
The Man who sold flannel to the Queen

John Evans, Curator.



Newtown Textile Museum

An early Pryce Jones invoice suggests the owner of the Royal Welsh Warehouse may have been a little economical with the truth. Look closely at the above. The medal shown on the left was awarded at the Great Exhibition of 1851, nine years before Pryce Jones opened his first draper's business!

Pryce Jones was never shy of displaying the success he achieved at international trade fairs. Between 1873 and 1894 he was awarded a series of prizes for his flannel at exhibitions from Vienna to Sydney, as well as at National Eisteddfodau. As a consequence, his price lists and stationery were festooned with images of his growing collection of medals. Yet, one medal included, related to the Great Exhibition of 1851, sits at odds with the others and raises questions surrounding Pryce's marketing strategy. Could it really be possible for a seventeen year-old apprentice to win a coveted Prize Medal at the first great international trade fair really be true? Apparently not, for a trawl through the newspapers of 1851 reveals the following:

*THE GREAT EXHIBITION - WELSH FLANNEL TRADE -
We are glad to notice that this branch of commerce, so important to the principality, has been represented in the Great Exhibition. The prize medal has been awarded to Messrs. William Lloyd & Co. Of Newtown.¹*

¹ Shrewsbury Chronicle (SC), 24 October, 1851

Who was this William Pryce, and why should his medal appear on Pryce Jones's business stationery?



Cilgwrgan, as shown on the Tithe Map of 1842 (Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library of Wales)

William Lloyd was born in Llanmerewig, a parish four miles north east of Newtown, the son of John and Anne Lloyd, in about 1804, and was baptised on 6 May of that year². The Lloyds were a prominent farming family operating a 350 acre farm near Abermule, called The Court. John Lloyd is named as living at The Court in a list of gentry and clergy in 1829³. By 1835 he was dead but his widowed wife, Ann, remained living there with her two unmarried sons William and Charles⁴. Sometime in his early 30s, William married and set up house with his wife, Mary, at Cilgwrgan Farm, situated on a rise above the southern bank of the river Severn at Aberbechan adjacent to the road to Welshpool. The tithe map and schedule of 1841 shows that William was the tenant of a Reverend Maurice Lloyd, possibly a relation, who was a substantial landowner in the parish and Rector of Montgomery from 1831⁵. Here the Lloyds grazed their sheep and cattle on their 130 acres of land. They also appear to have continued to rent The Court, as the tithe schedule indicates that Mary Lloyd had taken over its running from her mother-in-law and named as the tenant of David Pugh of Llanerchydol. Thus, the Lloyds were farming about 500 acres of land in the fertile valley of the Severn⁶.

Mary Lloyd bore at least three sons of William - William (born c. 1838), David (born c. 1839) and Maurice Edward (baptised November 18 1840⁷). The 1841 census shows the three young children living at Cilgwrgan, but the parents are strangely absent on census night. It would appear that on that occasion, the children had been left in the care of the three female servants in the household. Despite their absence from the census record, this is a further indication of the family's comfortable social and economic standing. In addition to the three female servants, there are another four male servants

² Parish Register (PR) Llanmerewig, mixed, 1761-1823 p. 15

³ Pigot & Co. *National Commercial Directory: North Wales*, Manchester 1828-9, p.1168

⁴ Pigot, 1835, p. 714

⁵ *Clergy of the Church of England database* - <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?PersonID=172640>

⁶ *Tithe maps Wales*, National Library of Wales, <https://places.library.wales/>

⁷ PR Llanmerewig Baptisms 1813-1898

living at the farm⁸. By the time of the 1851 census⁹ Mary Lloyd had died and widower William is described as a land agent and farmer of 130 acres employing ten people, eight of whom were living in the household, along with his youngest son Maurice Edward. It is likely that, with the exception of the housekeeper, Elizabeth Pritchard, the remaining servants were employed as farm hands rather than as domestic help.

William's occupation as land agent meant that he was kept busy away from the farm. As a land agent he was involved in the managing of sales of property in the county. In 1854, for example, the sale of the 'important freehold and fertile farm, called Gwernygo . . . on the banks of the River Severn', close to the proposed line of the Oswestry to Newtown Railway, was placed in the hands of William. It was developments in railway construction which appealed to William. Like many of his fellow entrepreneurs he recognised the importance of improving the communications in the county as a means of advancing prosperity and particularly in order to reduce the cost of the carriage of coal which would greatly facilitate the flannel industry of Newtown. In 1852, his name appeared in a list of subscribers in shares of the Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Railway¹⁰. Three years later, William was named as one of the provisional directors for the proposed railway. Amongst his fellow directors appeared some of the most prominent names in Montgomeryshire and the borderlands, including Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, William Ormsby Gore, MP, David Pugh of Llanerchydol and John Naylor of Leighton Hall¹¹.

He was also involved in debt administration. For example, in May of that year a notice appeared in the Shrewsbury Chronicle announcing that a bankrupt flannel manufacturer of Welshpool had assigned his personal estate to 'William Lloyd, of Cilgwrgan, in the county of Montgomery, gentleman . . . for the equal benefit of all creditors'¹².

But in Newtown itself, William was speculating in the principal trade of the town, flannel cloth. In the early 1850s, Newtown flannel was in the doldrums. Competition from the Yorkshire woollen textile towns was fierce and Newtown's slow

⁸ The National Archives (TNA) HO107/1440, folio 4

⁹ TNA HO107/2498 folio 170

¹⁰ *ESJ*, 7 July 1852

¹¹ *ESJ*, 14 February, 1855

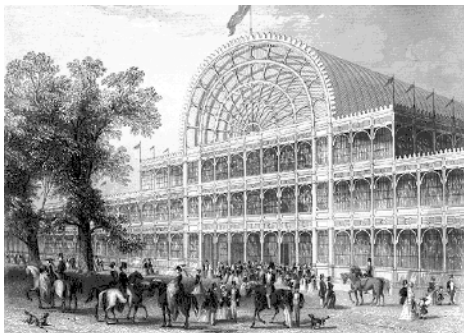
¹² *SC*, 3 May 1851



Plas yn Dre is the four-storey building on the extreme right in this 1845 view of Broad Street (NTM)

adoption of steam power was having dire consequences on the industry of Mid Wales. At some point, William had established himself at the head of a flannel company, William Lloyd & Co., and he had purchased a substantial property, including a flannel warehouse in Bridge Street (now Broad Street)¹³. Slater's Trade Directory of 1850¹⁴ lists the company under flannel manufacturers of Bridge Street and Severn Square, so it may be that his business was being run from *Plas yn Dre* which stood on the corner of what is now Broad Street and Severn Place (now Back Lane) and adjacent to the Flannel Exchange¹⁵.

It was from *Plas yn Dre* that William hit on a novel way to promote Newtown flannel. In May 1851, London was gearing up for the opening of 'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations'. In reality this was to be a showcase of the creative and manufacturing genius of Britain and her empire and, where better than in this great gathering to advertise Newtown's manufacturing prowess? Accordingly, it was William who determined to take Newtown flannel to the Crystal Palace, the brainchild of the Prince Consort himself, which was then being erected in Hyde Park and which would be visited by over six million people.



The Crystal Palace at Hyde Park (Creative Commons)

This wasn't a decision taken lightly. Although exhibitors were not charged for exhibiting, there was still expense associated with such an undertaking. Exhibitors were responsible for transporting and installing their goods and representatives would need to be available at key times. There is little detail of the items William chose to display beyond the fact that there were six in number. These are likely to have been six rolls of flannel each measuring 100 yards in length, the standard length of a woven piece of flannel and they took their place amongst 500 other woollen and worsted mixed fabrics and shawls in the South Transept Gallery of the Crystal Palace. The Official Catalogue simply lists the exhibits as 'Lloyd, WM., & Co., Newtown, Montgomeryshire, Wales, Manufacturers. Various specimens of Welsh flannel, all manufactured from sheep's wool'¹⁶. In the introduction to this section, the Catalogue observes that 'Flannel is produced in large quantities in the Principality, also at Rochdale and Stroud'.

¹³ *Eddowes Shrewsbury Journal (ESJ)* 11 June 1862 (Sale of property).

¹⁴ Slater's *op.cit.*, p.60

¹⁵ NB Pigot 1844 lists a Richard Lloyd flannel manufacturer Bridge Street. Could this be a relation?

¹⁶ The Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of all Nations, Vol 2, London 1851 p. 498



Great Exhibition Prize Medal
(London Coins)

Two kinds of medals, struck in bronze and designed by William and Leonard Wyon, were awarded by specialised panels of jurors. The highest honour was a Council Medal, awarded for highly creative, innovative and important contributions. Prize Medals, on the other hand, were awarded to exhibitors who met high standards of merit. In addition, exhibitors could also receive an Honourable Mention granted to those who did not meet the standards of a medal but who were still deserving of recognition. The Exhibition's Award publication lists William as one of the 3,000 winners of the Prize Medal out of a total of 170,000 exhibitors.¹⁷ Despite this achievement, the news of his success was greeted with muted acclaim compared to the the success at later Trade Fairs enjoyed by Pryce Jones. Perhaps this says much about the latter's flair for self publication. It would be a further nine years before a Montgomeryshire -based newspaper would be published, so the only indication we have of William's success is to be found in *The Shrewsbury Chronicle* mentioned earlier¹⁸.

It would be over a year later when William finally received the plaudits of his fellow citizens. On 23 January, 1853 a 'gratifying testimonial and public dinner' was arranged for William Lloyd, Esquire at the Elephant & Castle Hotel. As with such occasions, a committee had to be formed in order to collect subscriptions totalling £200 from the grateful tradespeople and manufacturers of Newtown, who had benefitted so greatly from William's success. It was reported that, 'Immediately on the award being made public, her Majesty was graciously pleased to signify her approval . . . by ordering from Mr Lloyd 100 yards of flannel of the same quality as that from which he had obtained the prize.' It was also reported that since the order from Windsor Castle had been despatched, 'much larger ones had been received from several of the principal nobility of this country and the continent'. As a consequence of the largesse of the townspeople, 'A superbly-chased Silver Salver' with the inscription, 'This Salver, with Epergne, Soup Tureen and Tea Kettle, were presented to William Lloyd, Esq. as a testimonial of his patriotic spirit in effectually representing the Welsh Flannel Trade in the Great Exhibition of 1851'. The celebrations commenced in the morning with a 'joyous peel of bells' from St David's Church before dinner and presentation with a succession of speeches, which 'continued

¹⁷ *The Great Exhibition 1851: Awards*

¹⁸ SC, 24 October 1851

to a late hour, the proceedings being of a very interesting character'.¹⁹

How and why did the medal won by William Lloyd in 1851 appear on the business stationery of Pryce Jones some two decades later? In 1851 Pryce Jones was seventeen-year old in his final year as an apprentice in the draper's business of John Davies of the 'Cross Shop'. It is this link which gives us the first clue. For in another newspaper report of William's grand reception at the Elephant & Castle we are informed that the the arranging committee of nine men included Mr John Davies himself.²⁰ Victorians were sticklers for social rank and order, and it is interesting that Davies's name is third on the list, below the chairman, William Richards, and flannel manufacturer William Matthews. Could it be, therefore, that John Davies was a close business associate of William? Perhaps acting as the major distributor of his flannel and, therefore, felt that he had made some kind of contribution to William's success at the Crystal Palace? It may have been that Davies had gone so far as to include an image of the medal on his own letter heads and that, when Pryce Jones took over the business in 1862, he retained the image. Unfortunately, we do not have any surviving letter heads of Davies in order to test this theory.



Details from the 1873 invoice - top: eisteddfod medals, bottom: the 1851 Prize Medal

There may, however, have been a more pragmatic explanation. It was not until 1865 that Pryce Jones gained his first success in exhibiting his flannels. In that year, he won the first prize at the Aberystwyth National Eisteddfod. Further success followed at Chester the following year and again at Carmarthen in 1867. These successes are shown on the right hand side of the royal insignia on the 1873 invoice. He needed another image to balance up his design and, perhaps, one which would link his business to his own success with royalty. What better than the medal won by William Lloyd in 1851 which had established Newtown as the premier centre for Welsh flannel? After all, wasn't Pryce the 'heir' to John Davies, William Lloyd's close business associate? And, of course, Pryce Jones was not a man averse to bending the truth to fit his own narrative.

Perhaps this interpretation does Pryce Jones a disservice. It may simply be that William Lloyd represented the model of the businessman he wanted to be. A man not content with being a success in his home town, but *the* best in the whole of

¹⁹ *ESJ*, 2 February 1853

²⁰ *The North Wales Chronicle*, 4 February, 1853

Wales. Perhaps, at the end of the day, William Lloyd was his inspiration. Lloyd's was the model to emulate and the reason why he took his flannel to Aberystwyth and Chester and Carmarthen and, ultimately to Paris, Vienna and Philadelphia. Lloyd had shown Pryce the way to international recognition and royal patronage. What better compliment could he give to the man than to include his medal on his publicity?

And what of William Lloyd? The year 1862 was the year in which Pryce Jones took over his former master's business at the Cross. Coincidentally, it was on 25 March of that year that William Lloyd died and was laid to rest six days later in the parish church of Llanmerewig where he had been baptised fifty-seven years earlier.²¹ His passing was marked 'with great regret' at a shareholders' meeting of the Oswestry to Newtown Railway held at Westminster in the following August.²² Success in 1851 had doubtlessly cemented his status as an enterprising businessman and established his reputation. Probate was granted to his brother Edward, the following June when his personal estate was valued at £8,000, the equivalent of more than a hundred years wages of a skilled tradesman.²³ By autumn 1862, all William's goods and effects had been sold in two separate sales. The details of these reveal the extent of his business concerns. First his 'substantially erected' house and flannel warehouse in Newtown went under the hammer of Messrs Hill & Son²⁴. This was followed in November by a three-day sale of his stock and implements held by William at the Court and Cilgwrgan farms. This included a 'very superior' herd of ninety-three Hereford and cross-bred cattle, 200 black-faced and Kerry Hill sheep and fifty pigs, along with nine 'very powerful waggon horses'.²⁵

Thus, the man who contributed so much to the establishment of Newtown's reputation as a centre of production of high quality flannel and who was the first to gain international recognition, as well as attracting orders from nobility and royalty across Europe, did not live long enough to see the heir to his success exploit his ideas to the full. Within three years of William's death, Pryce Jones had won his own orders from

²¹ PR Llanmerewig burials 1814-1993, p.35

²² SC, 29 August 1862

²³ Principal Probate Registry; London, England; Calendar of the Grants of Probate and Letters of Administration made in the Probate Registries of the High Court of Justice in England, 1862, p.252

²⁴ SC, 8 August, 1862

²⁵ *Ibid*, 14 November, 1862



Queen Victoria and within a decade had been awarded his first international medal. As his awards continued to grow in the following years, so too did the hyperbole of his publicity. Yet, even as late as 1881, his price lists continued to display the 1851 medal shamelessly paired with an inscription to the effect that he had received 'the highest award' for his flannels at the the 1881 exhibition of wool, woollen manufactures and allied industries held at Crystal Palace. A fine example of Pryce Jones blending fact with fantasy in his marketing!

The 1851 medal is shown middle right in this page from Pryce Jones's 1881 list. Note the vertical caption on the left (NTM)