

A graveyard survey: Saint Peter's Church, Lampeter

Abstract

This is a report on a singular grave at Saint Peter's Church in Lampeter. It's found next to the west door of the church on the north side of the graveyard. The grave belongs to Evan, Gwenllian and Samuel Hughes who died at the age of 7, 13 and 75 respectively.

It is likely that the Hughes family would have viewed the Welsh language as a hinderance or at least saw the English language as a route to success due to the change in education and the development of the Welsh railway network in the nineteenth century. The popularity of Darwin's theory of evolution and the notion of survival of the fittest was likely a factor as it was often used for social issues such as the use of the Welsh language. Resisting the fate of the language was seen as resisting the ordinances of God (Davies 2014). As we can see from the iconography and biblical verses used on their headstone, the Hughes family were religious and naturally wouldn't have wanted to resist God's wishes.

As the Genuki (2003) report on Saint Peter's Church and their location in the graveyard suggests, they were members of the Anglian Church. A report on the state of education in Wales was conducted by English members of the Anglican Church and it concluded that Welsh schools were inadequate and that Welsh people were thieves, liars and cheats. These comments were related to the fact that they were mostly Welsh speaking nonconformists. We can assume that this sort of rhetoric was possibly pushed through the Church and its members, including the Hughes family, resulting in them not wanting to portray their children and themselves as so after death.

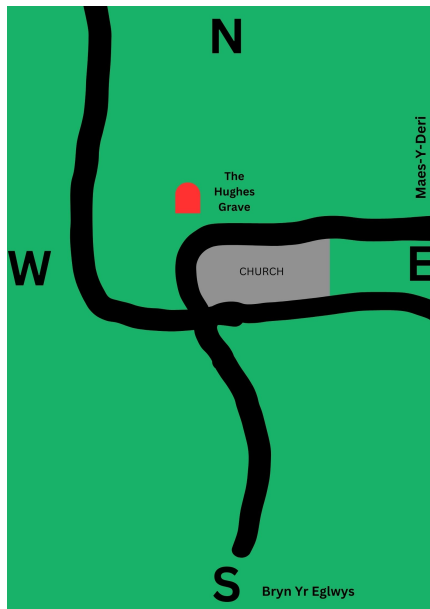
Keywords

Grave, Welsh language, Wales, education, railway

Introduction

The theme of this report is centred around the choice of language for the headstone of the Hughes Family at Saint Peter's Church, Lampeter. I've chosen this grave specifically as one of the members of the family, Gwenllian, has a Welsh name yet the inscriptions are in English. Assuming that they were a Welsh speaking family, I will be looking at the social context of why they might have chosen to do this in the late nineteenth century.

The 1891 census states that 95% of people living in Ceredigion had the ability to speak Welsh so we can assume it wasn't an accessibility choice to decide to be commemorated in English. It is vital to look at the wider historical context of people's attitudes towards the Welsh language to decipher why they wouldn't take the opportunity to portray national allegiance through their memorial.



The Hughes Grave

Method

I chose this particular grave to report on as I wanted to specifically concentrate on the reason a Welsh speaking person would choose to commemorate themselves in English. It was one of the only graves I could find at Saint Peter's Church that had a Welsh name but the inscription in English. Due to it being on the side of the path near the west door of the church, it was very easy to come across and it stood out to me right away. The year of death, specifically for Evan and Gwenllian, fell into the timeframe that I was looking to research, and therefore it was the best example for this report. I proceeded to take a photo and note the location of the grave.

I researched specifically into the use of language on gravestones in nineteenth century Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire and I also delved into the history of the Welsh language in this period. Although I researched earlier, it was from the mid nineteenth century onwards that felt monumental in changing people's attitudes toward the use of the language.

Results

As shown in the image, all the information is through the medium of English although Gwenllian is clearly a Welsh name. The grave is located at the north side of the graveyard, near the west door which is the entrance to all events at the church. To have been buried right next to it would imply certain wealth or status as it is a prime location in the graveyard and would have cost a healthy amount.

The headstone is an engraved slate slab around a metre and a half tall. A memorial of this size allows enough space for design and inscriptions but it would have come at a cost.

Compared to modern graves, this headstone includes a lot of information. Not only does it include the usual information of name and the date of birth and death, it also includes a reference to kinship and location as well as multiple biblical verses. As inscriptions were engraved by hand in

the nineteenth century, this would have also taken a considerable amount of time and money which further proves the Hughes family must have had a substantial level of wealth and status. We can tell from the biblical verses and iconography that they were religious. The Genuki (2003) site on Saint Peter's Church notes that Samuel is of this parish and we can clearly see this by the location of the grave and the chosen iconography of the headstone. As Saint Peter's is an Anglican Church, we can assume that the Hughes family would have also been Anglican and not nonconformists as many Welsh speaking families were.

Discussion

The grave of Evan, Gwenllian and Samuel represents a particular attitude towards the Welsh language that stems from a century of blows targeted at the Welsh language. Although 95% of people spoke Welsh in Ceredigion in 1891, they have decided to inscribe their memorial in English. We can assume that it was likely not an accessibility choice as almost everyone spoke Welsh, unless they believed that the Welsh language wouldn't survive. Due to Charles Darwin conceiving the theory of evolution in 1859, many people adopted the notion of survival of the fittest towards social issues (Davies 2014). The emphasis on competition alongside the principles of capitalism nurtured a belief that resisting the effects of competition was to resist the ordinances of God (Davies 2014). As a religious family, this could have been one of the main reasons for not wanting to use the Welsh language on their headstone as they wouldn't have wanted to be seen as rebelling against God's wishes or the Church.

The nineteenth century was a complicated time for the Welsh language because of a few important events. In the early 1800's, attitudes towards Welsh and those who spoke it changed largely due to developments and changes in transport and education. The completion of the Welsh railway network opened the whole country up to English tourism, business and influence (Davies 2014). According to the 1890 railway map of Wales, the main line from south Wales passed through Lampeter and continued towards Aberystwyth and the north. Although Lampeter wouldn't have been considered one of the most accessible places, it would have attracted many English tourists especially those heading towards seaside towns such as Aberystwyth. This would have had an impact on the need for English speaking employees, especially in the leisure industries, which meant that the Welsh language and monoglot Welsh speaking staff often lost their roles (Davies 2014). Although the railway network would have changed the social landscape of towns like Lampeter, we can tell by the 1891 census that even 40 years on from the development of the network, Welsh was still a majority language in Ceredigion with 95% of people over the age of two having the ability to speak it.

One of the biggest changes to the use of the language was through education. Due to Welsh civil unrest being one of the greatest concerns to the government in London, they believed teaching loyalty to the crown and the Anglican Church would be the best way to keep the Welsh under control (Roberts 2017). In the 1850's, the government sent commissioners who were middle class, English and Anglicans to write a report on the state of education in Wales. They found that most schools were inadequate and they called Welsh people liars, cheats, thieves and sexually promiscuous. These characteristics were related to the fact that most of them were Welsh speaking nonconformists (Roberts 2017). As the Welsh were often aware and cared about how the English viewed them, especially since it was incorporated into England politically and administratively by Henry the VIII, the report was a huge bombshell (Roberts 2017).

If we assume that the Hughes family were Anglican and members of Saint Peter's Church, it isn't unreasonable to suggest that this rhetoric would have been continually pushed through the church and its members. If this was the case, then they wouldn't have wanted their children or themselves to appear as second class citizens after death, especially if they had an important role within the church. Although the choice of language on graves can be used as a sign of national allegiance and a cultural identifier (Mytum 1994), it is suggested that the Hughes family saw more importance in their role within the Anglican Church and possibly the British union, rather than with their Welsh speaking nonconformist counterparts.

Reference List

Davies, J. 2014. *The Welsh language: A History*

Mytum, H. 1994. *Language as symbol in churchyard monuments: the use of Welsh in nineteenth - and twentieth - century Pembrokeshire*

Roberts, G. T., 2017. *"At once illogical and unfair": Jane Williams (Ysgafell) and the government report on education in mid nineteenth century Wales.*

Genuki (2003) *St Peter's Church, Lampeter Burials*. Available at: <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/CGN/Lampeter/Burials2> (Accessed: 11 March 2024).