



An excerpt from *A Historical Tour Through Pembrokeshire* by Richard Fenton

A VIEW OF LLANGWM IN 1811

The following morning opening auspiciously, the tempest hushed, and the spirits of the vasty deep laid, I proceed, wind and tide favouring, and passing several inlets and shipping places, land at Langwn on the right, famous for its fishery, particularly of oysters, all the inhabitants of the little village deriving their subsistence from it. It is a small oyster, and reckoned the least estimable of the different sorts which Milford Haven produces. They are, with other fish chiefly of the flat kind, brought every day to Haverfordwest during the season; now by a late act of parliament as to oysters limited to a precise time, and are sold at sixpence and eightpence a hundred. Besides vast quantities are pickled in little barrels and earthen jugs, and sent off to the interior and Bristol. In this state they are most esteemed.

This miserable village consists of several low, straggling houses interspersed with trees, amidst mountains of oyster-shells, and a church with nothing in its exterior, though cruciform, very attractive, being plain and towerless. But on entering it I found the portion set apart for divine service neat and clean. From the nave the north transept is entered by two pointed arches of cut stone resting on a plain octagon pillar, in which, under stone canopies occupying the whole north side, are two tombs, one plain, the other bearing the effigy of a crusader in a warlike attitude, his right hand on his sword, his left holding his shield, his head to the right, and his countenance strongly marked. The head rests on an outer helmet, which made part of the head armour in early times, and proves the work of remote antiquity. A crest the head of a bird, seemingly an eagle, surmounts the helmet. His dress is a short coat. The armour for his neck is mail or ring work; for his arms and legs plate armour very plain; but that which covers his feet is most remarkable, consisting of small squares, curiously interwoven by diamonded intersections. The canopy covering the armed knight has the ogee sweep with three turns right and left, each turn containing a smaller turn of corresponding work; and to the ogee sweep are crotchets and a finial. The figure is known to represent one of the de la Roch family, and him of whom tradition has preserved the strange story referred to in my account of Roch, and which the old lady who shewed the church failed not to repeat, pointing as for the viper, to what on a former visit I had concluded to be a thong of his military boot or foot armour falling negligently across the leg, but which, on more minute examination this time, I found to be nothing more than the return of the tail of the incensed lion at his feet, disposed of by the sculptor with great effect. On asking my female Cicerone who was buried there, "Whay," says she in the true Roos accent, "a bee one Dolly Roch, sir, thay zay." The plain tomb under the other canopy has its front curiously wrought and decorated with a row of escutcheons, yet I could perceive neither inscription nor trace of the armorial bearings that might originally have been tricked on them, as they are so daubed over and incrustated with mortar suffered to lie against it, and now grown as hard as the stone itself. On the east side of the entrance into the aisle there is a holy water niche of a most elegant and uncommon design, with a light canopy richly wrought, and a pillar seemingly to support its cistern, having its shaft, cornice, and pedestal covered with a succession of escutcheons unblazoned, placed in perpendicular and horizontal directions. The whole structure of this chapel is singularly elegant, particularly the entrance, formed of two pointed arches resting on a plain octagon pillar, the piscina perhaps unique, and the sepulchral recesses all of wrought Nolton stone, and bespeaks a taste ripened in countries abounding with rare models, and no doubt imported with the crusader.

On the north side of the communion rails there is on the pavement a recumbent effigy of a female with lovely features. Her dress was a loose robe held by the right hand of the figure, bringing the drapery into the most graceful folds: the head attire singularly elegant. To Mr. Carter we are indebted for this discovery, and to the incrustation of dirt removed by him, that had fairly concealed it for ages, for its fine preservation.

Of the family of de la Roch, as of all the ancient families of this county long since extinct, we have but scanty documents. But that they were men of the first distinction, of great possessions and power, we have ample evidence in the charter of endowment of Pill Priory, founded by the first of that name we hear of, and probably the first settler, Adam de Rupe, confirmed and enlarged with new grants by his successors. Besides, to all deeds of importance you will find one of that name a witness; and deeds in those early times were generally attested by persons of the greatest consequence at some season of public meeting, great festival, or on Sundays, when the business of their country, or public worship, brought them together. Moreover, there is every reason to think that the care of the province of Roos, the most accessible part of the new settlement by the Flemings, was delegated to one of the family bearing the hereditary office of "Comes Littoris," and that Benton and Roch Castles were the limits of his jurisdiction, and that, according to the exigency or a certain routine fixed, he resided in them alternately, for both appear to have been inhabited, and that, perhaps, when he died, he might have been in residence at Benton Castle, or in a mansion where now Nash stands, as the de la Roch chapel in Langwm church is appurtenant to that house. By an inquisition of their property found in the reign of Edward the Fourth, I see it extended nearly from one castle to the other, including the advowsons of all the churches in that direction. In the time of Richard the Second, the male line became extinct by the death of Thomas de la Roche, who left two daughters, Elen and Elizabeth; Elen married Edmond de Ferrers, fifth Lord de Ferrers, of Chartley; and Elizabeth, Sir George Longeville, who soon sold a property so remote from them, and to which they could have no natural attachment, and it was dispersed among many purchasers.

On the west side of the cemetery, just without it, observing an old house venerably overgrown with ivy, and a little loftier and larger than the rest, I was induced to ask what it was, and was told it was the castle-house. 'Tis true, such an answer served not to throw much light on the matter, but in my opinion proved a link to connect the family of de la Roche with Benton and Langwm, as probably this building, in a style superior to those in its vicinity and adjoining the church-yard, might have been there placed for the accommodation of the great family to whom it belonged, who made use of it previously to entering the house of God, thinking it improper to do so till they had adjusted themselves after their journey, and prepared themselves by prayer, and therefore called the 'The Castle House', as subservient to Benton Castle and its inhabitants.

I have already observed that in every part of this village hillocks of oyster-shells have been forming time immemorial, and am surprised that this testaceous aggregate, most purely calcareous, has not been removed for manure, a labour that would amply repay the farmer who would undertake it.

Less than a mile from the village is the mansion house of Nash, now unroofed and in ruins, and perfectly denuded, its woods having been recently cut down. The house, of the most fashionable form of mansions in this county of its date, a sort of cube, was large and habitable within these few years, as it was meant to have been fitted up for his residence by my friend Mr. Wyrriott Owen, the late worthy possessor, a man of high honour and sensibility, alas! too little known, and too early lost! whose friendship I am proud to acknowledge I was honoured with, and whose memory I shall ever gratefully revere. What this place was at first called I cannot learn, but it took the name of Nash from a family of that name, Advenæ, who came into possession of it about two centuries since. It after came to the Corbets, then to the Owens, and now belongs to Hugh Barlow, Esq. the legal representative of the late proprietor.