

AMELIA RAY: A VICTORIAN FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR

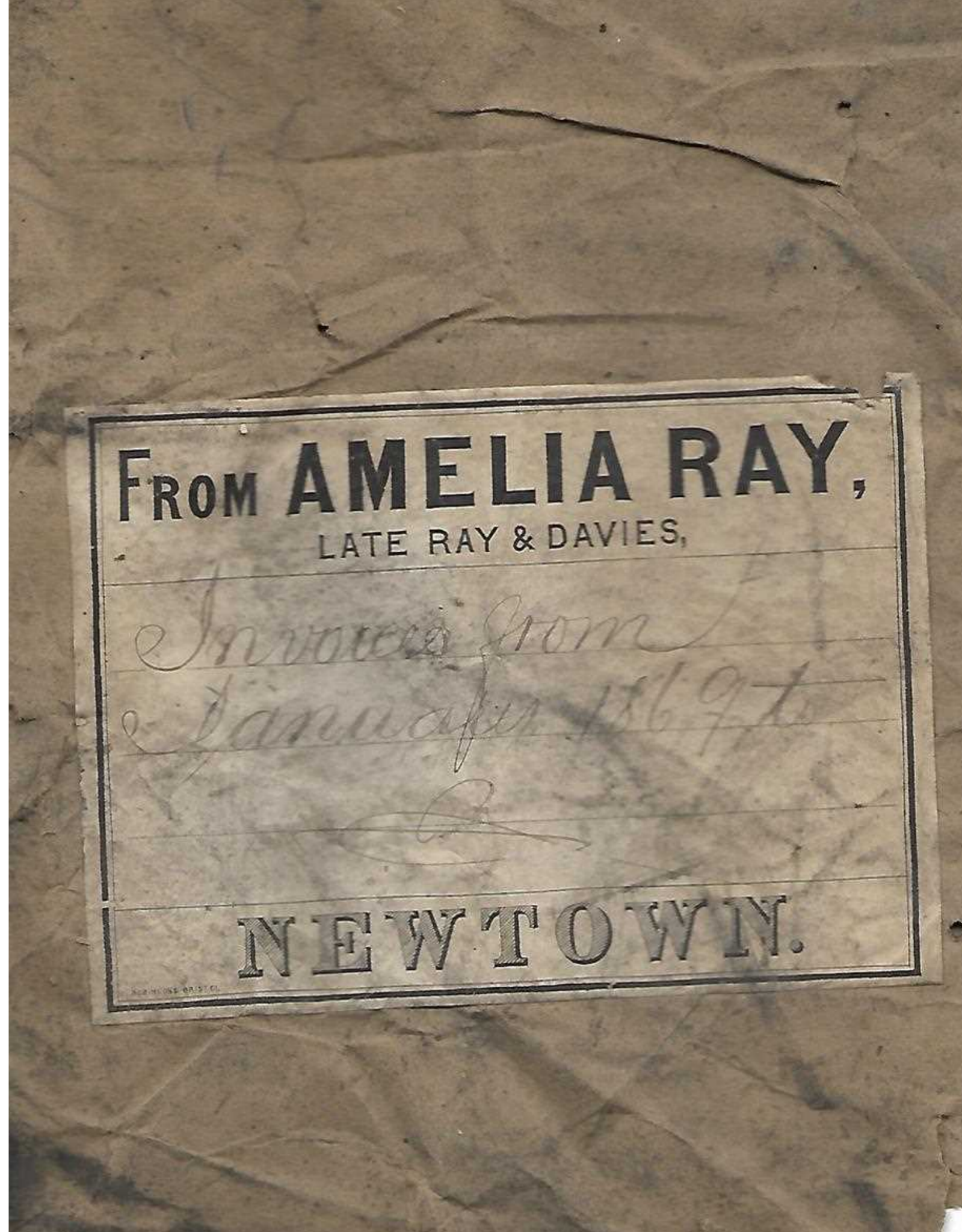


Summer Exhibition 2023

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1

From Ray & Davies to Ray & Sons



Amelia's Crown Shop at 25 High Street, about 1870.
Albumen photograph by John Owen

Charles Ray, a native of Stottesdon, Shropshire, arrived in Newtown in the late 1840s. At that time, Newtown had experienced unprecedented growth in its population. In 1800, the combined parishes of Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn could barely muster 1500 souls; by 1851 the population had more than tripled to over 7000. The cause of this increase was the concentration of the mid-Wales textile industry in the town. For centuries, the process of converting the wool from the sheep grazing on the slopes of the Severn Valley into fine quality flannel had been conducted in the isolated farmsteads of the area. But from the end of the 18th century, with increased mechanisation, the process was becoming centred in the urban centres of Llanidloes, Welshpool and, above all, Newtown.

Perhaps it was the prospect of enrichment in this industry which prompted Charles to set his sights westwards. As such, he was one of the many migrants from beyond the borders of Montgomeryshire who found their way to the town. Whatever the reason, by the time of the 1851 census, Charles had established himself in business with his partner, Ray Davies, in High Street. Together, they operated a wine merchants business from their premises at the Crown Vaults, 26 High Street, Newtown. Rather incongruously, the partners also ran a draper's business from the same premises.

Charles and David were both bachelors in 1851, but the household they shared was certainly large. Charles's sister, Elizabeth acted as housekeeper. She was assisted by two female servants. In addition, four apprentice drapers and one draper's assistant were also in residence, making a total household size of ten with only three over the age of 25. The number of apprentices and assistants perhaps gives us some indication of the scale of the draper's business compared to that of the licensed victualers.

Two years later, in 1853, Charles married 27-year-old Amelia Owens, thirteen years his junior. Like Charles, Amelia originated from Shropshire. She was born around 1814 in the small village of Aston Botterel, midway between Ludlow and Bridgenorth. The 1841 census shows her as an 11-year girl living with her parents, Stephen, a

surgeon, and his wife Martha. In total, the Owens had nine children and Amelia was the youngest. It is highly probable that the Owens and Ray families were known to each other for a considerable time, as the villages of Aston Botterel and Stottesdon are just 3 miles distant from each other.

When the next census was taken in 1861 it was clear that great changes had been made in the lives of both partners. Like Charles, David Davies had married and the households had divided. David, his family and servants remaining in the Crown Vaults, whilst Charles and his wife, Amelia, had taken up residence above the Crown shop. We know that the partnership with David was still in existence in 1861, but interestingly, there seems to have been a division of responsibilities. David and Charles are described respectively as 'wine merchant' and, 'mercier'. Evidence for the continued partnership comes from Slater's Trade Directory of 1868 which lists Ray and Davies as Woollen and Linen Drapers as well as proprietors of The Crown Vaults. In addition, they also had their own brewery situated in the Horsemarket (the area between the Cross and the junction with Market Street).

Back in 1861, the Rays seemed to have been thriving, for by the time of the census of that year there were four children. From their ages, they came in quick succession. Six-year-old Charles Downs Ray was followed in 1857 by Clement Owens Ray - both children taking their middle names from Amelia's mother's and Amelia's own maiden names. A year later Amelia junior was born and in 1860 William Barker Ray arrived. When the census was taken in early April 1861, Mrs Ray was probably still recovering from the birth of her second daughter, Mary Jane, who was just four months old. In addition to the family, the house was shared by three mercer's assistants, one 16-year-old apprentice, two domestic servants and two nurses, the latter obviously to look after the Ray infants.



High Street, about 1880, looking towards the Cross. Albumen print by John Owen



The Montgomeryshire Express, July 27 1880, suggests that Crown Shop had become a Department Store.

1853. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Stanton Lacy in the County of Salop

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
236	August 25	Charles Ray	full	Bachelor	Gentleman	Newtown	dead	Farmer
		Amelia Barrow	full	Spinster	Lady	Stanton Lacy	dead	Widow

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by licence or after by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Charles Ray Amelia Barrow in the Presence of us, Geo. Bright Martha Barrow J. Bostle, Vicar

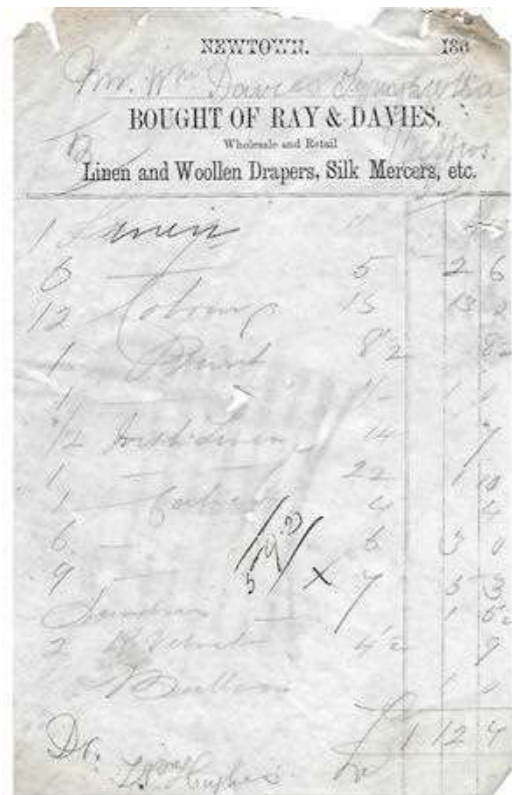
August 25 1853 marriage. Charles and Amelia preferred to state their rank as Gentleman and Lady, rather than their profession, in the marriage register of Stanton Lacy, Shropshire.

By early 1869 it appears that Charles may have been suffering from ill-health. In January of that year, the partnership with David Davies was dissolved. David continued with his licensed victuallers trade, whilst Charles continued as a draper. The last invoice for payment we have in the archive for Ray & Davies is 18/2/1869 from the Cambrian Flannel company, Flannel manufacturers, in respect of an order for 163 yds of Welsh flannel at a total cost of £7 18/3d. The period of sole ownership did not last long. By May 1869, Charles was dead and control of the business passed to Amelia. However, the evidence from the archive suggests that Amelia, who does not seem to have figured in the business prior to 1869, had begun to take an active involvement before the death of her husband. This suggests, perhaps, that Charles's health had been failing for some months prior to his death. The earliest indication of Amelia's involvement seems to date from January around the time that the partnership with Davies had been dissolved. The earliest datable reference to Amelia having some involvement in the business is from 9 January 1869 from Lewis Humphreys & Co, Fancy goods of Manchester - invoice for four items including linen, cotton, braid and sissal to the value of £1 3/1d (Ray04-081). A receipt from James McClaren & Nephews of Manchester, addressed to Mrs Amelia Ray for payment of goods ordered in November of the previous year, is recorded as paid on 10 January. The evidence of Amelia's involvement prior to Charles's death is

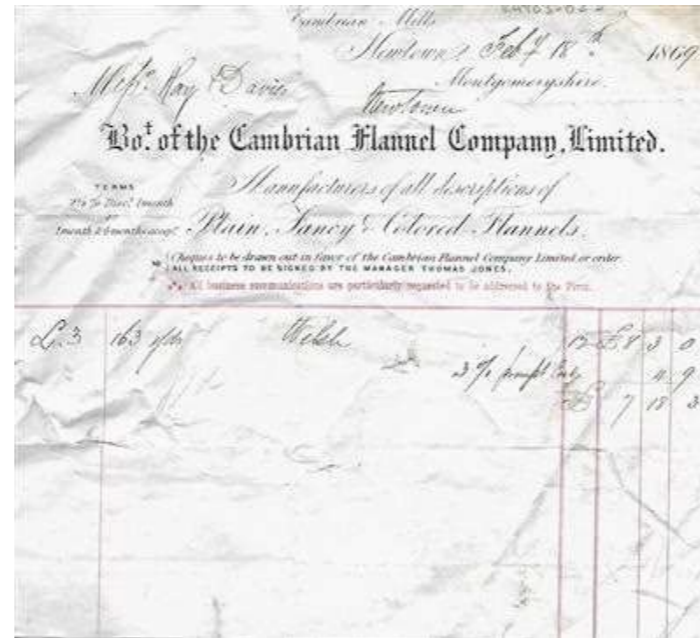
admittedly limited, and made more difficult to gauge because letterheads of Ray and Davies continued to be used post-January 1869 and items continued to be addressed to Charles Ray long after his death. It is, however, significant that this item of 10 January is the first surviving example of a link between Amelia and the business.

For the next decade, Amelia ran the business herself. The period would witness an expansion in the business from a mere outlet for the sale of fabrics and haberdashery to a multi-faceted concern taking in tailoring and bespoke services such as funeral direction. In 1878, perhaps with failing health, she took two of her sons, Charles Downes Ray and Clement Owens Ray into partnership. Over the next few years, Amelia's grip on the business gradually relaxed, as she retired to her new home, Glanhfren, on the edge of Newtown. It was here that she died at the age of 59 in 1885. Sadly, the business did not survive for much longer. Just two years later, her two sons were declared bankrupt. The Crown Shop was taken over by a rival draper, Henry Powell, who continued to operate until he himself was declared bankrupt in 1903. The bulk of the surviving archive covers the period of her sole ownership, indicating, perhaps, that she brought an increased efficiency to the business. Of the near 1,300 items which make up the collection xxx can be dated to the period 1869 to 1879.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUSINESS



Ray 05-095: Ray & Davies receipt issued sometime in the 1860s for items including Irish linen, red velvet and buttons: total cost £1/12/4d



Ray 03-023: Invoice Welsh Cambrian Flannel Company dated February 18 1869. By this time the partnership with Davies had ended, but invoices continued to be addressed to the pair for a long time afterwards. This is for an order of 163 yards of "Welsh" [flannel] valued at £7/18/3d (after a 3% discount for prompt payment). The Cambrian Mill was the first steam powered flannel factory in Newtown built in 1856 by Samuel Owen. By 1864 the Company was in difficulties and was liquidated. A new company was formed, the Cambrian Flannel Company. At its height it boasted 110 power looms and could count the Royal Navy as its customer for the supply of woollen blankets.



Ray 03-028: Printed Circular. Amelia recognised the value of advertising and regularly took out space in the local newspapers, or sent out circulars to her customers, as this item shows. This dates from the 1870s when Amelia operated as sole proprietor of the business.

High Street,
Newtown,
January 29th, 1878.

Madam,

I beg respectfully to inform you that having taken into partnership my two sons—Charles Downes Ray and Clement Owens Ray,—the business for the future will therefore be carried on under the name and style of “RAY & SONS.”

I take this opportunity of returning you my sincere thanks for the kind support you have favoured me with in the past, and trust that you will continue the same to the new firm, assuring you that no effort shall be wanting on their part to merit it.

I remain, Madam,
Your obedient servant,
AMELIA RAY.

Ray 08-047: Printed circular of 1878

announcing the partnership of Amelia with her two sons Charles Downes Ray and Clement Owens Ray.

FACTORY:— WEIR STREET, NEWTOWN. ESTABLISHED 1780. WELSH FLANNEL WAREHOUSE, NEWTOWN, NORTH WALES.

CIRCULAR FROM

RAY & SONS,
MANUFACTURERS OF
WELSH FLANNELS, TWEEDS, HOMESPUNS,
SHAWLS, &c.

We have much pleasure in informing you that owing to the increased enquiries which are being made year by year for goods of Welsh Manufacture, and the success attending our efforts to produce really useful Articles at a moderate cost, has induced us to take more extensive premises, to carry on the Manufacture of REAL WELSH HAND LOOM MADE FLANNELS, HOMESPUNS, WOOL SHIRTINGS, SHAWLS, TWEEDS, &c., and we trust for the future to be in a position to meet the great demand for these goods.

We would call your special attention to our WHITE and COLOURED FLANNELS, which need no recommendation from us, being made of specially picked FINE WELSH MOUNTAIN WOOLS, woven by experienced Weavers upon the OLD HAND LOOMS, and by the peculiar softness of the water in the neighbourhood, are finished in such a manner, that no other Flannels except those made in the vicinity of Newtown, can vie with them for durability, quality, and genuineness; also for their washable nature.

Our HOMESPUNS, TWEEDS, SHAWLS, &c., which have been much appreciated and sought after for so many years, are all specially designed by Artists of the greatest skill in the bleaching of colours, and, combined with the wonderful admixture of Wools used in their production, these goods have been brought to such a marvellous perfection, that we have every confidence in asking for your further esteemed orders and kind patronage. If we have not had the honour of supplying you with any goods, we respectfully solicit an inspection of our Patterns, feeling sure that they will meet with your kind approval.

Goods for CHARITY PURPOSES receive our most careful attention, having made it our study to supply goods of sterling value at reasonable prices, and disposing as we do of large quantities of these materials, we have taken advantage during the late depression of trade, of purchasing at very low prices, consignments of these Fabrics, which we are offering with our own Patterns, at prices much below the cost of production.

All orders entrusted to us will receive our immediate and best attention.

NEWTOWN, the centre of the Welsh Manufactures, being in direct communication with the principal lines of Railway in the Kingdom, Parcels can be forwarded without delay to any part.

Patterns and Samples forwarded Post Free. Any length cut.

Carriage paid on Parcels over £2 in value, to any Station in England and Wales, and on £5 and upwards to Ireland and Scotland. Immediate attention to Telegrams. Goods packed for exportation.

Ray 06-044: Printed Circular after 1878.

The business obviously continued to flourish after the new partnership was established as this circular shows. Weir Street was situated off Severn Square. The date of 1780 which marks the establishment of the Welsh Flannel Warehouse suggests that this must have been one of the earliest handloom factories established in the town.

Mrs. Ray L.S.D.
 To E. Hargreaves
 Dec^r 30th Making two dresses and Tunic 0.8.0
 Jan 20th Making two dresses and Tunic 0.7.0
 Making Tunic and Bodice 0.3.0
 July 9th Making two Polanise 0.6.0
 Aug 5th Making Polanise 0.3.0
 1.7.0

Settled Dec 2. 1872
 E. Hargreaves



An 1870s polonaise

Ray13-094 Amelia offered dressmaking and tailoring services to her customers. The work was farmed out to trusted seamstresses. In December 1872 she paid out £1-7-0 to E. Hargreaves for making four dresses and tunics, a tunic and "body" and three "Polanise" (a Polonaise was a woman's dress with a tight bodice and a skirt open from the waist downwards, looped up to show a decorative underskirt. This 18th C. style was revived in the 1870s inspired by Polish national costume).

2.

A Communications Revolution



The World's first postage stamp revolutionised the way letters were sent.

Victorian Britain witnessed a great expansion in trade and industry. Industrial expansion was accompanied by a revolution in communications, the like of which was not seen until our own generation. These changes greatly affected the way business was conducted, speeding up the process of ordering supplies from wholesalers, increasing the range of products which could be stocked and widening their customer base. For consumers, it meant a wider choice of commodities from further afield and the decline in a reliance on locally produced items. The two great drivers in this change were the introduction of the universal postal service and the development of a fast, reliable overland transport system.

The 'Penny Post' in 1840 was the brain child of Sir Rowland Hill. It meant that a letter could be sent to any part of mainland Britain for the same cost - one penny. Although a penny had the purchasing power of a modern-day pound, it cut the cost of delivery of a typical letter by three-quarters. Equally, it established the principle that the sender paid for postage. Until this time it was the person receiving the letter who paid the postage.

The steam locomotive had come a long way in the half century since Richard Trevithick built the world's first steam railway locomotive at Penrydarren Ironworks in South Wales. By the 1840s 'Railway mania' had hit Britain and over a twenty year period, a national network connected up the far-flung reaches of the United Kingdom. Localism was breaking down: even to the extent of local time with clocks set to 'Railway Time'.

One unexpected outcome of this communications revolution was the birth of new ways of shopping. People in rural areas, in particular, now found it possible to shop without leaving home. A letter could be sent with instructions for items. The items could be packed and sent by train to the nearest station and collected by the purchaser. Even better, from the retailer's point of view demand for goods could be stimulated by persuading customers to buy more. Pryce Jones established Newtown as a global supplier of goods. First sending out swatches of fabrics to his customers, he later printed his own catalogues, arguably becoming the creator of 'mail order' in the process. Others, like Amelia Ray, also realised the potential of the new communications to grow their businesses.

Amelia Ray lived through the greatest changes in transportation and communication ever witnessed. Like other entrepreneurs, she exploited the new opportunities which resulted.

1828

Swift Thomas, Bridge end
Walter John, Monifrey
Williams Edward, Stone market
Williams Jeremiah, Millon

WOOD DEALERS,
Hodder William, Bridge at
James John, Church Lane
Horton Edward, Cross Church at
Morris Edward, Poysholton
Morris Thomas, Bridge at

Miscellaneous.
Blackmore William, agent of
John, Bridge street
John, Winton, brick maker, Llanidloes
Dobson Richard, mill manufacturer, Green
Edwards John, miller, Bank of the River
Francis, River, Bridge street—David
Thomas, iron merchant
George Thomas, pattern maker, Horse
Lane John, iron miller, Severn at
James and David, wine & spirit dealers,
High street
Owen John, iron founder, Canal basin
Green Wm, cooper & chair maker, High at
James Jones, dealer in game, Bridge at
Stephen Charles, draper, Post road
Thomas David, iron necessary to the
proprietors of the Flannel Mill Company,
Bridge street
Tanner Mary, stamp manufacturer, Bridge

COACHES.
To ABERYSTWYTH, the train from
Birkenhead, every Tuesday and Saturday morning
at six and the return to the
Angel, every Monday, Wednesday and
Friday morning at ten o'clock, during
the bathing season, and the *Direct* from
Killeshock, every day at the hour of noon,
every Monday and Friday afternoon at
three, during the bathing season. All
go through Llanidloes and the *Line*
between from Birkenhead to the
same line, every Wednesday & Thurs-
day morning at six, during the bathing
season; good through Llanidloes
and the river.

To LLIDLOES, the *Direct* from
Aberystwith, every day at the hour of noon,
every Monday and Friday afternoon at
three, during the bathing season. All
go through Llanidloes and the *Line*
between from Birkenhead to the
same line, every Wednesday & Thurs-
day morning at six, during the bathing
season; good through Llanidloes
and the river.

To LLIDLOES, the *Direct* from
Aberystwith, every day at the hour of noon,
every Monday and Friday afternoon at
three, during the bathing season. All
go through Llanidloes and the *Line*
between from Birkenhead to the
same line, every Wednesday & Thurs-
day morning at six, during the bathing
season; good through Llanidloes
and the river.

A letter at the time of Amelia's birth might take two or three days to arrive in London by mail coach. It was also expensive, depending on weight and distance to be delivered. Since the receiver had to pay, delivery might not even succeed. Conveyance of goods by land or by canal was even slower - allow a week to ten days.

(Pigot's Trade Directory, 1828)

1840



By the time Amelia had reached 13, the Universal Penny Post had been introduced. Now it was possible to send a letter anywhere in the country for the same rate - one penny (about £1 in modern terms). The introduction of a stamp meant that the sender, not the receiver, paid. Delivery times remained about the same.

No change to how goods were transported..

(Roland Hill's Penny Black, 1840)

1853

SWIFT PARAGONS BRATA
DUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1853.

Line	From	To	Time
1	Aberystwith	London	10:00
2	London	Aberystwith	10:00
3	Aberystwith	London	10:00
4	London	Aberystwith	10:00

Amelia was about to marry Charles at the same time that the Great Western Railway reached Shrewsbury. It still took a five hour canal trip from Newtown to Rednal (near Oswestry) where a train connected to Shrewsbury for on-going connection to London.

(Shrewsbury Chronicle, 1853)

1869

POST OFFICE, Severn Street, Newtown, Mary Ann Evans, Post Mistress —
Arrivals.—From London and all parts of England and General, at six morning, and thirty minutes past three afternoon.
From Aberystwith, at thirty minutes past two morning.
From Aberystwith, Machynlleth, Llanidloes, and places adjacent thereto, at eight night.
Departures.—To London and all parts of England and General, at thirty minutes past two morning, and seven evening.
To Aberystwith, at thirty minutes past three afternoon.
To Aberystwith, Machynlleth, Llanidloes, and places adjacent thereto, at thirty past five morning.
Home Trade Office and Services Book.

In the next few years, the railway was extended westwards to Machynlleth and eastwards to Oswestry and Shrewsbury. At age 42 Amelia was entering widowhood. By this time, it was possible to send a letter from Newtown to London and get a reply the following day. Goods also could be sent with ease from Newtown's new station to all parts of the country.

(Slater's Trade Directory, 1869)

1859

NEWTOWN RAILWAY.

November, 1859.

Notice to the Public, that the Company do not hold themselves responsible for any loss or damage to goods.

Station	Time	Time	Time
Aberystwith	10:00	10:00	10:00
Machynlleth	10:00	10:00	10:00
Llanidloes	10:00	10:00	10:00
Newtown	10:00	10:00	10:00

Amelia had given birth to her third child just before the opening of the railway in Newtown. It was a wonderful occasion, celebrated with great fanfare. But it wasn't very practical, as services only ran between Newtown and Llanidloes.

(Llanidloes to Newtown Railway timetable, 1859)

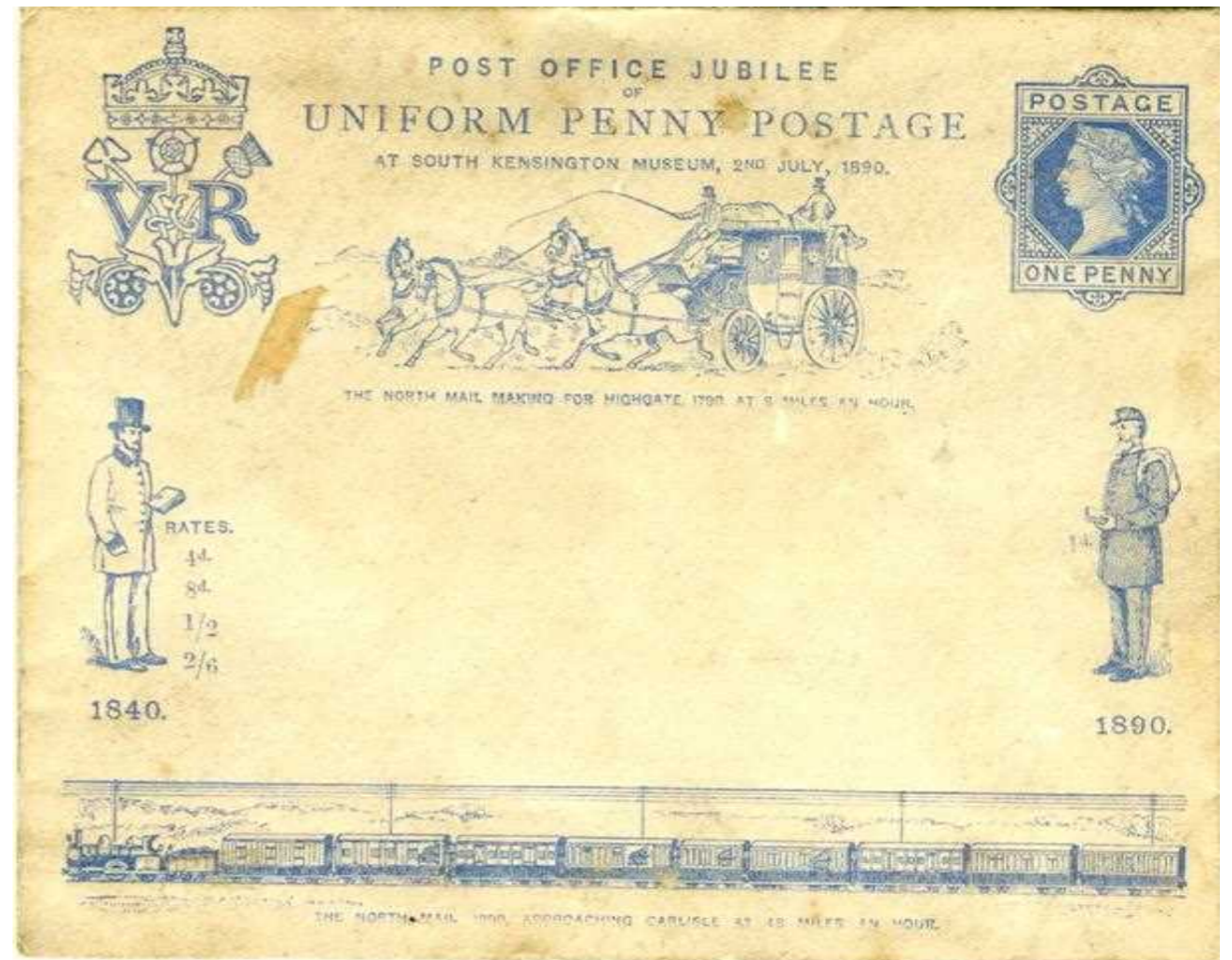


A Cambrian Railways train approaches Newtown Station.
(Detail from Panorama of Newtown, R.G. Salter 1878)

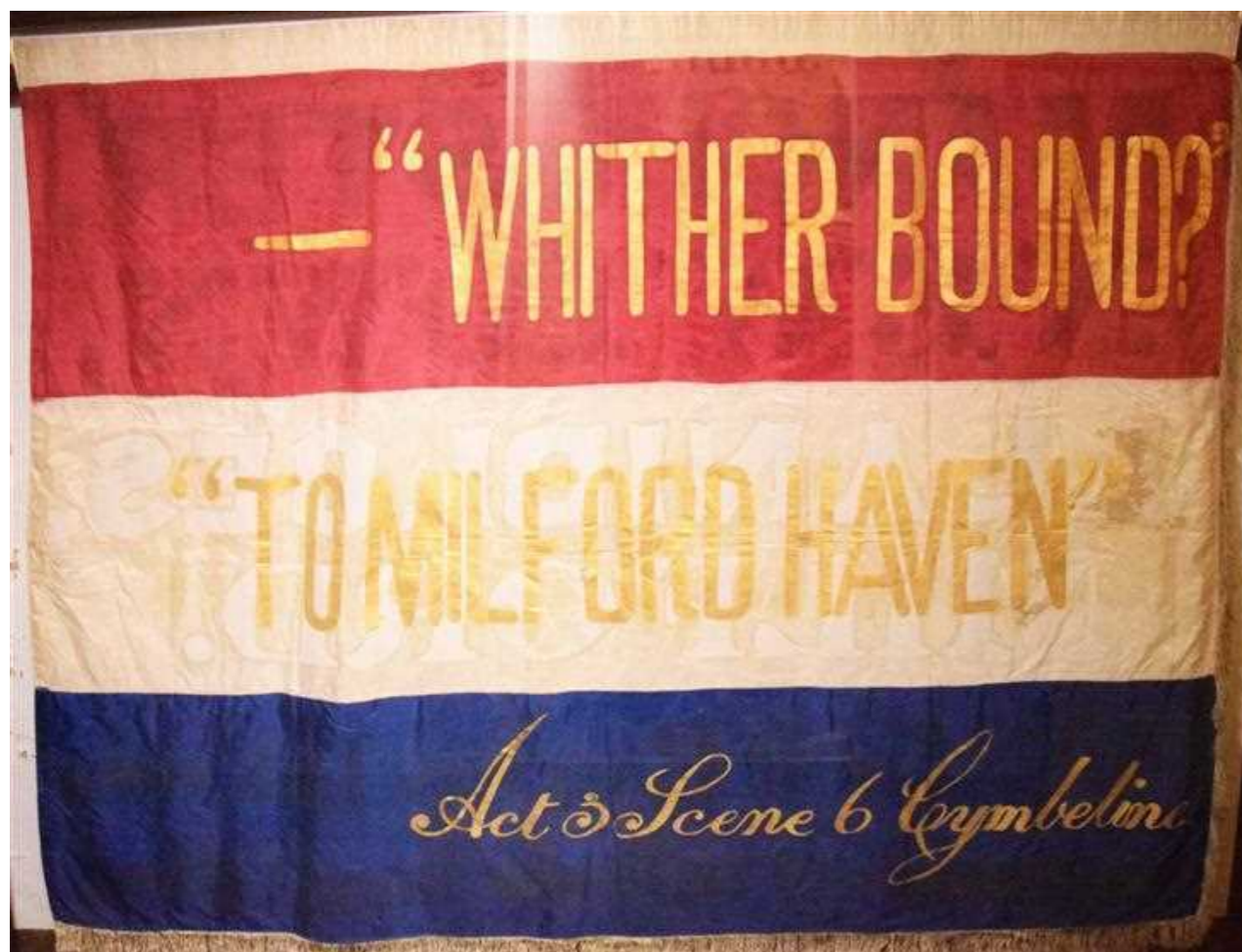
NEWTOWN GETS CONNECTED



Ray 01-091 Envelope addressed to Amelia Ray, Draper. Reverse of an invoice which also operated as an envelope. Posted by Dent & Alcroft of London on July 4 1869 and arriving in Newtown the following day.



N.1990.170: Commemorative Postal Cover marking the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of the Penny Post in 1890. Victorians clearly recognised the revolution in communications which had occurred in their lifetime.



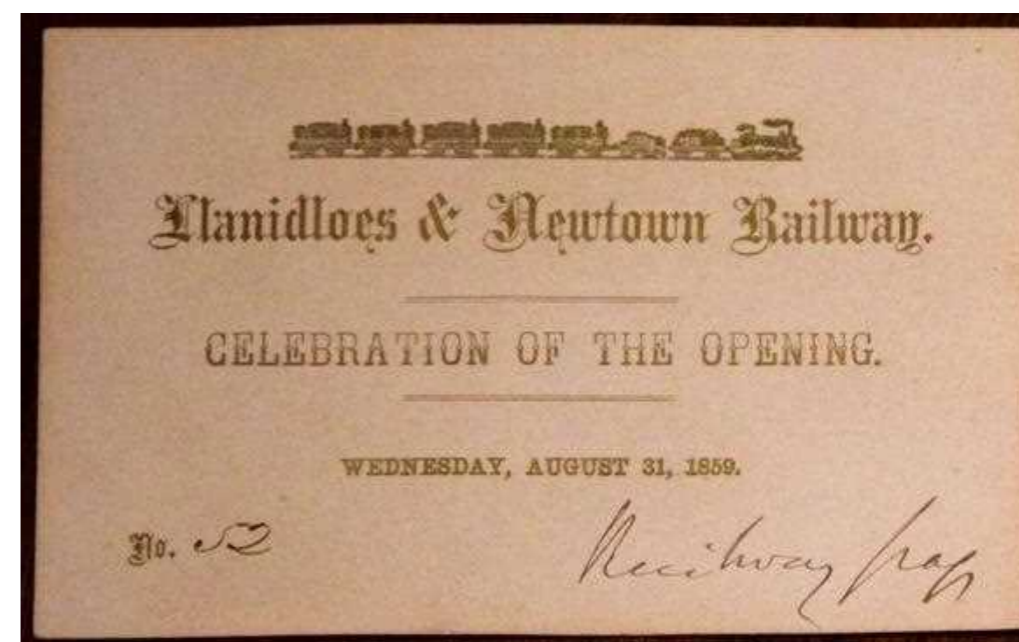
N.1990.316: Silk banner raised at the opening of the Llanidloes to Newtown Railway 1859. The quotation from Shakespeare is a reference to the dream of creating a railway from Manchester to Milford Haven for onward Atlantic connection to America.



N.1990.164: Obverse of commemorative medal marking the opening of the Llanidloes to Newtown Railway, August 31 1859



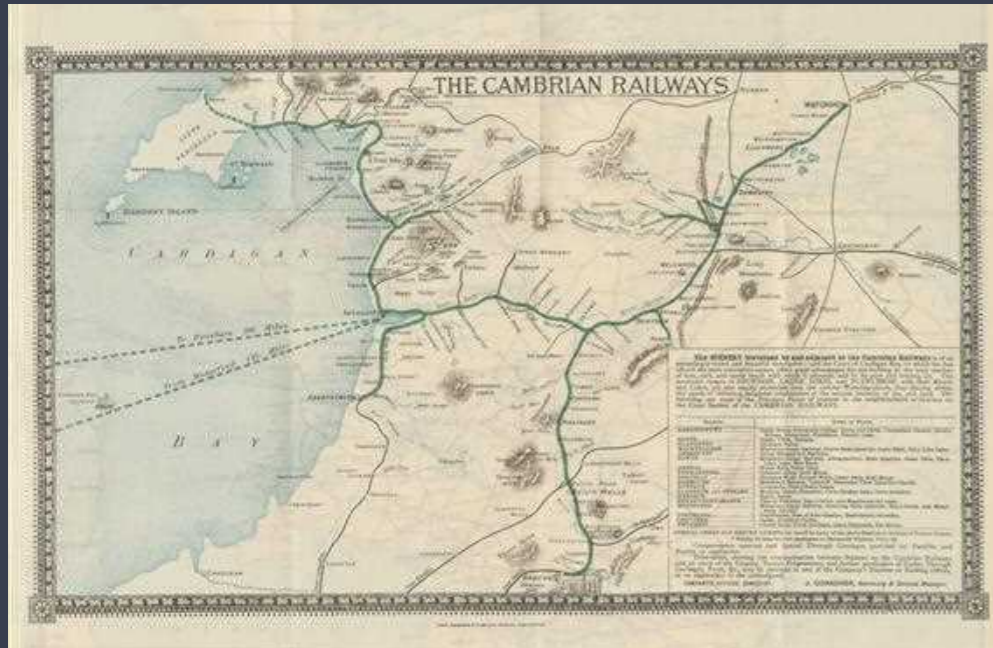
N.1990.164: Reverse with inscription



N.1990.384: Railway ticket on the inaugural railway service to connect Newtown and Llanidloes. More than 2,000 people travelled that day, including Pryce Jones and, quite possibly, Amelia and Charles Ray.

3.

Supply and Demand



A map of the rail network of Mid-Wales, c.1880. Amelia's customers could be found all along the railway - from Borth in the west to Craven Arms in the east: from Hay-on-Wye in the south to Rhyl in the north.

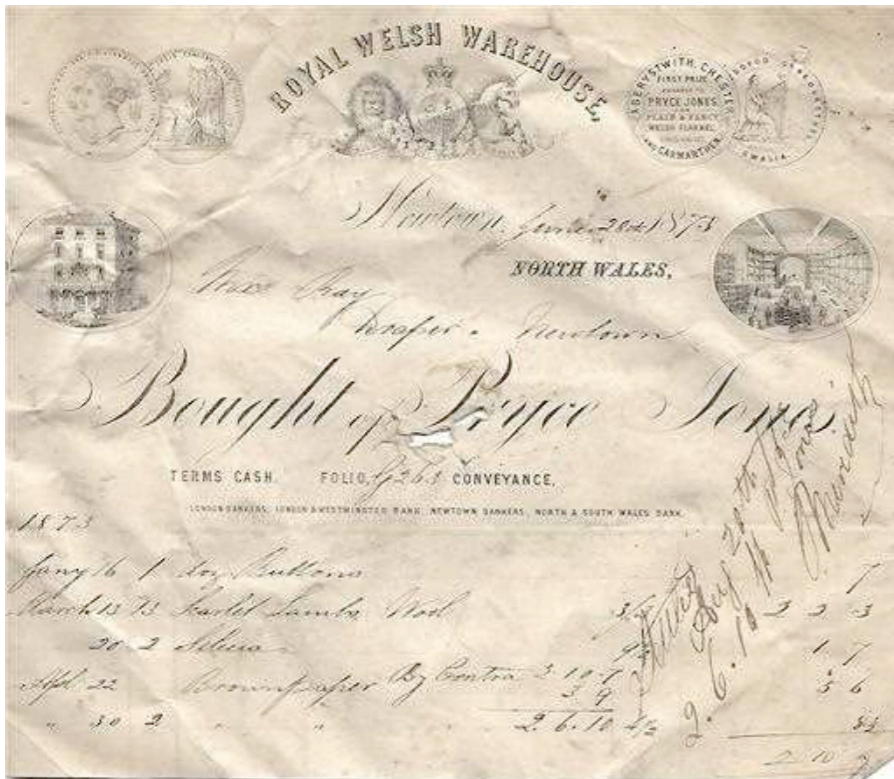
Since Newtown and Mid-Wales produced its own woollen fabrics, Amelia could obtain much of her stock locally. But, her customers were becoming more discerning as commodities from further afield became available with the growing ease of communication. As a result, Amelia could call upon a national network of suppliers. From Scotland she received tweeds, the North of England supplied cottons and woollen textiles such as Alpaca and the West Country provided hats, bonnets and gloves. Fast communication with the global entrepot of London meant that goods from the wider world could also be accessed. These were often not one-off orders, but regular suppliers. For example, between February and May 1869 Amelia placed twelve orders with one of the largest drapery and lace warehouses in London, Copestake, Moore, Crampton & Co. of 5 Bow Churchyard. The orders included a range of items - bonnets, shirts, corsets, skirts, petticoats, ties, gloves - and came to a substantial total of £123/1/6. This was equal to 615 days wages for a skilled workman. In modern terms, it equates to the sum of £7,750. Perhaps this represented Amelia's re-stocking of the business as she took control and gives a glimpse of how she planned to expand.

The archive contains over four hundred letters related to orders for goods from the Crown Shop. Many of these were from local customers within Newtown. A number are scribbled notes, hand-delivered by a bearer who might also be collecting the items on behalf of the customer. Others show quite clearly the effects of the communications revolution on Amelia's business. In the wider sense, they also illustrate how Newtown was becoming a market place for the wider mid-Wales hinterland. The network of railways provided an easy communication route for orders in and goods out. However, since the parcel post was not introduced until 1883, ensuring goods reached customers required a little organisation. The customer needed to be at the station to meet the train carrying her parcel, or arrange for it to be collected from the station.

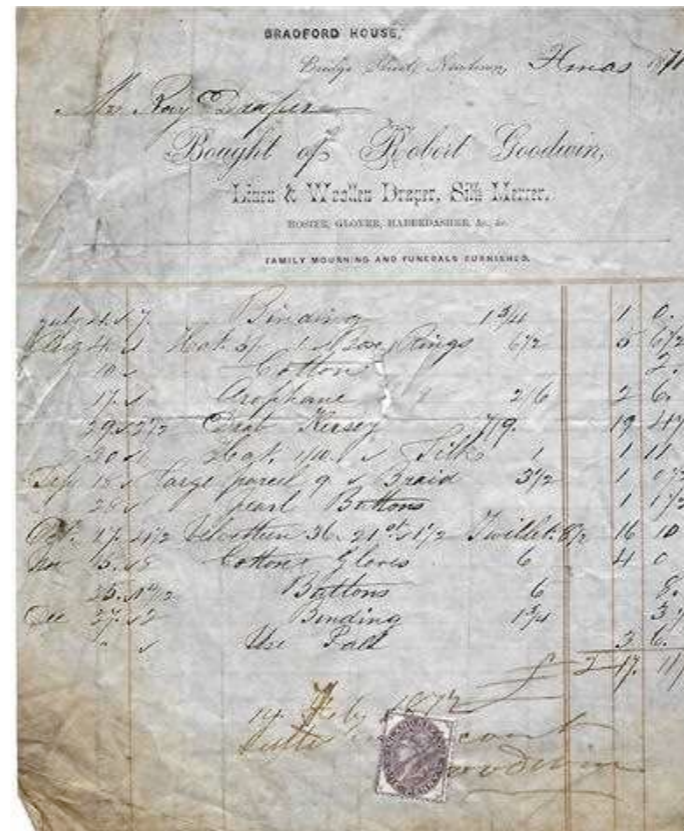
LOCAL SUPPLIERS



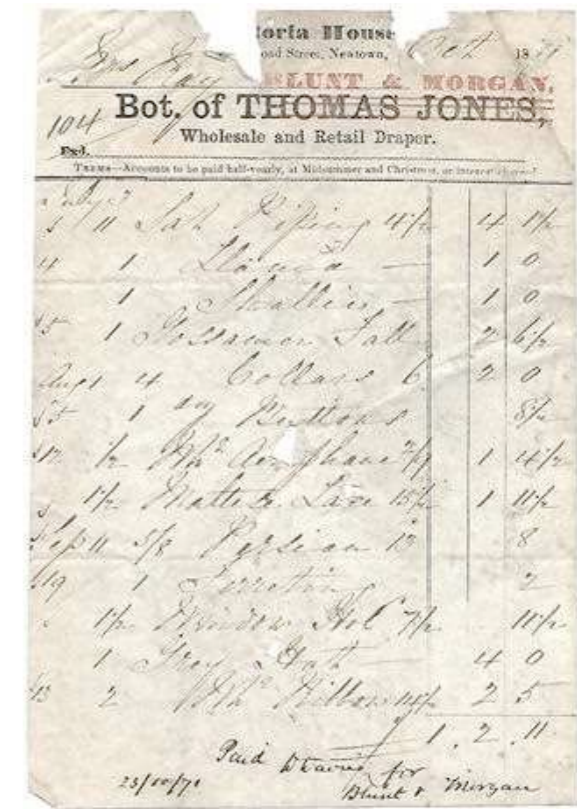
N.2022.13.1. Broad Street about 1870. Stereograph by John Owen. The building at the bottom of Broad Street shows Pryce Jones's original Royal Welsh Warehouse



Ray 05-001: Receipt, Pryce Jones, June 21 1873. Amelia sometimes needed to buy goods from her rivals when she was short, as this receipt illustrates. The letter head does provide us with a rare view inside the original Royal Welsh Warehouse on Broad Street.

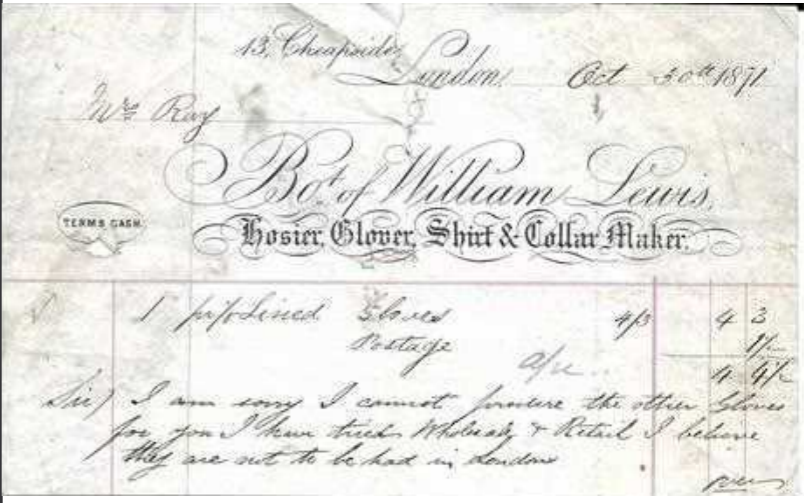


Ray 08-076: Receipt to Mrs Ray, Draper, Xmas 1871 from Robert Goodwin for goods purchased between August and December 1871



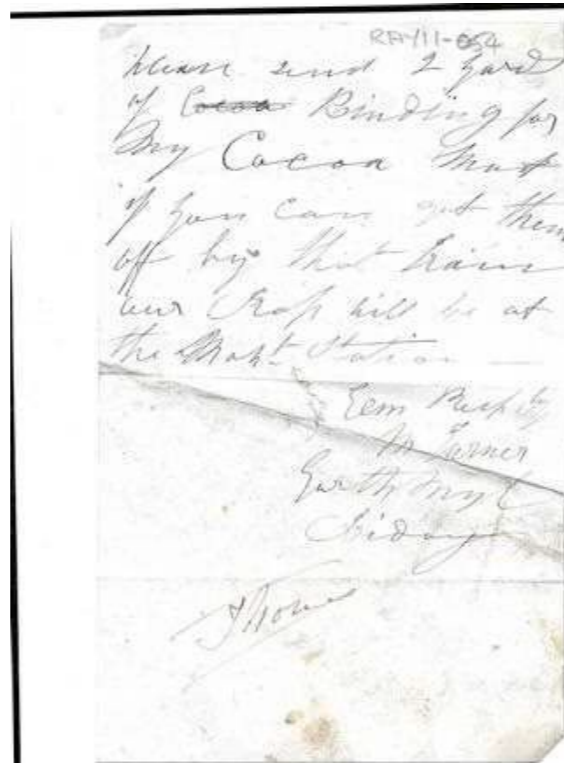
Ray 08-057: Receipt to Mrs Ray, October 1871 from Blunt & Morgan Wholesale draper of Broad Street for items purchased between July and September totalling £1/2/11

AMELIA'S SUPPLY NETWORK

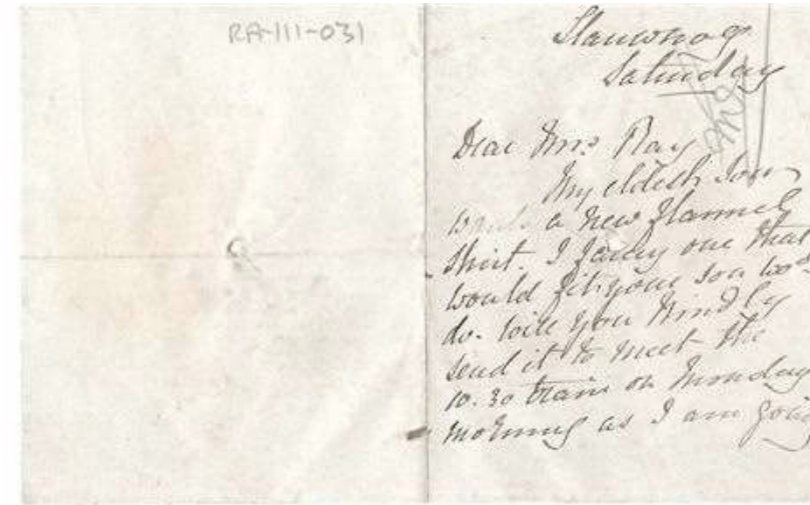


Ray 13-030: Invoice October 30 1871. London may have been the greatest trading city in the world, but sometimes even this wasn't good enough, as this receipt shows. The handwritten note reads, "I am sorry I cannot procure the other Gloves for you. I have tried Wholesale and Retail. I believe they are not to be had in London. . ."

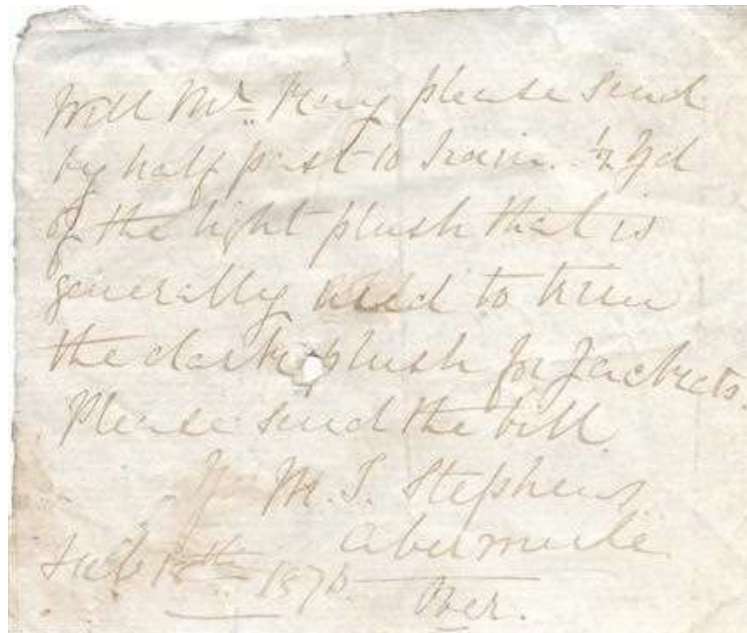
TRADE FOLLOWS THE TRACKS



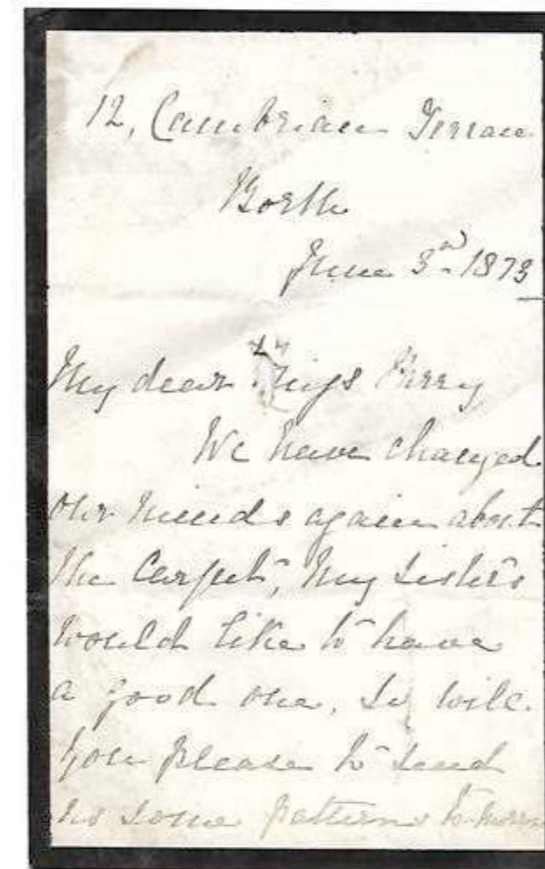
Ray 11-054: Undated letter from Mrs Pugh, Garthmyl requesting "2 yards of Binding for my cocoa mat if you can get them off by that train our Trap will be at Mont [Montgomery] Station"



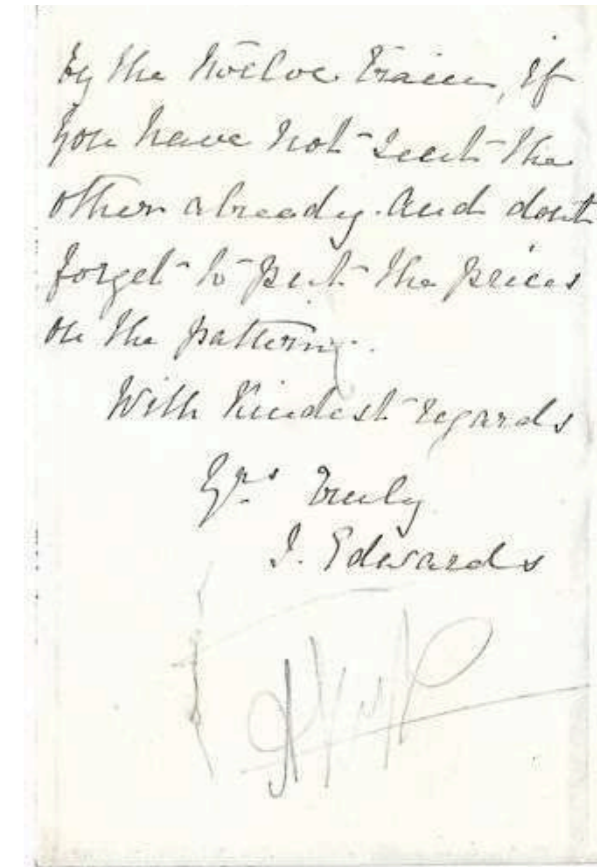
Ray 11-031: Undated letter from Mary Parry, Llanwnnog requesting a new flannel shirt for her son. "Kindly send it to meet the 10.30 train on Monday".



Ray 14-020: Letter from M.J. Stephens, Abermule, February 18 1876. "Will Mrs Ray please send by half past ten train half a yard of the light plush ..."



Ray 05-016: Letter from I. Edwards, Borth June 3 1873. Many of the letters were addressed to Miss parry, Amelia's long-time assistant. This one request patterns "to be sent by the Twelve train."



4. CUSTOMERS



Amelia's cashbook

At the beginning of April 1874, Amelia opened her account book and started a new page. Carefully dipping her pen in the ink pot on the counter, she neatly scribed the day and the date, "Wednesday, April 1". Her account book is a record of the day to day transactions in Crown Shop and fragments of this have survived covering the period April 1874 to the end of March 1875. Easter came in the first week of April in that year, so the shop was closed on Good Friday and Easter Monday. Even so, Amelia in the first two weeks of the month, still managed to take a total of £129/3/11¼d; the equivalent of over £8,000 today.

As well as recording every transaction "by cash", she kept a careful record of the names of all her customers. These were often her neighbours, other fellow tradespeople in the town, such as Mrs Benbow of the Buck Inn, a little further along on High Street or Mr George of the Black Boy in Broad Street. Some were in the same line of business like Miss Jones, dressmaker of Berriew who, on May 16, paid £7/10/0d (after a handsome discount of 13/11d), for her supplies. From across the Longbridge in Penygloddfa, came private householders, perhaps looking for cotton threads, or materials for patching and hemming, like Mrs Beadles of Clock Street. They also came from further afield too. From Kerry, Montgomery, Forden, Llandinam, Llanbryn-mair, Machynlleth - all brought in by the train to do their weekly shopping.

Whilst the account book gives us an idea of the numbers of customers Amelia dealt with and the kind of financial turnover she made, it is the letters and notes which were sent to her which gives us more of a flavour of the times. Many of the written orders were delivered by hand from people close by, who might order goods to be returned "by the bearer". Others, formally written, were from her more esteemed customers in the large country houses, such as the Tracys of Gregynog. These preferred to retain their distance, ordering patterns and samples, returning unwanted items, or sending instructions for new suits for their children or livery for their servants. They could also be quite demanding and expectations of good service were high. Undoubtedly, all efforts to please were financially worth while.

George Augustus Haig was an Irish-born wine merchant, who built Pen Ithon Hall, near Llanbadarn Fynydd in 1862. He was the cousin of Earl Douglas Haig and his daughter Sybil, Lady Tonypandy, would become a prominent campaigner for women's suffrage and suffered imprisonment for her beliefs.



10 1/2 yds Sarsgelloth like pattern
 5 1/2 yds middle work edging like pattern
 or if not in stock, please to
 send patterns of what you
 have that is something the
 same width and quality.
 12 yds grey Moreeno
 3 Dozen shirt buttons
 3 Dozen brace buttons (size large
 than pattern)
 Patterns of thick scarlet flannel
 (for petticoats)
 12 Pearl Taylor's black cotton number 7
 12 Pearl Taylor's black cotton number 8
 12 Pearl Taylor's black cotton number 5
 6 yds grey twill lining
 Pen Ithon

Please let my footman have a hat
 but not a new band as the old one will
 do. He must be measured for two
 suits of livery mind you give sufficient
 room as he is growing stouter. Tell
 him what day will suit to try on both
 suits of livery. Will I attend my next
 week suit. G. A. Haig
 15th Sept 1876

Ray 13-55: Note from George Augustus Haig September 15 1876: Mrs Ray could count some of the County elite amongst her clientele. Well-off they may have been, but there was no need for extravagance. Mr Haig writes "Please let my footman have a hat but not a new band as the old one will do." But clearly the servants were being fed too well. He continues, "He must be measured for two suits of livery, mind you give sufficient room as he is growing stouter".

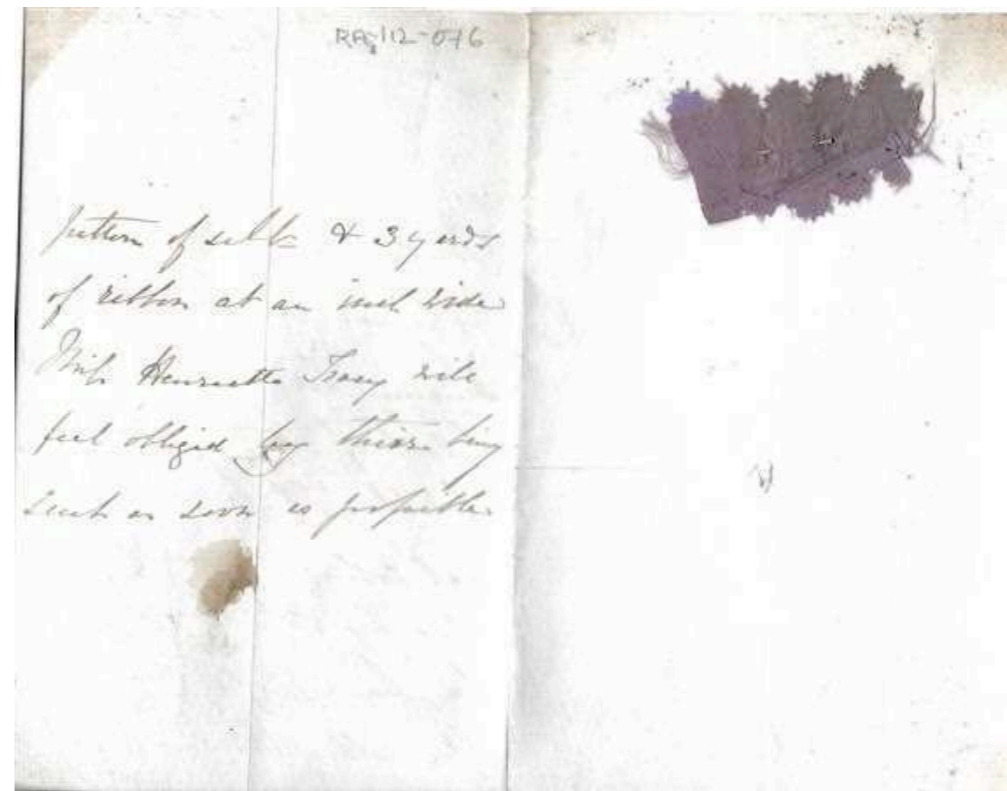
Ray 10-032 Undated order including "12 yds of grey Moreeno" [marino], "patterns for thick scarlet flannel (for petticoats)"

September 27th
 Mrs Haig requires another
 piece of white braid
 and has enclosed the
 mark as it must be
 exactly the same, the
 braid is required immediately
 and the Coachman will
 call for the parcel on
 Friday or tomorrow.
 The large sized pearl
 buttons will be returned

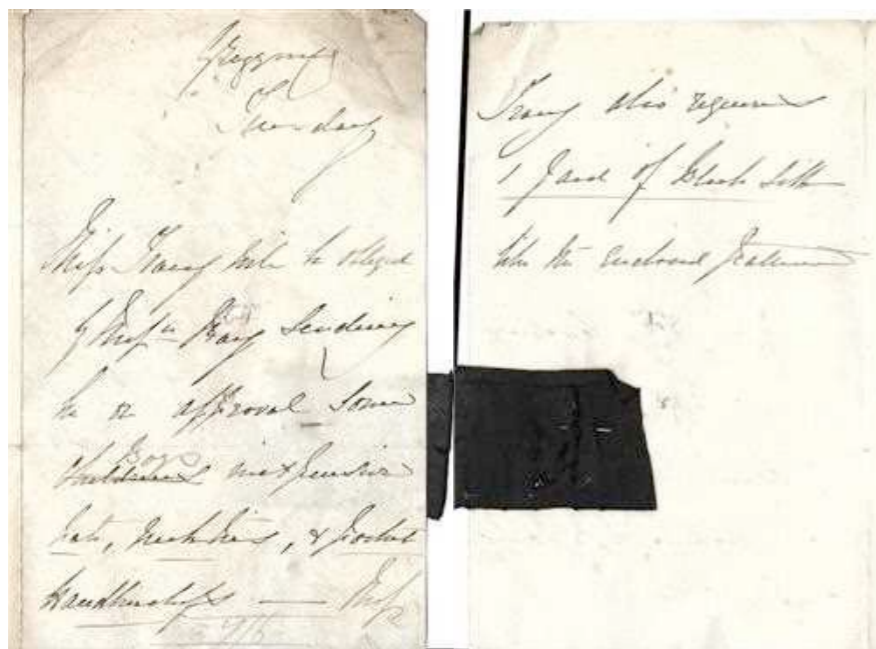
RAYOG-001
 by the coachman,
 being a size too large
 for the button holes
 which are made,
 if Mrs Ray has not
 the buttons Mr Haig
 would be much obliged
 by her getting them
 at any of the other
 shops as they are
 required directly.

Ray 06-001: Letter dated September 29. "Mrs Haig requires another piece of white braid and has enclosed the mark which must be exactly the same . . . and the Coachman will call for the parcel tomorrow . . . The large size pearl buttons will be returned by the Coachman being a size too large for the button holes which are made. Mrs Haig would be obliged by her getting them at any other shops as they are required directly"

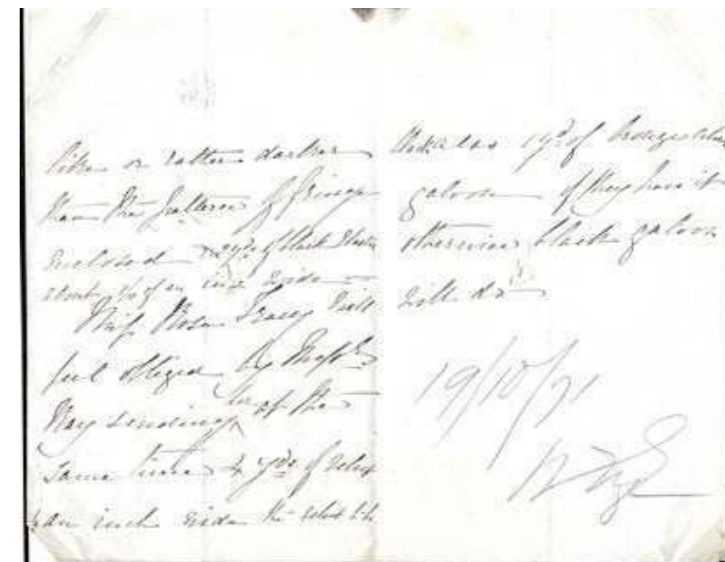
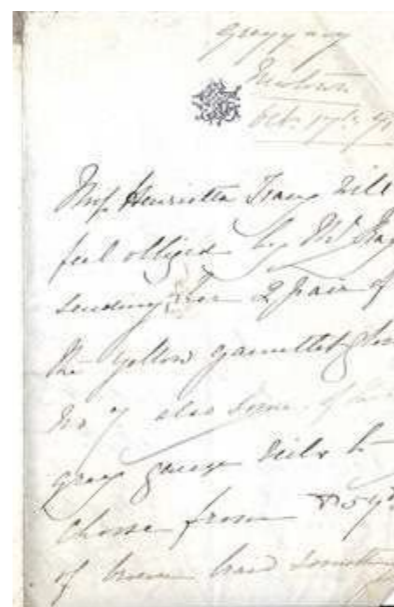
For hundreds of years Gregynog was one of Montgomeryshire's leading landed estates, at the heart of the community and the local economy. The Blayney squires gave way to the Lords Sudeley, then Lord Joicey. The original mansion was rebuilt in the 1840s by [Charles Hanbury-Tracy](#), [1st Baron Sudeley](#). Its concrete cladding, designed to replicate the black-and-white timber-framed architecture of Montgomeryshire farmhouses



Ray 12-076 Part of letter dated 1 December 1873 for quantities of ribbon including $\frac{3}{4}$ yard of lilac ribbon, as pinned. "Miss Henrietta Tracy will feel obliged by their (sic) being as even as possible".



Ray 12-092: Undated letter from Henrietta Tracy, Order on approval for some boys' hats, neck ties and pocket handkerchiefs, also one **yard of black silk as pinned.**



Ray 11-065: Letter dated October 17 1871

RA-112-053

Dear Mrs Ray,
 The jacket did not fit so I have tacked it to please me - and have sent my servant down to bring it back with him at 12 o'clock will you kindly see it done at once. I want a shawl of white stocking cotton and two or three pairs of grey do - & a black shawl of net for a seal without

Ray 13-053: undated letter from M.E. Parry complaining that "The jacket did not fit so I have tacked it to please me and have sent my servant down to bring it back with him at 12 o'clock will you kindly see it done at once..."

Brynafan
 Wadellau
 vale of Clwyd Naidler
 Thursday

Dear Mrs Ray
 I was dreadfully disappointed not to get my son's coat to meet the 10.30 train as your son faithfully promised - Will you

Ray 11-036: Undated letter Mary Parry to Mrs Ray: "I was dreadfully sorry not to get my son's coat to meet the 10.30 train as your son faithfully promised. Will you be so good as to send it on Friday (tomorrow) without fail to the above address it had better be carriage paid as it will come sooner and my son has no change of coats. Please send the old coat also back I do not want my dress sent here. I trust to you to send these at once as they are really needed..."

be so good as to send it on Friday (tomorrow) without fail to the above address. It had better be carriage paid as it will come sooner and my son has no change of coats. Please send his old coat also back I do not want my dress sent here. I trust to you to send these at once as they are really needed.

With very kind regards
 from Mrs Ray
 Mary Parry

Mr. Ray
 I am sorry the milliner made the mistake - but I told her I only wanted the head dress to wear on one evening Wednesday last, & therefore I would

RA-112-049

I am sure you will readily part with it tomorrow. I should not have returned the box without a note, which Mr. Marshall intended to leave.

not go to any expense about it. I beg to return this because it really is of no use coming too late - It is very pretty &

Ray 13-049: Undated letter E.L. Marshall to Mrs Ray. "I was sorry the milliner made the mistake - but I told her I only I only wanted the headress to wear for one evening, Wednesday last and therefore I would not go to any expense about it. I beg to return this because it really is of no use coming too late..."

5.

COST OF LIVING

In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes. So wrote American statesman Benjamin Franklin. Taxation, both local and national, was as familiar to Amelia Ray as it is to us today. Despite government having far less responsibility for its citizens - there was no public healthcare, education, transport, for example - money was still needed to run it and to pay its debts. Income tax had been introduced by prime minister William Pitt the Younger to pay for the cost of the Revolutionary war with France at the end of the 18th century. It was very unpopular and successive governments promised to abolish it, but with little success. By Amelia's day income tax had become begrudgingly expected and was paid by everyone whose income exceeded £150 (approx. £12,000 in 2022). Even so, income tax only accounted for something like £6 million of government revenue, the bulk of which came from Customs and Excise.

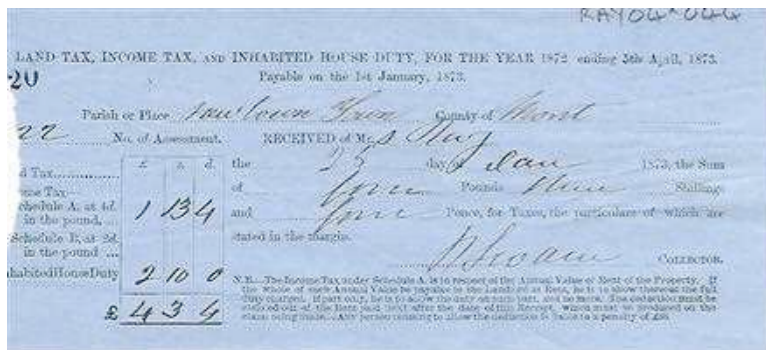
Amelia also had to pay local taxes as well. Chief amongst these was the Poor Rate. Since the days of Queen Elizabeth I, the householders of every parish had to contribute to the care of the poor and destitute. In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act grouped parishes into Poor Law Unions, each run by an elected Board of Guardians. This act also established workhouses where the 'able-bodied' unemployed were put to work, along with children, unmarried mothers and the mentally ill. The Newtown and Llanidloes Union Workhouse was established at Caersws in 1840, capable of housing 350 inmates.

Amelia's income was enough to maintain her in a comfortable life style. By 1871, she could afford to employ four domestic servants as well as seven shop assistants or apprentices and still have sufficient money for life's little luxuries. Although the archive principally contains her business accounts, there are a few items which throw a little light on her domestic life.

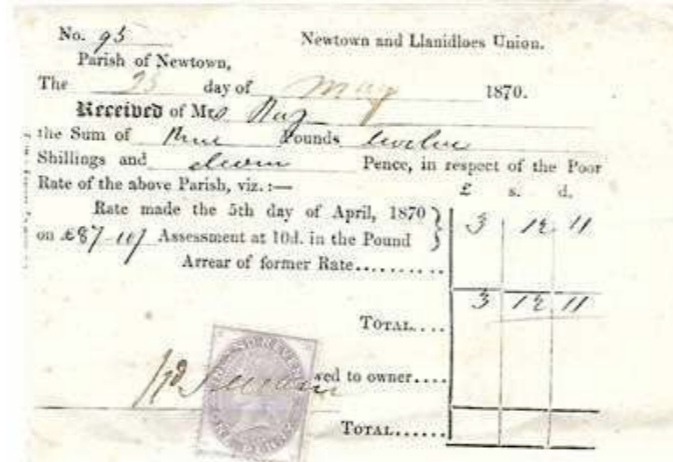
AMELIA PAYS HER DUES



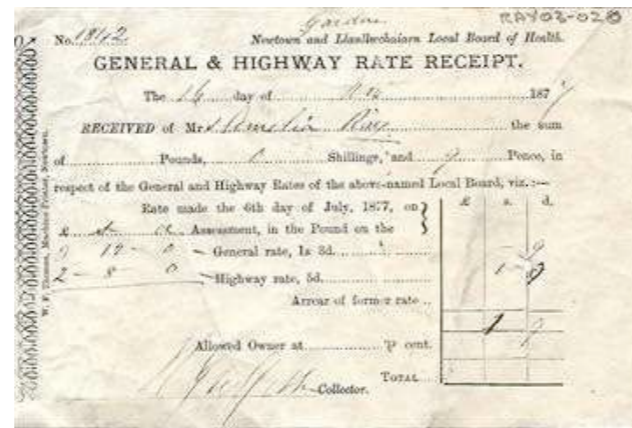
Ray 14-022: Tax Assessment, 1871. Amelia's declared an income of £300 (about £25,000 today) for which she paid £7/10/0d



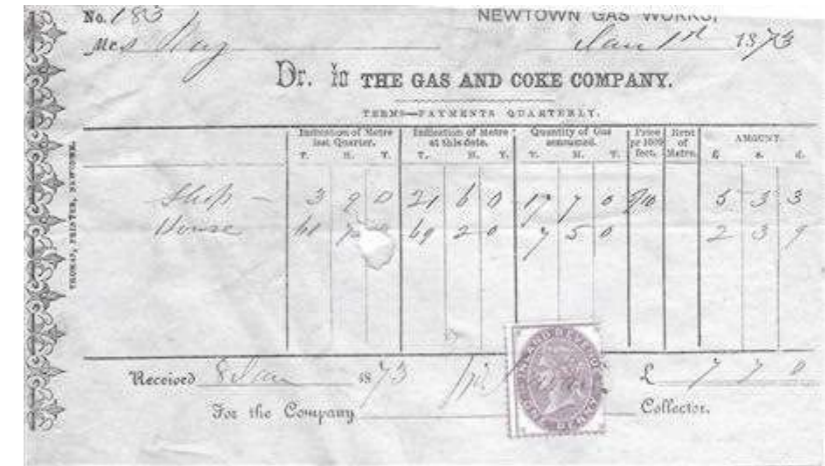
Ray 04-044: Tax Assessment 1873. Amelia's income tax bill also included land tax on the commercial occupation of land and on her house for which she paid a further £4/3/4d



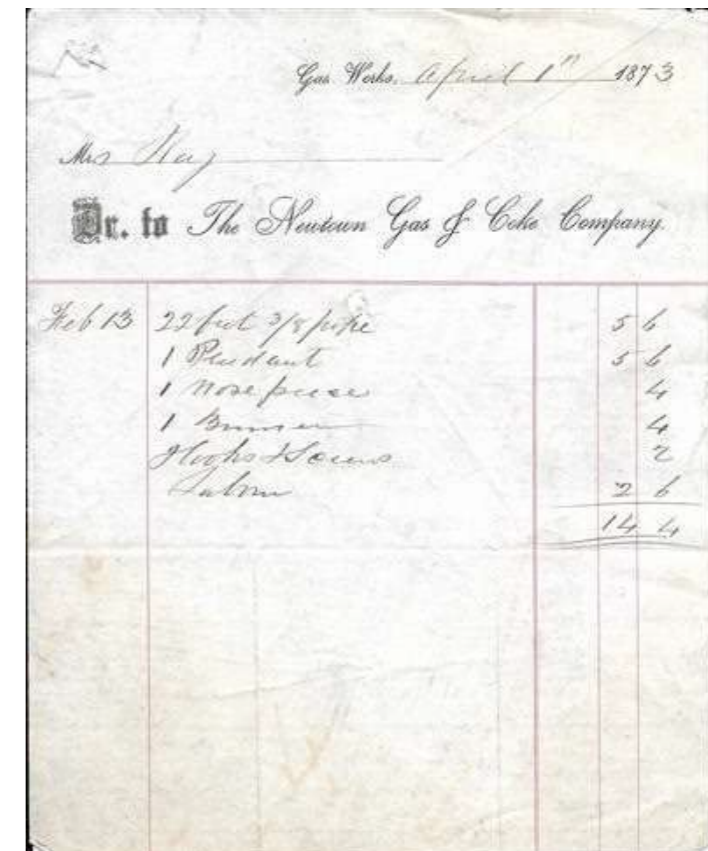
Ray 05-046 Newtown and Llanidloes Union Poor Rate, 1870. Each Poor Law Union could set its own level of Poor Rate. In 1870, the Guardians of the Poor charged Amelia £3/12/11d.



Ray 03-020: General and Highway Rate 1877. Local Boards of Health had been formed following cholera epidemics in the 1840s. Amelia paid 1/9d towards the upkeep of the the local roads, for a clean water supply and law and order.



Ray 11-100: Bill for gas 1873. Amelia could afford to connect to Newtown's coal gas supply for both her house and shop for which she paid £7/7/0 in January.



Ray 13-038: Bill for gas work 1873. Amelia appears to have extended the gas lighting paying out 14/4d for 22 feet of 3/8 inch pipe, and a light fitting (Pendant, burner and nose piece, as well as screws and hooks. There was labour of 2/6 included also.

GLIMPSES OF DOMESTIC LIFE

Ray Brown Shop Newtown
1872 at the late N. P. Beecham's sale

July 1	16 cut glasses	14 0
59	6 cut wine glasses	3 0
60	4 spoons etc	2 0
74	11 small knives	1 0 0
July 6		
Lot 1	Foot Pan & Water Tin	5 6
8	Wine & Water Bottle	8 0
15	Mahogany Toilet Glass	2 0 0
21	Slop Vase	2 0
41	2 Bedroom Chairs	4 0 0
		5 7 6

W. P. Beecham

Ray 13-048: Receipt for purchase of domestic items, 1872. In April 1872, Amelia took advantage of the sale of the household property of "the Late N. P. Beecham" to refresh her possessions. She paid out a total of £5/7/6d for an assortment of cut glasses, 11 small knives, a "Foot Pan & Water Tin", a "Mahogany Toilet Glass", a "Slop Vase" and two bedroom chairs (4/- each).

Newtown Ltd 1872
140 Ray

Bo of Morgan & Sons,
Wholesale Grocers,
Wine, Oil & Salt Merchants.
AGENTS FOR W & A. GILBEY.
Wine Importers & Distillers.

1872.		
Feb 5	12 Caster oil	3
21	4 The Sp. Gro	2 1/2
May 13	last Vinegar	6
24	The Soft Soap	1 1/2
June 4	18 Quat Sh Sugar	8 3
8	3 Soap	1 6
15	T Best Tea	3 1/4
17	1/2 doz. anchovies	1 0
19	The Best Tea	1 8
20	last Vinegar T. Sugar	1 0
23	The Quat Sh Sugar	10 5
26	1/2 doz. salt	6
Aug 1	1 doz. salt	1 0
2	The Soft Soap	1 1/2
3	1/2 doz. salt	1 5 6
2	1/2 doz. salt	18 0
14	The Soft Soap	10
15	1/2 doz. salt	1 1
26	T. Caster	6
30	Soft Soap	9
Sept 4	7 Quat Sh Sugar	3 7 8
11	1/2 doz. salt	8 10
17	1/2 doz. salt	6
Oct 2	Balance in hand	4 6 0

Ray 13-027: Grocery Bill 1872. Amelia's account for the period Feb 5 to October 2 1872 with Morgan & Sons, Wholesale Grocers of Newtown. Items bought included candles, best tea and coffee, vinegar, soft soap, anchovies, sugar, salt, three dozen tumblers and two dozen wine glasses.

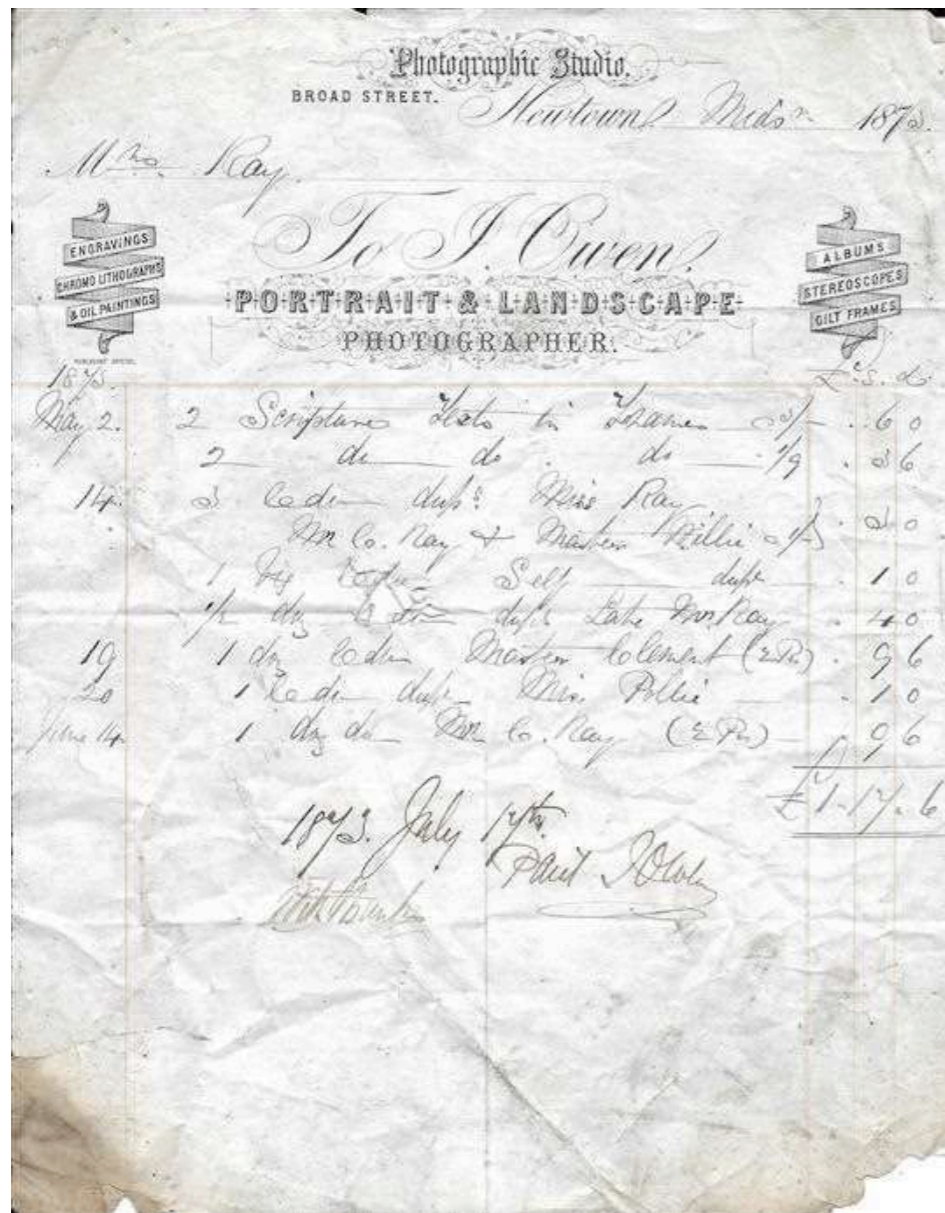
Newtown Ltd 1872
140 Ray

Bo of Cornelius Morgan,
Brewer,
Wine & Spirit & Soap Merchant.
Terms Cash Three Months Interest Charged

1872		
Sept 3	21 Gin	3 6
Nov 29	21 Best Port	4 6
	21 Sherry	4 0
		12 0

paid January 10/7/73
C. Morgan

Ray 13-044: Christmas Drinks Account 1872. Perhaps the glasses bought from Morgan and Sons were needed for the Christmas celebrations that year when Amelia ordered 2 pints of gin, 2 pints of Best Port and 2 pints of Sherry from Newtown Brewer and Wine Merchant, Cornelius Morgan. The cost of Christmas celebrations? 12/0d!



Ray13-034 is a receipt from J. Owen Portrait and Landscape Photographer of Broad Street, 1873. Between May and June 1873, Amelia purchased four "Scripture Texts in Frames", two at 3/- and two at 1/9. There were also photographic portraits commissioned of 15 year old Miss Ray, Masters Willie (William Barker Ray, born 1860) and Clement (Clement Owens Ray 16 years), Miss Pollie (probably Mary Jane Born 1861), Amelia herself, as well as the "Late Mr Ray". John Owen was reputedly the first professional photographer in Montgomeryshire, setting up his business in Broad Street in the late 1850s.



The Owen receipt refers to the purchase of 'CdV'. These were Carte de Visites, bought in quantities of a half or full dozen and used as 'calling cards' by fashionable Victorians. Sadly, there are no known portraits of the Rays, but here is a selection of CdVs from the Museum's collection, including top right, a very youthful looking Mr and Mrs Pryce Jones, taken possibly on their wedding day.

6.

AFTER AMELIA



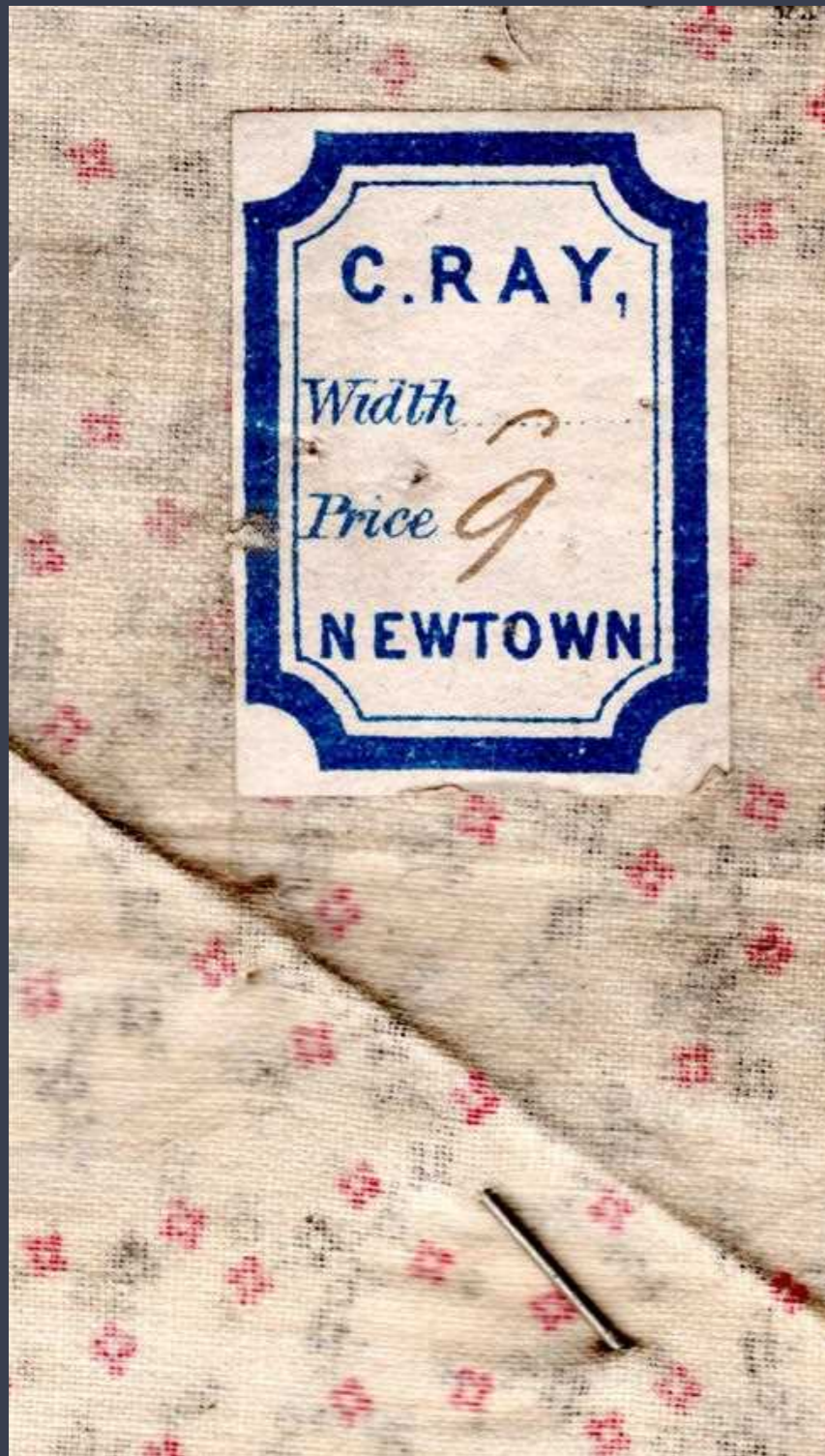
In 1878, at the age of 51, Amelia took her two sons, Charles Downes Ray and Clement Owens Ray, into partnership. From then on the business would be known as 'Ray and Sons'.

At about the same time, Amelia moved out of her home above Crown Shop to Glanhafren, a country property on the eastern outskirts of the town. She was not present here on the census night of 1881, but her household is recorded as consisting of her sons Clement and Arthur and her daughter Amelia, along with her grandson Charles A Ray. The family was supported by a cook, two domestic servants and a groom. It was here that Amelia died on 21 May 1885. She was 59 years old.

Sadly, the business did not survive for much longer. Just two years later, her two sons were declared bankrupt. The Crown Shop was taken over by a rival draper, Henry Morgan. A grand clearance sale in July 1887 prior to Morgan his business from Broad Street to the Crown Shop. Amelia's accounts were packed away and stored in the attic. Here they remained for a century undisturbed as the businesses below changed from draper to chemist to furniture store to charity shop to video store before they again saw the light of day in 1990. Today, they are stored safely at Newtown Textile Museum where they provide a snapshot of commercial life in a vanished age.



Montgomeryshire Express, July 12 1887 records the end of an era for Crown Shop.



A chance discovery by workmen in an attic in a video hire store in High Street opens up a window into the world of a Victorian draper. Amelia Ray was one of the estimated 30% of entrepreneurs in Victorian Britain who were female, providing us with an alternative view of a male-dominated society. From her Crown Shop, Amelia served a growing customer base throughout Mid Wales, utilising the newly established universal postal system and the railways. Her archive of papers preserved in the attic of her former shop consists of some 1300 letters, invoices and receipts which together provide us with a unique insight into how her business functioned.