

“A gentleman’s word” so it used to be said, “Is his bond”, but would it still be kept when both parties were in their grave?

A Gentleman’s Word

“A gentleman’s word”, or so the saying used to run, “Is his bond”, and surprising as it might seem today, this was generally true. A promise given was a promise that was almost invariably kept - certainly no true gentleman would contemplate doing otherwise. This little story, which I pieced together from some old documents in the Penrice & Margam Collection, concerns just such a case involving a man named John Loveluck who lived at Margam and Kenfig during the latter part of the 18th century. Although his descendants are numerous in the area today, he was not a native of the district but was brought here by Sir Thomas Talbot of Margam House about the year 1767.

Sir Thomas was a keen huntsman, and John was employed as his gamekeeper responsible for maintenance of his game reserves, parks and lakes around Margam. At the time John was about 27, single, and his employer clearly rated his abilities highly. His wages were set at £1. 1s. 0d (£1.05p) per month, and to wear whilst engaged on his duties he kitted John out in a “*new hair plush coat*” costing £3. 10s. 0d (£3.50p). To put these sums in context contemporary records show that 1,000 roofing tiles cost five shillings (25p), a mason received 1s 4d (7p) for a day’s work, and the annual rent for a cottage in our area was no more than £1 per annum. The following year John married a local girl named Ann John, and in 1769 the first of their six children was born.

After ten years serving Talbot John evidently decided that the time had come to secure the future for his family, and about 1778 he became the tenant of a small farm at Maudlam – probably not much more than 13 acres or so – owned by a Kenfig burgess named Daniel Rees. The original house has long gone, but it stood at the eastern end of the village church and behind The Angel Inn. From the fact that much of the land here was severely affected by sand encroachment it was known as *Ty’n y Towyn* – “*The House in the Sands*”.



The location of Ty'n y Towyn Farm which was replaced by the present house built by Matthew Forester in the early years of the 19th century.

Relations between John and his former employer remained cordial, and indeed the impression I get is that there was a great deal of mutual respect between them. In 1789 for example Talbot renewed John's gamekeeper licence and often called upon his expertise in this respect as when on one occasion when he employed him on an expenses-paid trip to Longleat House to select suitable pheasants for breeding at Margam Park. John, for his part, was able to use his good relationship with Sir Thomas to secure the tenancies of Margam properties at Kenfig which fell vacant and so expanded his farm into a large and prosperous holding

In 1796 Daniel Rees, John's landlord for Ty'n y Towyn, died and although his will has not survived it would appear that whilst he left the lands of the farm to his son Daniel Rees, the house itself he gave to a local girl named Catherine Symes who was married to Matthew Forster the Agent for the Gnoll Estate at Neath. The Forsters it seems made it clear that they wished to use this house as a kind of holiday home which meant the Lovelucks had to find somewhere else to live.

The licensee of The Angel Inn at this time was an elderly widow named Mary Evan who was well into her 80s. She held by lease from Margam two ruined cottages on the main road through Maudlam village, opposite the church and a little to the east. John sought a meeting with Sir Thomas, and together they came to a verbal agreement. He (John) would become Mary's tenant for the cottages and convert them into a farm complete with the necessary house, outbuildings and suchlike at his own expense. Sir Thomas for his part would ensure that once old Mary died, a new lease would be issued to John, Anne his wife and William their eldest son securing the farm complex and all their other Margam properties to them for the duration of their lives. Whilst undoubtedly a strange, one-sided arrangement by today's standards (since the farmhouse never actually became the property of the person who built it), this was nevertheless a perfectly normal arrangement two centuries ago.

The deal was sealed with nothing more than a handshake, but that was sufficient for John who went ahead and turned the cottages into *Maudlam Farmhouse* which was demolished in the 1950s. He probably reasoned that given her advanced age old Mary did not have long to live, but she was a tough old bird and was still very much alive when John himself died in March 1803. In fact she lived well into her 90s and only died in 1807 at which point John's widow Anne and their son William anticipated Sir Thomas would honour his promise to the former gamekeeper. They waited in vain. Thomas was himself approaching the end of his life and in poor health, so lacking John's special relationship with his former employer; perhaps they were reluctant to approach him themselves. Whatever the reason, the upshot was that when Sir Thomas died in 1813 no lease had been issued.



Maudlam Farm which was demolished circa 1959. Sketch by O.G. Trinder from "Sketches of Old Kenfig & District"[1992] with the kind permission of The Kenfig Society *.

Perhaps at this point William Loveluck plucked up courage to approach Griffith Llewelyn the Margam Agent and broach the subject with him. The result was that William then submitted a formal petition to the Trustees administering the estate on behalf of Sir Thomas's heir. Griffith, it seems, had found in the Margam archives a memo written by Sir Thomas at the time of John Loveluck's death. The writing is terrible, and Sir Thomas's memory of their original agreement a little confused, but the meaning was quite clear - despite John's passing, his promise still stood. When the time was right he committed himself to honouring his word by issuing a lease to Anne and William Loveluck.

When William's petition and the memo were placed before the Trustees they had no hesitation in complying and, although both parties were in their graves, Sir Thomas's word was duly honoured.

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