



Langum Women

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Excerpted from The History of Haverfordwest and Some Old Pembrokeshire Parishes (1914)

I have reserved for the last of my letters on Pembrokeshire Parishes the subject of the fish-women, who reside in the parish of Langum, a few miles further up the river Daugleddau than Neyland. The Langum women are closely connected with Haverfordwest, where you would be sure to fall in with some of them, and could not fail to be struck by their appearance. No other class of people in South Wales - except it be the natives of Gower, near Swansea, whom they strongly resemble and who are, like them, pure Flemings - have preserved intact the dress, manners and customs for I know not how many generations. Fisherwomen, wearing short petticoats and jackets, and often pea-jackets, or "my man's jacket," as they would inform you if you asked them; a style of dress which leaves them very unencumbered for "travelling", or walking, bearing on their backs panniers suspended by leathern straps which come over their shoulders, and are kept in position by their arms thrust through in front and crossed over the breast, - these hardy industrious people are met with, go where you will. Mostly of fair and bright complexions, not unfrequently decidedly pretty; not shy and yet by no means immodest, they address high and low with a frankness which is sure to attach. They are cousin-german to the "Harfats" and form a kind of appendage to them. For I know not how many generations they have gone in and out among them, bearing their burden of fish and oysters from door to door. At home, in the village where they reside, six or seven miles from Haverfordwest, you would pronounce them a peculiar people, never forming an alliance with strangers, or allowing their daughters to go out for service, as the other peasant people of the county do; you would be interested if you were to pay them a visit at any time.

Their husbands are kept under strict petticoat government, and you would hear a man described familiarly as "Jenny Palmer's man." It is said that, instead of a woman surrendering her maiden name at marriage, her husband is often called upon to take hers; thus a man would be called Jemmy Morgan by his own, but Jemmy Thomas by his wife's, surname. Anyhow it is quite uncommon for the wife to surrender hers. As a class they are very industrious, the men scarcely ever going from home except to follow their avocation as fishers, while the women "trapes" (their word for travelling) the towns and country round to sell what they manage to get, fish or oysters, according to the season.

The village where these people live does not present anything attractive as far as their habitations are concerned, being mostly a cluster of poor cottages; but the families are very large, the number of children being almost incredible. These pour forth in troops at the approach of a stranger, not, however, as in some neighbourhoods, to beg, but to stare. Every cottage has a garden attached, which is very industriously cultivated. The village, though so mean in itself, is beautifully situated on the river I have mentioned.