape from the pursuit of Edward IV. by carrying him to France in one of his own ships.

Among other notable memorial tombstones at St. Mary Parish Church at Tenby is one erected to Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven Castle, of wrecking notoriety. This memorial tombstone was first brought to light by a Mr. Fenton, the Pembrokeshire historian, about 120 years ago, which records the death of Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven, the last representative of the Vaughans of Dunraven Castle, who appears to have retired to Tenby—rather a secluded seaside holiday resort in the old days, and to have died there on the 4th January, 1637; and according to his epitaph on the tombstone, "Awaits a glorious resurrection."

(To be Continued).

P.S.—Adverting to a previous article published June 1st, it should be stated (accidentally) that Mr. Richard Edmunds Pennoyer is the present owner of St. Donats Castle. Also Dr. Benjamin Heath Malkin, F.S.A., LL.D., was the South Wales historian buried at Cowbridge Parish Churchyard in 1841.

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Probably many readers have read and also heard numerous thrilling narratives of wrecks and wreckers on the Glamorganshire coast in the olden days. This evil and wicked practice of wrecking—happily, now a thing of the past—was in former days made a system or a trade, and we may easily select out of many old legends and stories that we have heard from time to time of many strange mysterious, catastrophes which have been alluded to by several of the old topographers or writers, and which invests and comprises the headland of Dunraven with a tragical interest, particularly

The Legend or Story of Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven Castle.

Let us now revert to the last representative of the Vaughan family at Dunraven Castle, who resided there in the latter years of the sixteenth century and the earlier part of the seventeenth century. This was Walter Vaughan, lord of Dunraven Castle, or lord of the manor. Briefly it may be explained that manors, which were established in Anglo-Saxon times, were estates originally granted as rewards for knightly services, and included the privilege of a special court, with jurisdiction criminal and civil, within the manorial territory. In recent times the ancient privileges of the manorial system have almost passed out of existence. Such copyhold property as is yet unenfranchised is generally set forth as being held by the tenant "at the will of the lord," according to the custom or right of the manor.

Walter Vaughan, of Dunraven Castle, commenced life under the fairest auspices. Soon after he came into possession of the Dunraven Estate. He also distinguished himself by swimming off with a rope to the crew of a stranded ship off the coast near South-or-down, whom he saved—which was considered a very notable and considerable act of bravery in those old days.

The success of this attempt appears to have subsequently turned his thoughts into a new channel. He eventually busied himself and devised certain plans for the saving of life in the event of ship-drecks. He constructed boats with the aid of other helpers, and finally he studied navigation and astronomy.

In the lofty old watch-tower which then stood on the precipitous cliffs adjacent to his old castle, he loved to spend the night in studying and reading the stars and planets of the heavens.

Subsequently, he placed his plans and inventions before the Government of that period, by whom they were slighted and rejected.

ded with revelry. The old watch-tower on the cliff was deserted; the punch bowl and the dice engrossed its owner; revelry, sport, music, song and dance ran riot there. He drank to excess, kept an open house, and gambled heavily until his fortune ultimately began to fail—such as we often learn to-day in the world of sport and pleasure. Walter Vaughan was pronounced on all hands to have revived the hospitalities of the old Welsh chieftains, and probably he gained what he vainly coveted—distinction.

In the meantime he had married. It is uncertain whether he broke the heart of his wife or not, but she died just as his fortunes began to decline and fall, leaving four boys, the eldest of whom was on the verge of manhood, and the youngest a child of four years. Man is invariably the same everywhere—prosperity and wealth have many friends; but the Welsh gentry turned their backs, and ignored their prodigal friend when poverty and misfortune struck him, and as time went on the old castle was nearly shut up, and its lord, Walter Vaughan, was left with one solitary attendant—his faithful old harper. He again betook himself to the watch-tower on the brink of the cliffs. His eldest son, no longer heir—for there was hardly any inheritance left—finally determined to seek his fortunes on the broad ocean, and in some distant foreign lands. The parting of father and son was naturally painful; the affections of the father, long deadened by dissipation, returned in the hour of desolation with redoubled force to their natural channels. He had four loving children left, although he had lost wealth, friends, and reputation; anxiety, sorrow, and remorse made him prematurely old. "Who could recognise in that stooping and haggard countenance the manly youth of five and twenty years ago?"

About this period a wreck occurred near Dunraven which temporarily improved and bettered the condition of Walter Vaughan, who as lord of the manor possessed, under charters that had descended from Anglo-Saxon times, a right to property which was cast by the sea or foreshore (seawerk), although the rights of owners remained in force for 366 days, if anything living (except vermin, of course) should be found on board—an old law that was practically a dead-letter and a farce. This particular event gave birth to a new passion in the mind of the impetuous broken landlord of Dunraven. Could not sufficient property be accumulated by wrecking to reclaim the heavily mortgaged estate for his eldest son and heir?

"Mat of the Iron Hand," a Notorious Character.

In the neighbourhood of Southern-down or St. Brides Major there lived a man of desperate habits, who was nicknamed and generally known as "Mat of the Iron Hand," who had once been the skipper of a small piratical sailing craft, which, when in port (according to tradition), was seized by order of Mr. Walter Vaughan, lord of the manor and presiding magistrate at that period, shortly after he came into possession of the Dunraven Estate. There appears to have been, however, a desperate struggle with the crew, and the old skipper, who, unfortunately, lost his hand in the fight, eventually turned a wrecker, and probably carried a grudge of some sort against the man who had finally ruined him. Mat was a very revengeful man, and determined to have his own back by fair or foul means, though showing himself outwardly sub-

amidst the roar of the relentless, turbulent sea and the hoarse sighing of the wind—

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The bereaved parent was naturally stunned and prostrate with grief by a loss so fearful and tragically sudden, and people of the surrounding neighbourhood spoke of it as a just retribution, many declaring fearlessly that ill-gotten gain by those following infamous wrecking as a trade or a means of livelihood, who lured and misled mariners to destruction by placing false lights and other nefarious evil practices, never came to any good or prospered in life.

Soon after this tragic chapter of sad events, and with this terrible grief, something akin to repentance came to Walter Vaughan, who eventually, as time went on, wished to amend his life, and endeavoured to shake off his old friend and associate, Mat the Pirate, and so fix his hopes on his eldest and only surviving son returning to Dunraven, of whom he had heard nothing since his departure from home.

One wild night the old man observed a distant vessel approaching slowly up the Channel, the slow movements of which seemed characterised by uncertainty, as if the master or skipper hardly knew what particular course to take.

Mr. Vaughan had an anxious presentiment about this vessel, and it is believed that the poignant grief and sorrow he had endured had evidently worked repentance at the eleventh hour. The vessel was soon hidden by the gloom of the night—which also became very gusty. Mr. Vaughan felt particularly curious, and he decided forthwith to go down to his grotto or cave by the sea-shore accompanied by his faithful and favourite old harper. The latter, fearing evil from Mat of the Iron Hand, whose hatred to his master had broken out unequivocally of late, took arms for protection, if necessary.

Walter Vaughan and the Harper listened in the gloomy darkness to the cries of the distressed storm-driven mariners amid the booming surf of the raging relentless waves. They had not been long near the sea before Mat the Pirate's false lights cast a lurid gleam over the great waste of waters and adjacent rocks. The night grew thick and drizzling, but Walter Vaughan moodily refused to stir in spite of persuasion of his old Harper. Presently crashing sounds were heard above the din and howling of the wind, and wild and broken cries followed. About half an hour later Mat the Pirate, or Mat of the Iron Hand, strode into the cave with the news that the ship's boat had been surrounded by the waves; that the captain had remained on the wreck when it drove against the rocks, and that every living thing in it had been drowned. The captain, he said, remained alone on the wreck, which drove on the rocks after the crew had deserted her, and stated that he was a Welshman, and that his birth-place was off the neighbouring coast.

"Did you help him, villain?" inter-

Vaughans of Dunraven Castle, who appears to have retired to Tenby—rather a secluded seaside holiday resort in the old days, and to have died there on the 4th January, 1637; and according to his epitaph on the tombstone, "Awaits a glorious resurrection."

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THE EMBITTERED LORD WHO TURNED WRECKER

Dunraven Gardens

SITUATED on a hill overlooking the beach of Southerndown, lies the walled gardens of Dunraven. The history surrounding these gardens has an intriguing insight into a world of lordship and tragedy, connected to a building of grandeur from our not too distant past.

The fortified manor house known as Dunraven Castle once stood overlooking the coast of Southerndown. It was built on the site of an Iron Age settlement and fort on the hillside, which later made way for a 12th century stone building constructed by Armand Botteler (also interpreted as Botiler).

During 16th century, the Vaughan family lived within the manor house until 1642 when the Wyndham kinfolk purchased the property.

They became important citizens within the community and built a fortified manor, naming it Dunraven Castle. Its ancient name in Welsh is Dundryfan, which translates as 'triangular fortress'.

Ancient Princes of Soluria, Bran ap Llyr, his son Caradoc, and other families from Ireland, also lived at the fortified manor and in 1886 the Duke and Duchess of Tick visited the dancing stones of Dunraven.

During World War I, the manor was used as a military hospital and convalescent home for wounded soldiers. Before the outbreak of World War II, the castle played host to the Dunraven Horticultural and Flower Show, where educational walks were organised

by
HAYLEY WILLIAMS

hayley.williams550@yahoo.com

around its beautiful grounds and gardens.

The castle then continued as a family home until the 1960s, when the owner had a dispute with the local authority because they refused him permission to develop the land.

In a fit of anger, he demolished the building in 1962. But tragedy had already cast its spell on him as his three sons had met their deaths in tragic circumstances.

Today, only the enclosed walled gardens, entrance gateway, grand lodge, outer wall, ice tower and ruins remain of this once enchanting fortified manor. These are all now Grade II listed.

Legend maintains that Walter Vaughan, who was Lord of Dunraven, was a kind-hearted man who found satisfaction in saving the lives of sailors whose vessels had become victim to the cruel sea.

His heroics were frowned upon by the government, causing him to become disillusioned, and as a result he spent his fortune in a wasteful way.

Penniless, he teamed up with the local wreckers and their pirate leader named 'Mat of the Iron Hand', and together they lured ships onto the treacherous rocks by evilly placing lanterns on roaming sheep.

They were used as decoys to confuse sailors whose vessels would plunge on to the hazardous rocks.

Walter Vaughan had been a magistrate in previous years, and it was him who passed sentence

upon Mat of the Iron Hand – and now he was indulging in the same circle of wickedness as the pirate and his ship wreckers.

Burdened by greed and time spent away from his home, Walter tragically lost his three sons who all drowned at sea.

Could these horrifying accidents be fate paying him back with heartache for his dastardly deeds, or just a legendary fable passed on through time?

The glowing figure of a ghostly lady wearing a blue dress and leaving behind the distinct aroma of perfume was reported to haunt the upper floors of the fortified manor for centuries before its downfall.

It was not known who she was, but could she have been responsible for the misfortune surrounding the manor, by showing her disapproval in such a disturbing way?

Chilling screams have been heard, bellowing out across Dunraven Bay, pitifully shouting for help, which could only have fallen upon deaf years from a bygone era, when looters gleefully watched the harrowing ordeal of sailors drowning in the cruel sea.

Could these haunting sounds be from a restless seaman who walks the coastline on the anniversary of his death, or just a figment of peoples imagination?

Around the Ice Tower, the echoing sound of horses galloping at pace has been heard, particularly at the dead of night.

Could this distinct noise be an eerie case of the past, unwilling to make way for the present? Fact or fiction? It's up to you to decide... *Porthcawl Sea Festival Ghost Talk and Walk is at The Swan Inn, Nottage at 6pm on Thursday, August 2; £2.50 on entry.*