

Radyr and Morganstown Local History Society

Occasional Paper 1

The Reminiscences of the Rev. William David



**Cover Picture
St. John's Church
1846**

September 1997

Farm, north of the house, was enclosed in the park.

Radyr Ucha, half-a-mile north of Radyr Court, was the residence of a very prominent old Welsh family named Morgan, which intermarried with the Mathews and other leading families in the county. At least six generations of the Morgans lived there (Radyr Ucha). The old house was taken down 40 or 50 years ago. An upper room in it was highly ornamented, the walls being partly stencilled, and partly wainscoted, with a particularly pretty cornice, and the ceiling was groined in a well-designed geometrical pattern. The only house at the Lodge was a commodious dwelling of that name, which had been converted into two cottages before my birth. A family named Sinclair lived there in the last century. Waterhall was the residence and, presumably, the property of a well-to-do family of Norman extraction, named Turberville. The last remnant in the house, besides the picturesque dripstones over the front windows, of its past manorial character, was the fireplace in its little parlour. The grate, of an antique pattern, and the mantleshelf, were neatly ornamented, while the sides of the former were prettily lined with small white china tiles, each bearing under the glaze some coloured drawing. Maesllech is chiefly remarkable on account of its occupant, Oliver Robotham, who at his death, as recorded on the tablet placed to his memory in the chancel of Radyr Church, weighed 32 stone.

While I heartily thank the Rector for the generous space he has placed at my disposal in this Magazine to put on record the ecclesiastical and archaeological facts contained in my papers, some of which facts were probably only known to myself, in taking leave of my readers, I beg to express a hope that, as Church people and inhabitants of the parish of Radyr, they have met in my papers some matter of interest to them, sufficient to save my reminiscences and historical notes from having given them a sense of weariness in their perusal.

Introduction.

The following Reminiscences appeared in the Radyr Parish Magazine in seven instalments, between September 1895 and March 1896. It is appropriate that this should be the first Occasional Paper to be printed by the Society as the Rev. William David's "Reminiscences" are much quoted when the history of the parish is in question. The layout of the original is unusual in that a certain space was allocated to it and the reminiscence brought to an end regardless, sometimes in the middle of a sentence. Apart from restoring the text into one continuous flow, we have made no alterations to the original and it is reproduced in its entirety.

William David was born at Radyr Court and baptised on the 21st. December 1823. At the time of his birth Radyr Court, now the public house of the same name next to St. John's Church in Danescourt, was the largest and most important house in the parish. It had been built in the fifteenth century and had once been the home of the Mathew family. When the Mathew family sold the estate and moved to Ireland in 1625 it was bought by the Lewis family of Van, near Caerphilly, who moved to St. Fagans about the same time. The Windsor family, Earls of Plymouth, acquired the Lewis estate by marriage in the 1700s but at the time William David was writing these Reminiscences the Earldom had lapsed (to be revived in 1905). From the time of the departure of the Mathews, Radyr Court and its lands was let out and was in the hands of the David family for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This is an important historical source as it is largely "primary" in nature giving valuable insights into the parish before the abolition of tithes and the coming of the railway. Occasionally he becomes a "secondary" source and tries to recount the history of the Mathew family, here he is not so successful. It is clear that he did not have the documentary evidence available to his modern successors and was unaware that the Mathews had two deer parks at different times and of the nature of the litigation between Edmund Mathew and Sir Henry Billingsley.

We are grateful to the Rector, the Rev. William Barlow and the churchwardens for their permission to reprint the "Reminiscences" and the drawing of St. John's Church on the cover.

Allan Cook.
Chairman. September 1997.

The Reminiscences.

The general and rapid recovery of the affections of the people throughout the principality for their venerable and time-hallowed Church is fairly typified by the contrast presented by the Church in Radyr parish at the present day to its condition an age or two ago. The Rector, thinking that it will be interesting and gratifying to the readers of the Radyr Parish Magazine to learn something of the Church in their parish a few decades ago, (and as I was added to its population at Radyr Court before the first quarter of this century had expired) has asked me to jot down some of my recollections of the state of the Church in this parish.

Sixty years ago, saving the fabric itself with its singularly pretty bell-turret, the Church had only the barest foothold in the parish. There was no resident clergyman, no curate even ever came into the parish to visit the sick, to collect and teach the children the Church catechism, to seek out candidates for Confirmation, to encourage the lukewarm to come to Church, or to instruct any thirsting to be guided into the ways of righteousness. The one weekly service was bi-lingual and held alternately in the morning and afternoon. The morning services, including the sermon, were in English excepting the lessons, which were in Welsh, and those in the afternoon were just the reverse. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated only once a quarter or four times a year. The regular congregation consisted only of members of my family, the parish clerk and the sexton. Occasionally, at varying intervals, two brothers named named Rees, of Maesllech, Thomas Williams and his daughter, of Waterhall, and a lame octogenarian - Joe Hobdy, of Croeswen, put in an appearance. The above farmers found it a convenient occasion to consult my father in the porch after the service about rates and the repair of the parish roads, etc. There was however,

being very strong, (all the other doors and lower windows being walled up), and then they within began, some to hurl stones from the gutters of the house, others we might see running towards the gate with weapons, targets, muskets and calivers, so settled and prepared for resistance, that we could not at this time perform the service, being assured there are near one hundred persons assembled in the house, furnished as aforesaid, for withstanding us, and that the house is not to be won without ordnance to batter it, and shedding of much blood."

That the family mansion was, if not fortified, of a very substantial character, may be inferred from the foregoing statement that its chief *gate* was very strong, and that it could not be taken except with the aid of cannon.

As Edmund's son, George, on inheriting the property, *sold* it, the heroic defence of it by a high spirited Welsh "gentlewoman" appears to have been successful in keeping Radyr out of Sir H. Billingsley's forcible seizure of it.

Leland, who visited this neighbourhood in the life-time of the before-mentioned Sir George Mathew, states that he had made a deer-park, extending two miles northward from his residence at Radyr. This extent is a great mistake, as one mile must have been about the distance. Some of the old park wall may still be seen in the hedge running from the church and to the cottage due west of it, as well as in the hedge running down in a line with the other, from Radyr Court to the river, where there is an old cottage, on the site of the present one called the Golchdy (wash-house) doubtless used as such by the residents of the mansion above. A great deal of the park wall, about seven feet high, was standing, in my recollection, along the river-side to where the railway now is. It seems to have followed the course of the river all round the Lodge land, as some fragments of it were standing on its bank near the Radyr Railway Station. Apparently nearly the whole of Radyr Court

other counties, is unique.

Edmund's son, Captain George Mathew, sold Radyr and moved to Thurles, in Ireland, where he died 1636. The family mansion at Radyr partly stood where the garden is now, and a little to the south of it. About 60 years ago the foundations were dug up for the stones to build the addition to the back of the present dwelling house, and some outbuildings.

Between Edmund Mathew, when in possession of Radyr, and Sir Henry Billingsley of Gloucestershire, who was married to a daughter of the previous owner, viz, his deceased brother, Henry Mathew, was a dispute as to the rightful ownership of Radyr. The following extract from a letter written to the High Court of Chancery by the Sheriff, George Lewis of the Van, an ancestor of Lord Windsor, on August 12th, 1611, the day on which the event referred to took place, gives an amusing account of the courageous spirit, with which, in open defiance of English law, then scarcely recognised by the Welsh, one of the daughters of Edmund Mathew, who had been left in charge by her father and mother of the family mansion, successfully defended it against the Sheriff and the Sergeant-at-arms supported with what they supposed would be sufficient force to take possession. On arriving at Radyr, they found the house barricaded against them. The Commission was then read, the Sergeant showed the Mace, flattering himself that the sight of it would overawe the inmates, and when they were summoned to deliver peaceable possession, the Sheriff graphically reports, "We were answered only by a gentlewoman at a window, being one of the said Edmund Mathew's daughters, that they had received commandment from their father and mother not to deliver it, nor would they, but would rather die altogether. Whereupon, after a full hour run out of an hour glass, and the offenders continuing their disobedience, we caused an assault to be made against the chief gate of the house,

one other attendant named "Rum". This was however a small English terrier which never failed to walk by the side of my father and mother when going to church, and curling itself up under their seat, to remain quietly there till the close. Rum eventually became well-stricken in years, and alas! his doggy odour grew so perceptible as to be unpalatable when he was so near to one's seat. To obviate this unpleasantness the ruse was adopted of shutting him in the house when the family left for church. Whether it was an attachment to my parents or to the church, or a desire to add a unit to the meagre congregation I will not venture to determine, but something made him feel it to be incumbent on him to regularly attend every sabbath day the service in his parish church, and that he ought not to tamely submit to any interference with his liberty in giving heed to that dictate of his conscience.

After duly pondering his position he resolved to have recourse to a stratagem, whereby he outwitted the combined wit of the family. After having been imprisoned during the church hour a few Sundays, he had recourse to the practice as soon as the church bell began to ring, of quietly slipping out through the back door and trotting by a short cut to the church, so that when my father and mother entered their pew, there they invariably found Rum with a wag in his tail ready to greet their arrival, and doubtless with a twinkle in his eye expressive of the roguish thought in his mind - you may be cute but you see I am still cuter. There are many, some perhaps in the parish of Radyr, who would do wisely and well to learn a lesson from Rum in deciding beforehand what action should be taken when evil is apprehended - in self-reliance and dependence on one's own resources in a time of difficulty - in forming a habit of never being behindhand, but always up to time - and above all in attaining the wholesome and commendable practice of regularly and cheerfully responding to the sweet summons of the church-bell.

The Parish Clerk - Robert Davidson, was my father's bailiff, and

one, perhaps, of only two Englishmen then in the parish, the only other one known to me was also in my father's employ and was known as *the* Englishman. The ordinary practice in those days was for the Clerk to lead the responses in a voice almost as loud as the Clergyman, while the congregation remained more or less mute and merely followed mentally. I was at first Curate of a small country parish in Shropshire, the aristocrats of which were small tenant farmers, some of whom had never seen the sea, and whose travels in the mazes of literature were no less circumscribed. I found it was the practice there for the Clerk alone to repeat the responses. Being an illiterate shoemaker and possessed of a strong provincial accent, his performance of the function was more calculated to excite a smile than inspire one with devotional feelings. Accordingly I lost no time in going round the parish to ask the members of my flock to join in reading the responses audibly, as the rubrics direct. A well-meaning, good-natured, elderly farmer combated the innovation I desired to introduce as a new-fangled crochet and said to me - "I likes you, young man, very well, and am glad you have come to live along with me, but I can't come that." Previously there had been no resident Minister. After pressing him repeatedly to tell me his objection, at length he hit upon one, and said with an emphasis which manifested a conviction that was unanswerable - "We pays the Clerk to do it for us." Although the practice in Radyr was not a similar harping on one string, it was considered the duty of the Clerk to lead the responses in a voice far louder than anyone else. At the Welsh service my father being bilingual and alone able to read in *yr iaith Cymraeg* officiated as Clerk.

In anticipation of the present claim made by women of their right as ratepayers, and qualification to fill parish offices, the sexton of Radyr Church was an old woman - Rachael of the Chain, who lived alone in a comical little cabin about nine or ten feet square, which stood on the corner of the adjacent cross roads, where she kept charge of a chain stretched across the road and lowered only on payment of toll by any traveller coming on the turnpike road from direction of Llantrisant and

Fardre, Talygarn, Rhiw-saeson, St-y-Nill, Sweldon, Whitchurch, Roath etc. The first of the family who lived at Radyr was Thomas Mathew, fourth son of Sir David Mathew of Llandaff; he died 1470. His eldest son, David, who died 1504, married Alice, daughter and sole heiress of Robert Vele, of Charfield, Gloucestershire, who owned the manor and ruins of the old Norman castle of St. Fagans, (on the site of it the present residence of Lord Windsor stands) which had been occupied by his ancestors for probably 200 years, i.e. from the time of its erection by Sir Peter le Sore, Lord of Peterston and St. Fagans. This marriage caused a striking contrast to the present ownership of local properties, for instead of nearly the whole of the parish of Radyr being owned by a resident at St. Fagans, nearly the whole of the parish of St. Fagans became owned by a resident at Radyr. Several of the Mathews of Radyr were Sheriffs of the County and some of them attained great distinction.

Sir William, who was the second son of Thomas, was knighted on Bosworth Field by the Earl of Richmond, 1485. His handsome tomb and effigy stand in Llandaff Cathedral, alongside those of his grandfather, Sir David Mathew, who was standard-bearer to Edward IV at the battle of Towton in 1461. There is a tradition that Sir William hanged a man for some offence or other in the steep field overlooking Waterhall, consequently it is called to this day Cefn Crogwr (hangman's hill).

His eldest son, Sir George Mathew, was M.P. for Glamorgan and Sheriff, 1545. Sir George, who married twice, had a remarkable family, which accounts in a great measure for this neighbourhood being so peopled with Mathews. He had four daughters by his first wife, then seven sons, then five daughters by his second wife, and eight more children born out of wedlock. His eldest son, William, was Sheriff, 1568, and 1580, whose surviving brother, Henry, was also Sheriff, 1590, and his surviving brother again, Edmund, was Sheriff 1593. The fact of three brothers being High Sheriffs of this, and perhaps of all

once set to work with the greatest energy and zeal to rekindle a religious feeling among them in strict harmony with the principles and rites of the Church. He devoted his attention in a special manner to the religious instruction of the children and left not a stone unturned to establish that indispensable institution in a well organized parish - an efficient Sunday School. The activity soon bore good fruit, insomuch that the need of an additional and more central place of worship became so pressing that he determined on the erection of a combined school and chapel room. The late Lady Mary Windsor-Clive gave the land and at once subscribed £300 in Lord Windsor's behalf. The whole cost was £1,100 which was chiefly borne by Lord Windsor, who paid off a considerable deficit at the end. His Lordship gave £25 to furnish the new vestry attached to the church and built the shed for coals etc. Mr. Humphreys resigned the Incumbency in 1880 on his appointment to the Rectory of Llangan and in less than six months afterwards was naturally much pained to find that the National School which he had made such an effort to get for the parish had lapsed into the hands of a school-board. His successor was the Rev. H.G. Williams, who remained Rector till 1891, when the present Incumbent was given charge of the parish. Mr. Williams, having a wife and family, was obliged for the want of a house to live some years in Llandaff, but eventually, with very praiseworthy perseverance, stimulated by the substantial aid of Lord Windsor, who also gave a liberal plot of ground, he built the Rectory House, which will remain a permanent and creditable memorial of his connexion with the parish.

Permanent out-houses and a porch are still much needed.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Radyr has had a distinguished past, seeing that Radyr Court in the 15th, 16th, and 17th, centuries was the chief residence, next to what was called Llandaff Castle (the old Bishop's Palace), of the Mathew family, which was second only to the Herberts in importance, perhaps, in the whole county. Branches of it lived at Fairwater, Llanelay, Llantwit

leaving it there. Rachael could never have had an illness, or never allowed any to prevent her from punctually unlocking the church door and ringing the bell every Sunday all the year round.

There was no school in the parish of any kind until my elder sisters grew old enough to establish a Sunday School, which they did, and a clothing club, and maintained them both for many years until my family moved to Fairwater.

The Church, being thus served in as scant and perfunctory a manner as possible, exercised scarcely any influence over the religious condition of the parish. But the spiritual life of Radyr parish was no less than that of the surrounding ones, not even of Llandaff, for there, in one respect at least, it was far worse. As an illustration of the low ebb to which the general religious feeling of the people had sunk, I need only mention that it was usual in the summer months on most fine Sunday afternoons for a large concourse of men from Radyr, Llandaff, and Whitchurch parishes to meet in Radyr Churchyard to play interparochial matches of handball against the west end of the church. Amid considerable shouting, coarse and profane language, and cheering, our visitors played for sundry gallons of beer, brought in three or four gallon flagons from a public-house then at Croeswen, which was chiefly supported by this Sunday patronage. After repeated efforts, my father, claiming in the absence of a resident vicar the right as churchwarden to interfere, eventually succeeded in suppressing this scandalous desecration and disgraceful exhibition of the ungodliness of the period.

Such was the religious state of Radyr Parish in my boyhood. The readers of this magazine who are conversant with all the work of the Church now being organized and conducted by their energetic, zealous and efficient Rector, if they are properly concerned for their spiritual welfare, cannot fail to feel thankful that their lot is cast in the last and

not the first half of this century. The gross neglect of the parish was owing, no doubt, to the non-residence of the Incumbent, a misfortune however almost unavoidable, on account of there being no house for him to live in, and of the poverty of the endowment and the consequent necessity of placing two or more parishes in charge of the same clergyman. Even now the income of the living is very much too small. As the population has so much increased with a corresponding increase of work to be done by the parson, it would be most desirable that a permanent increase should be made to the endowment. But if that cannot be done at present, Churchpeople, not only in this, but in other inadequately endowed parishes should remember, when each time for Easter offerings comes round, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire," and that a good labourer deserves good or at least adequate pay, especially when his work is of vital importance to every soul in the parish. There is a danger that parishes with small endowments may, as unfortunately in times past, be yet tacked on to other parishes and so deprived of a resident Incumbent.

The style of architecture of the church (perpendicular) shows that it was built at least 400, perhaps 500, years ago. The old pulpit was a lofty one, having a massive sounding board suspended over it, and faced the door. In front of it, at a lower level, was a roomy prayer desk in the form of a pew with a high door to it, and in front of that again, at a still lower level, was the clerk's pew. The nave was fitted with high pews, two only, which stood behind the door, being west of it and of the pulpit. A most interesting pretty screen, elaborately carved and ornamented, filled up the chancel arch, excepting a pointed arch in its centre. About fifty years ago or upwards, my father, as Churchwarden removed it on account of its decayed state. That is to be regretted. All the fittings in the church were of oak in expensive panel work.

The church was restored in 1869, at a cost of £1050, which was entirely defrayed by Lord Windsor's mother - the late Lady Mary

Windsor Clive. The late Rev. Chancellor Hugh Williams, then Vicar of Bassaleg, near Newport, where he lived, was the vicar, and the Rev. John Parry, who lived at Tongwynlais, was the Curate in sole charge. The roof was renewed, and the present east window was substituted for the old one, which was peculiar, as it consisted of three small pointed lights, each about one foot wide and all of a uniform height, of about four feet high. Prior to the restoration there was a small stone mural tablet let into the outside of the southeast wall of the chancel, bearing the brief but impressive inscription - "*Pulvis et umbra sumus*" - "dust and shadow are we".

There is an interesting block of Sutton stone, now carefully preserved in the church-yard, which used to lie at Radyr Chain, near the door of the diminutive house there, as a guard against vehicles striking the corner of it in turning the corner. The fact of it being of Sutton stone, which was so generally and exclusively used in the building of churches throughout the Vale of Glamorgan, is a good proof that it belongs to Radyr Church. A well formed basin has been scooped out of it, which has suggested the idea to some that it may have been a font, or a piscina. I consider that the cavity is too small for a font, and needlessly deep for a piscina, besides piscinas always have a hole for the water to run out, but this has not. My belief therefore is that it was a stoup usually placed near the door of a church, like the one now in St. Fagans church, to contain holy water for persons on entering the church to dip their fingers in and make the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

To the first resident Incumbent at Radyr - the Rev. H. J. Humphreys, now rector of Llangan, the credit is due of having inaugurated the marked revival of the Church in the parish during the last 17 years. The late Chancellor Hugh Williams, Vicar of Bassaleg, had been the non-resident Vicar for 41 years, from 1837 to 1878, when he vacated the living with his life. He was succeeded by Mr. Humphreys, who, getting quarters as a bachelor at Radyr Farm, in the midst of his parishioners, at