

**WELSH POOL AND POWYS-LAND:  
A HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT  
PRINCIPALITY AND LATER BARONY  
OF POWYS, AND OF THE TOWN  
AND CASTLE OF WELSH POOL**

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Welsh Pool and Powys-Land: A History of the Ancient Principality and Later Barony of Powys,  
and of the Town and Castle of Welsh Pool by Robert Owen

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**ROBERT OWEN**

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A HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT PRINCIPALITY  
AND LATER BARONY OF POWYS, AND  
OF THE TOWN AND CASTLE OF WELSH POOL.

BY

ROBERT OWEN, *1854*

(AUTHOR OF "WELSH POOL AND ITS ENVIRONS," "CEDEWAIN  
PLACE-NAMES," ETC.)

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THE TOWN OF WELSH POOL FROM THE CASTLE.

## WELSH POOL AND POWYS-LAND:

"A HISTORY OF THE TOWN AND BOROUGH OF WELSH POOL, AND  
THE SURROUNDING DISTRICT."<sup>1</sup>

BY ROBERT OWEN (WELSH POOL).

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### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

At the outset, it will be well to state that this history—extending from the earliest historical periods up to these latter days of the nineteenth century—does not attempt to give to its readers any minute details of the past annals of the district, nor is any attempt made to publish excerpts from contemporary documents: either task would be well-nigh an impossibility; and, moreover, to make a documentary chronicle of these pages would be a fruitless affair, when we consider that the work has already been accomplished, and that all documents bearing upon the annals of both town and province have, long since, been duly codified, translated, and published.<sup>2</sup> The primary object, then, of this history is to forge together, into one continuous chain, the links that bind one epoch of our local history with another: in other words—to take a “bird’s-eye view” of the annals of our district, and to present them to the reader’s eyes as one continuous whole. So far as the

<sup>1</sup> This was the title of the “Prize Essay”, proposed for competition at the Powys Provincial Eisteddfod, held in Welsh Pool on June 13th and 14th, 1895, for which “Cynveliu” was adjudicated the successful candidate; and it is here enlarged, by request, under the wider head of “Welsh Pool and Powys-land”, by the author, Mr. Robert Owen.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the past volumes of *Montgomeryshire Collections*, *Archæologia Cambrensis*, and other similar publications.

writer is aware, this is the first attempt ever made to construct a continuous chronicle of events for that loosely-defined "geographical area" known as the PROVINCE OF POWYS.

To write a history of the ancient town and castle of Pool (which is the primary intention of the writer), and yet to ignore the general trend of events in the surrounding province, would be the means of seriously curtailing the mental range of vision, and of narrowing the historic horizon to the limits of the town and parish; or, *vice versa*, to review the state of affairs in Powys-land, age by age, without due regard for the part played in its provincial annals by the stately stronghold of the noble CASTLE OF POWYS; and, in a lesser degree, by its dependent ville of La Pole (Welsh Pool), without a plentiful allusion to both town and castle, in such a review: would be to liken our paper to the time-worn simile of "*Hamlet*, with the Prince of Denmark omitted therefrom." The history of Powys-land has been so bound up, so interwoven, with that of the borough-town and its castle—and this intimate connection between the two began when Cadogan, "the Renowned Briton", came to Trallwng (Welsh Pool) in the early days of the twelfth century, and it has continued ever since—and their historic associations are so entwined, that there seems nothing incongruous in the idea of allowing the wide history of the ancient province to gradually narrow its area, bit by bit, as we approach more modern times, until it becomes practically merged in the records and channels of the borough-town. Our history, therefore, begins with the lives of the Kings of Old Powys, dealing with the stirring events that occurred in their days, and in which they were no mere passive spectators, and it finishes with a slight record of municipal progress in the town and borough, together with some events of local history up to the present day.

Geographically, the town of Pool is situated within the county and archdeaconry of Montgomery and



diocese of St. Asaph, and lies within the upper valley of the Severn,<sup>1</sup> twenty miles west of Shrewsbury and seven miles north-east of Montgomery, and is distant 176 miles from London. The town is built at the entrance of a deep valley, formed by the passage of the Nant y Caws, or Lledan brook, a stream which rises at Castle Caereinion, and flows into the Severn half-a-mile below the town. Upon its eastern side the town is open to the Severn valley; but on the west it is shut in by the lofty Golfa, a tract of moorland which extends in the direction of Meivod and Mathraval. Upon the north the Rhallt (Yr Allt) rises precipitously from the valley level, and slopes in swelling undulations towards Guilsfield; whilst a spur of this hill, known as the "Red Bank", abruptly terminates at the "top" of the town in a huge volcanic rock of greenish-grey basalt. To the south-west are the wooded slopes of Powis Castle Park; and crowning the undulating lawns and shady woodlands rises the picturesque structure of the ancient castle, built upon a rock of sandstone, from which it took its earliest name, "Castell Côch", or the Red Castle. Across the valley, the long level crest of Cefn Digoll (the "Long Mountain"), stretches for miles along the horizon, whilst to the north-east rises the noble Breiddin, with its triple crown—Craig Breiddin, Moel y Golfa, and Cefn y Castell—and its rock bound flanks, standing out as sentinel to the hill-country of the upper Severn. The Breiddin, indeed, has been aptly called "the *sentinel* of the Welsh hills"; for, once it is passed (to the east), we enter the great fertile plains of Shropshire and the English Midlands. The beautiful country to the west of Breiddin, in which the town and its castle are situated, is quite worthy of the title given to it by Llywarch Hên in the far-off sixth century, *Powys Paradwys Cymry* ("Powys, the Paradise of the Welsh"). And no less worthy is it of

<sup>1</sup> That portion of the Severn valley lying immediately below Welsh Pool was formerly known as *Ystrad Marchell* ("Marcella's Strath").

renown for the associations it bears in the chequered history of our Cymric Fatherland. These associations are especially recalled when the student of local history climbs the crest of the "Craig", or Moel y Gofa, and sees in front of him the camp of Caractacus upon the adjoining height of the Breiddin, or gazes at the solitary Wrekin and the distant spires of Shrewsbury, each with its memories of Cynddylan and Brochwel; or else turning westward, views below him places with names of such historical significance as Powis Castle, Montgomery, Meivod, Mathraval, Buttington, and Careghova. It is upon the rocky heights of this noble hill of Breiddin that the opening scene of our history is enacted.

"A thousand years their cloudy wings expand  
Around me, and a dying glory smiles  
O'er the far times."—Byron.

The town of Welsh Pool lies distant less than two miles from Offa's Dyke, the *historical* boundary-line between England and Wales: this geographical consideration is important. Of still greater significance is the fact that the town is built upon the *western* banks of the Severn, and not upon its *eastern* side. Along the border-lands of England and Wales there is no better criterion for judging the respective predominance of the rival Anglo-Saxon and Celtic elements, in any given locality, than the witness of the *place-names*. In bringing this important witness to bear upon the case of our own neighbourhood, it will be found that *east* of Severn<sup>1</sup> the Anglo-Saxon nomenclature freely intersperses itself with that of the Welsh:—Buttington, Edderton, Hope, Leighton, Thornbury, Uppington and Woodliston, intermixed with Cilcewydd, Cletterwood, Criggion, Forden (Ffordd-hen), Mynllyn, Trefnant, Trelystan, and Trewern. These townships, by their names, clearly testify to the commingling of the rival nations within their limits, at a period prior to the fall

<sup>1</sup> We are dealing with the country-side lying upon the western slopes of the Long Mountain and Breiddin.

of Anglo-Saxondom (1066 A.D.). On the *western* side of the river we have a purely Celtic district: a district which at no time in its history was ever affected by Teutonic influences, and which, from among its place-names cannot produce one single instance of Anglo-Saxon nomenclature.<sup>1</sup>

In these pages, therefore, we shall be dealing with the records of a Celtic district undisturbed ever by Teutonic influences. Indeed, it may be said that the Celtic system of social polity survived for a considerable time in this district, and in other parts of Wales, after the purely Teutonic epoch had been supplanted in England by a *Romanesque* or Norman successor. In the end, the Celtic system, too, succumbed to the Romanesque, and it was during the long period of transition between the two systems (during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) that our local history passes through its acutest stages.

In Teutonic Britain the *Village Community* (or *Township*) formed the unit of social polity, whereas, in Celtic Britain, the *Tribe* formed that unit. This all-important fact should not be lost sight of, especially by students of Welsh history. A record of the great princely tribes that ruled in Powys-land will, therefore, of necessity, occupy a large proportion of the pages of this short history.

During the course of this history, local society may be said to have passed through three distinct phases; and so, before proceeding further, we will now indicate how these phases can be roughly grouped under their several headings:—

(a) The *Tribal Epoch*—which extends from the first stage of local history to the days of Griffith ab Gwenwynwyn—that thirteenth-century ruler of Powys who gave the finishing stroke in the overthrow of the ancient Celtic system in these parts.

(b) The *Feudal Epoch*—begins with the infusion of

<sup>1</sup> The name *Gulifield*, be it noted, is not of Anglo-Saxon origin (*vide* p. 189).