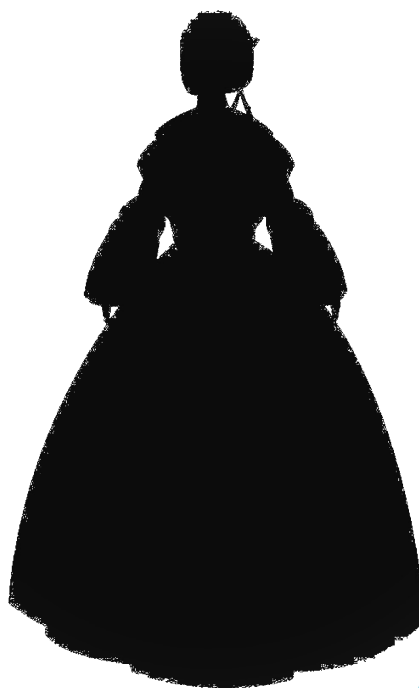


Mary Ann Goodwin: a forgotten mother?

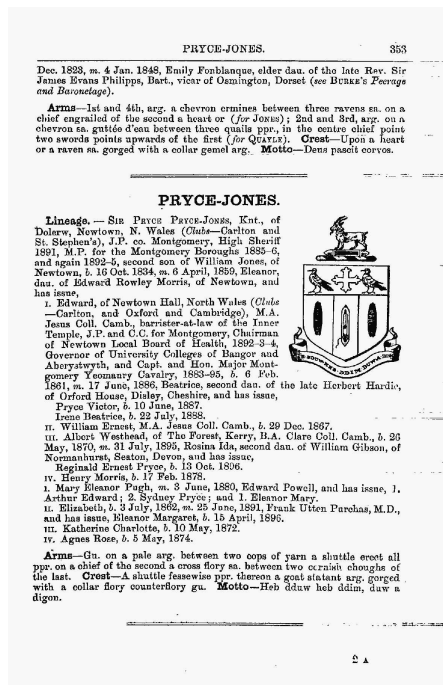
John Evans, Curator



Pryce Jones's mother hardly history. It takes a real effort to existence. Yet even during her lifetime

receives a mention in find any evidence of her

she seems to have been largely omitted from the story of her successful son. Here, we try to piece her life together.



Burke's Peerage, 1895

Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones was knighted in 1887 and, in accordance with tradition, his name and details found their way into *Burke's Peerage*. After listing his membership of his London clubs (the Carlton and St. Stephen's), his public offices are recorded - High Sheriff of Montgomeryshire, Justice of the Peace and Member of Parliament - before finally his family is described. His father is named as William Jones of Newtown. Eleanor, his wife is mentioned, and those of his children. Even his father-in-law is included. But, strangely, his mother's name is absent.

Pryce Jones was born on 16 October, 1834 and was baptised the following February. The details of his introduction into the World were recorded in the register of Newtown's Wesleyan Methodist Church. In addition to the date of his birth and baptism it tells us that his mother was Mary Anne Goodwin. But conversely, unlike *Burke's Peerage*, it is his father's name which is omitted, from this, the most important record of his son's existence. This is the first indication we have that Pryce's parents were not married. In other words, Pryce was an illegitimate child or, in the common parlance, a bastard, 'base born'.

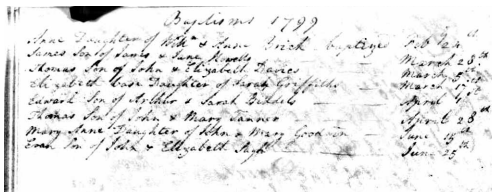


The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Severn Place, built in 1845, replaced the building where Mary Ann brought her infant son, Pryce, for baptism ten years earlier. It too was replaced in the 1960s by the present building.

A community of Wesleyans had been established in the Newtown area in the same year as Mary Ann's birth, and the register shows that it served a wide area of the Severn Valley, as far out as Berriew.¹ The Wesleyans were a blossoming congregation, quickly gaining ground amongst the working classes. In 1835, a total of 33 baptisms were recorded. The Methodists were certainly pushing the Anglicans hard for members. In that same year forty-eight baptisms were recorded at St Mary's Church. Of these ten per cent can be identified as being baptisms of illegitimate children. They are identified in the register by the names of their 'reputed' fathers. In fact in the decade 1831-1840, some twelve per cent of all Anglican baptisms in Newtown can be identified as being those of extra-marital unions. Illegitimacy offended against the strict Christian moral code of nineteenth century Britain. So, was this 'offence' just too much for the editors of the definitive guide to the British aristocracy? Was Mary Ann Goodwin 'cancelled' from polite society, and has she been written out of history? Nearly two hundred years after the birth of her son, Pryce Jones, his mother, Mary Ann Goodwin, remains a shadowy figure.

The Goodwins were a long established family in Llanllwchaearn with births, deaths and marriages recorded from at least 1755. We do not know the date of the marriage of John and Mary Goodwin, Mary Ann's parents. But it was through her father that Mary Ann could claim a family connection with Robert Owen, the great social reformer and founder of the Cooperative movement, who was also born in Newtown. Another possible Llanllwchaearn relation may have been the so-called 'Weaver Poet', John Goodwin, who died in 1846. There were also at least another eight families of Goodwins in the parish who may, or may not, have been related to Mary. Of these, three were living in the township of Kilcoven. Although there is scant further evidence, the little that does exist suggests that the Goodwins were of humble stock. For example, Edward Goodwin of Hendidley who married Grace Jones in 1800 was a weaver; Richard Jones who married another Mary Goodwin about 1800 was a Sawyer; Edward Goodwin who also married in 1800 was a weaver; yet another Mary Goodwin married a carpenter, named John Tanner in 1798. In addition to the Llanllwchaearn register, we find Goodwins also resident across the river in Newtown parish, where, for example a Thomas Goodwin and Elizabeth Thomas (widow) married on 12 May 1795.

¹ The National Archives (TNA) RG4/4009



Llanllwchaearn was a large and sparsely populated parish. In 1799 only eight baptisms were recorded in the register. Mary Ann's is the penultimate entry.

Mary Ann's baptism is recorded in the Llanllwchaearn register on 15 June 1799. After this she is absent from the historical record for over twenty years. But by the time she was 26 she had met and formed a relationship with a young solicitor's clerk named William Jones. The Newtown register records that on February 3 1827, William Jones, 'reputed' son of William Jones and Mary Ann Goodwin was baptised in St Mary's Church. It may be that William senior had gained some kind of dubious reputation by the time of his son's baptism: eleven months earlier the register records the baptism of another illegitimate child of his, named Thomas, this time to a Blanche Griffiths.

Nevertheless, the relationship between William and Mary Ann appears to have been long lasting. Most illegitimate births in Newtown in the period 1821 to 1840 are single events between couples, but there are eight instances where the relationship lasted long enough for at least two successful births to occur. The case of Mary Ann Goodwin and William Jones is an exception for the evidence suggests that the relationship lasted for at least a decade and produced four children - William junior (baptised 1827), Elizabeth (baptised 1828), Pryce (born 1834) and John (born 1838). The baptism of Pryce is the odd one out as, unlike his siblings, he alone is recorded in the register of the Methodists, rather than in the parish registers for Newtown or Llanllwchaearn. Why should this be? The register is interesting in that there are no births/baptisms recorded as 'illegitimate', 'base born' or more prosaically 'bastard', as they are variously described in the Anglican register. Instead, illegitimacy is only hinted at by the absence of the father's name from the register entry and the fact that, in the case of Pryce, his surname is recorded as 'Jones'. So, did this reflect a desire by Mary Ann to escape censure by society? Or was it the father's reluctance to be identified? Probably not the latter. If it had been William's intention to deny paternity, his name might well have appeared in the Quarter Sessions records dealing with bastardy orders. Illegitimacy in Victorian Britain, was not only a sin to be condemned by the Church, it was also a social transgression which might cost the parish ratepayers dear, if that child's mother could not support it in the absence of a father. Thus, perhaps Mary Ann turned to the Methodists as the congregation less likely to censure her behaviour.

There is some evidence for this. Despite nonconformism being usually viewed as a more 'puritanical' movement when compared to Anglicanism, it has been suggested that some nonconformist congregations adopted a more sympathetic and pragmatic attitude towards bastardy. This seems to have

been particularly true in rural Wales in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries².

Whatever the reasons, the register entries provide a little more information about Mary Ann and William. The eldest son, William, baptised in St Mary's Church on 3 February 1827 describes the father as an attorney's clerk. The baptismal entry for Elizabeth Jones, 'base born' is recorded in the Llanllwchaearn parish register on 26 October 1828, suggests that the parents were not cohabiting at this time: whilst William's abode is recorded as Newtown, Mary Ann was living in the neighbouring parish at Upper Rock. This is most likely to have been Rock Farm, a fine eighteenth century mansion situated next to the newly completed canal and opposite St. Llwchaearn's Church. Perhaps, therefore, Mary Ann was in service here as a domestic servant at this time.

By the time that her third child, Pryce, was baptised in 1835, Mary Ann had moved across the river as her place of residence is recorded as the 'Parish of Newtown'. John Jones, the youngest of the four children of Mary Ann and William, was not baptised until September 1850, although his birth date is recorded as April 30 1838. In this entry, Mary Ann's occupation is given as a dressmaker. This may give us a hint to her condition at this time. The term 'dressmaker' in Victorian Britain might range from describing a respectable skilled trade for a middle class woman, but it could also refer to someone involved in 'sweated labour'. In a small manufacturing town like Newtown, it was more likely to refer to the latter. Thus, it is probable that Mary Ann was working on farmed-out orders from one of the town's drapers, such as Pryce's future employer, John Davies. Dressmaking involved long, gruelling hours of work by candlelight in order to complete the order in the allotted time, in return for a weekly wage of between six to eight shillings.

By the time of John's baptism in 1850, or even before then, it is probable that father, William was dead, despite the fact that his occupation and abode is given in the register. It is important to remember that the church was keen to record details of the parentage of the child at the time of birth, rather than their current condition. The evidence to indicate that William was dead by 1850 comes from a court case of 1862 between Mary Ann's son, Pryce, and his former employer John Davies. In this dispute, over arrears of pay, Pryce states that he had entered Davies's service as an apprentice in 1847 with his

² A. J. Muir, *Courtship, sex and poverty: Illegitimacy in eighteenth century Wales* in *Social History* Vol 43, pp. 56-80 Routledge, 2018

apprentice fees being paid by the parish as he had 'lost his father at an early age'.³ There are several possibilities for a date of death for William, between 1840 and 1845, but a date of in 1845 may have been most likely⁴. With William's demise, Mary Ann's financial condition had become parlous. She had four children to support and no husband or partner to provide for them and the prospect of entering the Workhouse loomed. The fact that Pryce was apprenticed 'without premium' by the Parish provides some suggestion for this and even before William's death there are clues to indicate that conditions were challenging for the single mother. At some stage following the birth of Pryce in 1834, he had been sent out to live with an aged aunt, Margaret Goodwin, who scraped a living as a school teacher in one of the town's charity schools. The 1841 census shows her and Pryce, aged 5 (in reality, 6), living in Broad Street. Unfortunately Margaret died the following year which probably meant that Pryce returned to live with his mother adding to her financial burden.

| | | |
|------------------|----|----------------|
| Margaret Goodwin | 62 | School teacher |
| Richard Goodwin | 30 | Wor Weaver |
| Ann | 28 | Wor Weaver |
| Pryce Jones | 5 | |

The 1841 census shows Pryce Jones living with his aunt in Horsemarket Street (Market Street today)



Frolic Street c. 1967. Mary Ann may have lived in one of these cottages in 1851.

Mary Ann cannot be found in the Newtown census for 1841, an indication that this record is far from definitive. But, ten years later, the census locates the fifty-one year old living amongst weavers, spinners and slaymakers in 'Frollick Green'. At this time, the Frolic, as this area was usually called, was regarded as an area rather than the street which bears its name today. It was originally known as Newtown Green but in 1795 the land was enclosed and sold off in lots. By the time Mary Ann settled there it was crowded with three- and four-storeyed brick factory buildings. Here, in a tiny two-roomed cottage below the thumping of the handlooms on the factory floors above, Mary Ann, still with her twelve-year old son John at home, continued to ply her trade as a dressmaker. Interestingly, her status is given as married, although, strangely, she is the head, indicating that any husband is not resident. So, who is her husband and where was he on census night? Is this a mis-recording by the census enumerator? But, if she was married, why was she still using her family surname rather than that of her husband? Had Mary Ann simply declared that she was married, with her husband 'absent' in another attempt to give herself some form of respectability? These are all questions which remain unanswered.

³ *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 2 August, 1861

⁴ There is an entry in the Newtown Parish Register of a burial of a William Jones on 14 August, but unfortunately neither his occupation nor his age is provided which might help to identify him.

Following this entry in the census, Mary Ann disappears from the historical record again until her death in 1873⁵. The death certificate indicates that she was living at 'The Bank, Newtown' and is described as a housekeeper. The cause of death was 'dropsy', an archaic term for an edema probably caused by heart failure. The person who reported the death was a Margaret Barnes of the Frolic, who was present at the death. Confirmation of her burial is found in the Parish Register for Newtown - buried on 8 January 1873, aged 74.

What had happened to Mary Ann in those last twenty years? Had her son, Pryce, now a successful draper and manufacturer, lifted her out of her poverty? The fact that she died at The Bank, a rather more salubrious area than The Frolic, might suggest that he did. But at 74 she seems to have been still employed as a housekeeper. Three years earlier, the census records two households at 'The Bank Buildings'. One is that of Dr Richard Jones and the other of William Pilot, rope and brick maker employing seven men and six boys. Both households contain domestic servants, but Mary Ann does not appear amongst them. Had she taken up employment in one of these in the intervening period between the census and her death? If so, it suggests that perhaps her son, the aspiring proprietor of the Royal Welsh Warehouse in Broad Street and supplier of flannel goods to royalty, was not so charitable. In either case, Mary Ann seems to have died alone, tended by her friend. She was buried on a cold winter's day in January 1873 seemingly with little recognition, with no 'In Memorium' message in the local press, and in a grave no longer evident.



Dr Richard Jones, c.1860, unknown artist, oil on canvas.

⁵ GRO 1873 Q1 Newtown 11b 151