William Scott Owen, 1853–1920: an English-born land agent in mid Wales

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Abstract:

William Scott Owen figured prominently in Montgomeryshire history by being deeply involved with the lives of working people and active in local politics. He was an incomer from the south of England and a stalwart of the Anglican faith and the Tory party. He spent the whole of his working life in Montgomeryshire and came to be deeply respected in a part of Britain noted for its Nonconformity and Liberalism. Scott Owen was agent on the Gregynog Estate, which lies in the south east of the county, much of it now belonging to the University of Wales. This study of his life provides a vivid picture of the county in the late Victorian and Edwardian period and discusses why he became so well regarded.

Key words: land agent, Wales, Montgomeryshire, landed estate, tenant farmers, game laws, agricultural depression, social welfare, education.

Land agents have been identified as crucial figures in the study of agriculture and great estates. They often left abundant records with minutiae documented, which can illuminate and provide context for agricultural, economic and social research.¹ Studies of land agents, however, have been generalised, such as F. M. Thompson's overview of their work and relations with the landowners who employed them,² with a concentration on their abilities as revenue collectors and managers.³ They have been seen in a rather mechanistic and impersonal way as adjuncts and facilitators of the 'agricultural revolution' (however and wherever defined), lacking particularity and a sense of how they fitted into local communities. We do not have much sense of how their roles changed over time, nor do we know much about Welsh land agents and estates. More recently, Sarah Webster has used the records of the Egremont estates to provide a closer examination of their roles, but again concentrating on management, and James Bowen has

focused on the work of a chief agent to investigate the improvement of the Lilleshall estate.⁴

While family letters and diaries are often used for analyses,⁵ Carol Beardmore rightly points out that studies of agents rarely contain comprehensive personal details. It is the aim of this article to fill that space by describing the life and work of Lord Sudeley's agent on the Gregynog estate in mid Wales, a hitherto little-studied part of Britain.

Early years

William Scott Owen was born in Colchester, Essex, in 1853 and was the youngest of five boys and two girls fathered by Lewis Welsh Owen, Rector of Holy Trinity church.⁶ The Owen family was one of a privileged background, with Scott Owen's grandfather being a landed gentleman in Tiverton, Devon, descended from the Dukes of Somerset.⁷ The Owen family members were intelligent and very well educated, having a tradition of scholarship at Oxford University and membership of the Anglican clergy. Scott Owen's grandfather, father, two uncles and two of his brothers were all graduates of the university, and all but the grandfather and Scott Owen himself were clergymen.⁸ William Scott Owen received his schooling at Marlborough College from the age of 14 years, where he was a keen sportsman, being on both the first cricket and first rugby teams during his final year. In 1870 he won the prizes for best drop kick and best place kicking, and was described as a 'useful all-round cricketer...a serviceable slow round-arm bowler; active in the field but seldom to be depended upon as a catcher'.⁹ A photograph of the cricket team is shown in **Figure 1**. Although Scott Owen was not the captain, he is seated in the centre of the group, reflecting the respect he received after bowling out the Captain of the team from Rugby school during a match at Lords. One of his fellow pupils was the future 4th Lord Sudeley, heir to the Gregynog Estate in mid Wales, noted for its fine timber and hunting opportunities. It was Lord Sudeley who brought Scott Owen to Montgomeryshire in 1879 to be his land agent. This invitation led to a lifetime of fulfilling work for the man from Essex, with life on the estate allowing his natural talents and ability to flourish. He was to serve Lord Sudeley, the people of the estate, the wider community, and the Tory party with distinction.

Figure 1: William Scott Owen in the Marlborough College cricket team seated centre (Courtesy of Marlborough College)

The early career

Scott Owen's residence as agent was in a large, timber-framed house that was later demolished and rebuilt, possibly designed by Scott Owen himself.¹⁰ The building was perched on a hilltop about 200 metres above Gregynog Hall, overlooking the estate village of Tregynon and the cottages and farms for which he had responsibility. Lord Sudeley's main concern was receiving his due rents from tenants; apart from collecting these rents, Scott Owen was free to run the estate as he saw fit, to be 'master of all he surveyed' as Lord Sudeley put it.¹¹ Scott Owen addressed his work with diligence. Three years after taking up his position as agent, he started keeping detailed records of work done by estate workers in the grounds around the Hall and on the tenant farms. He also kept account books showing how money was spent.¹² From these documents a vivid and invaluable picture of life in this area can be drawn. For example, in the 1880s estate work included sundry labour in woods, putting up fences, constructing roads to take timber and bark out, and cutting drains.

All year round, attention was paid to fruit trees. It is known that Lord Sudeley invested in an ill-fated orchard business on his Toddington estate in Gloucestershire at the very end of the 1880s. Clearly similar endeavour was going on at Gregynog at an earlier date although perhaps not on

such a great scale as that which was to come in Gloucestershire. It appears that the fruit project suffered the same fate as at Toddington as the amount spent on it fell from £22 11s. 10d. in 1884 to only 17 shillings in 1890. On the 1886 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of Tregynon, three orchards can be seen. One of them was at the agent's house and indeed it was the largest of the three and is mentioned specifically in the accounts. The 17 shillings spent on fruit trees in 1890 was all on this orchard. The next largest collection of apple trees was in a field near Gregynog Hall, overlooking two reservoirs, and the smallest was adjacent to the estate workers' base, situated next to the walled kitchen garden. An article appeared in *The Montgomeryshire Express* telling of how Lord Sudeley was experimenting in the keeping of bees.¹³ both to promote fruit production and to make an income from the sale of honey, and Scott Owen's accounts show that Lord Sudeley was a member of the Montgomeryshire Beekeepers' Association. They also show £1 0s. 6d. paid for a beehive and 2s. 6d. paid to Cambrian Railways for carriage of the hive to Newtown. Two of the orchards have gone but the one next to the walled garden remains, now overgrown and ghostly.

The Gregynog Estate was well known for its hunting and shooting opportunities, and game books compiled by Scott Owen give a clear picture of the richness of the land.¹⁴ A Royal Commission report published in 1896 contains a section about the game laws and says that this was one of the topics causing the most concern among tenant farmers.¹⁵ Often the farmers resented landowners coming onto their holdings and this resentment was even deeper when the hunter was a so-called 'sporting tenant', renting the estate for a time during the open season. These feelings were clearly illustrated by a legal case from 1884 when one of Lord Sudeley's sporting tenants, a Major Phillips, brought a prosecution against three residents of a neighbouring parish. The prosecution was carried out under the 1828 Night Poaching Act, which allowed gamekeepers or servants of landowners to arrest a person taking game. The trial of the alleged poachers took place at the spring assizes in Caernarvon following a plea of not guilty before Montgomeryshire magistrates.¹⁶ Although at the trial the defendants were positively identified by the estate workers, they brought forward 15 witnesses who gave them alibis. Against such a defence, the prosecution case collapsed, and the men were acquitted. The judge allowed prosecution costs but refused to allow the defence witnesses to be granted any financial help. He said that had the witnesses appeared before the magistrates then the case probably would not have been sent to trial. *The Montgomeryshire Express* reported that it was no secret the jury members had made up their minds at the end of the first day of the two-day trial, and intimated that they, the jury members, supported the alleged poachers. This was a typical popular reaction to the disliked

game laws, absentee landlords, sporting tenants and the ruling classes. The defence lawyer was local man Martin Woosnam and his success established him as the people's champion. The following February he was asked to be chairman of the first meeting of the new Liberal Club in Tregynon. He accepted and made an opening speech in which he spoke about events at the time that the 1880 Ground Game Act was being debated in Parliament. This Act was later passed allowing occupiers of land (i.e. not only landowners) to take and kill hares and rabbits. Woosnam spoke in a provocative manner about 'Conservatives who had wished to retain for themselves the hares and rabbits notwithstanding that they had the pheasants and grouse'. He also said, 'If you should take your gun out to shoot a rabbit for your sick child, you are in imminent peril of prosecution', and spoke of his wish to see the game laws swept away.¹⁷

Despite such strong local feeling among the tenants against games laws conflicting with his role as agent to an absentee landlord, Scott Owen was surprisingly popular as land agent. When he and his Australian-born wife, Priscilla, returned from their honeymoon in 1884 the admiration felt for him by the people of the estate was shown when a representative spoke the following words at a presentation made to the couple:

During the five years, Sir, of your residence amongst us as Lord Sudeley's agent and representative, your unwearied courtesy and kindness have won for you the esteem and affection of his lordship's tenantry and others with whom you have been brought into contact ... As a token of our high regard for you ... we beg your acceptance of the accompanying silver tea and coffee service ... felt that we had the happy opportunity to show our great respect for you.¹⁸

Later, in 1891, Lord Sudeley himself declared to his tenants:

We are deeply indebted to one gentleman – Mr Scott Owen. He has done his work admirably; he has done it with tact, discretion and justice, and even during the years of agricultural depression has won your regard and esteem.¹⁹

This nationwide agricultural depression started in the 1870s and continued through the 1880s and into the 1890s. It was a major factor in the lives of land agents. The unusually hard winter of 1890–91 meant that markets were depressed in the spring of 1891 and Lord Sudeley consequently granted a rent abatement of 10 percent. At a meeting of tenants in the nearby town of Newtown in April 1891, Scott Owen as chairman spoke of being encouraged by agricultural returns that showed livestock numbers in Montgomeryshire had increased by between 5 and 10 percent and that no great outbreak of disease had been reported. He spoke of his surprise to read in the returns that the county produced more wheat than any other Welsh county, almost 30 times as much as Anglesey, for example.²⁰ However, by the time of the next tenants' meeting six months later, Scott Owen was speaking of the prices of sheep and pigs going down considerably although the harvest had been good and wheat prices were reasonable. The dreadful situation of agriculture in Russia was mentioned and one of the farmers expressed a hope that such misery would never be seen in Wales.²¹ However, the situation in Montgomeryshire did worsen. An agricultural review published in the local newspaper the following year said that:

The year 1892 will long rank among the worst seasons in the annals of British agriculture. Not only have the seasons and harvests been disastrous but there has also been a wave of low prices.²²

1893 consequently saw a 20 percent reduction in Gregynog estate rents.²³ In 1894 the Royal Commissioners sat at Welshpool Town Hall in Montgomeryshire to take evidence for their forthcoming report on land in Wales and Monmouthshire. A number of Gregynog tenants appeared to give evidence along with other witnesses, and both Scott Owen and Martin Woosnam were present at the hearing. Woosnam asked questions of several witnesses to elicit information about the treatment of tenants on both the Gregynog Estate and elsewhere. Some reports of agents' discriminatory behaviour were heard, such as the following regarding actions by the agent on Sir Watkin Williams Wynn's estate:

Woosnam: You admit he was evicted in consequence
of his protest against the application of

the tithe?

Hughes: I do.

Woosnam: You admit that you did interfere with the liberty of conscience of those persons?

Hughes: No, I did not. I never let it enter my mind. I would not interfere with any man's conscience But I have said what I have done.

Woosnam: Did you act under Sir Watkin's direct Instructions?

Hughes: Yes, I did.

However, nothing of this sort was heard of William Scott Owen.²⁴

Partly as a result of the depression, Lord Sudeley's fortunes famously collapsed and he lost Gregynog.²⁵ In 1893 the Economic Life Assurance Company foreclosed on a £200,000 loan that Sudeley had inherited, and took over ownership of the estate.²⁶ For the next five years Scott Owen continued as agent, receiving a commission of 5 percent for the first year and 2.5 percent for the second year upon letting of the various farms and other properties.²⁷ The cost of celebrations to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee – tea on the meadow near the big house, sports and bonfire on the nearby hilltop known as the Bon Kyn – was largely covered by the company directors. One director, a Mr Sartoris, attended the 4th annual Gregynog show in September 1897 and spoke of the board's lively interest in the goings on of the estate.²⁸ The directors also allowed the building of a school, designed by Scott Owen, in a neighbouring village, showing the versatility and range of the responsibilities of the land agent. During this time Scott Owen worked on a lengthy and detailed piece of writing about the history of Tregynon, partly researched from records found in a box in the church vestry during restoration in 1892. This work was eventually published by the Powysland Club in 1898,²⁹ the year that Sir James Joicey, later Lord Joicey, bought the Gregynog Estate from the Economic Life Assurance Company.

Development of Scott Owen's professional and political interests

As this pattern of events suggests, William Scott Owen used and developed the many skills in his possession. He became a fellow of the Surveyors' Institution in 1889, the precursor to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors,³⁰ and used his drawing, draughtsmanship and architectural

abilities on the new school. The foundation stone was laid in 1896 and the building opened formally the following year. It can still be seen today, standing adjacent to the modern community centre. The main schoolroom measured 6.5m by 13m and the windows were designed to throw light upon the children. They were said to open by 'an ingenious method' but this is not described in the newspaper report. There were fireplaces surrounded by chocolate-coloured, glazed bricks, and separate entrances for girls and boys, which was common in many schools at that time. Scott Owen allowed for adequate ventilation by having in the roof four ventilators, two of them rotating. There was also a bell tower on the roof.³¹ Scott Owen had also supervised the restoration of Tregynon church in 1892 and designed the remarkable wooden porch on the south side. It has the words 'Enter ye by the strait [sic] gate' carved into it, crafted by a local man.³²

Scott Owen had a significant impact on the education of Gregynog tenants, making efforts to help the farmers during the agricultural depression. He arranged for staff from the agricultural college in Bangor to visit the area to give lectures on useful topics including foot rot among sheep, and natural and artificial fertilisers.³³ He initiated a 10-day course of instruction in butter making for school children, paid for by the new county council and held at the coach house at Gregynog Hall. Although organising such education was a normal part of the role of a land agent or steward, Scott Owen's contribution must have been exceptional because by 1897 he was a director of the newly-formed University College of Wales, Bangor.³⁴ He also created the Gregynog Show which was first held in 1894. Initially parading the horses of the estate, in the second year the scope of the show was extended to include sheep, cattle and garden produce, sports and competitions, with a pony race being won by Mr Scott Owen's elder son, Lewis. Food was provided at the big house and about 800 people attended the event.³⁵ The show continued annually until 1914 when the outbreak of the First World War coincided with the 11th event, and when hostilities ceased, it never resumed.

It was mentioned earlier that although Scott Owen enforced the disliked game laws, he was nevertheless popular with tenants. Another area in which there could have been tension was in politics. Montgomeryshire county council was formed in 1888 and Scott Owen had a seat on it by the early 1890s. In 1904, he stood again for election to the county council and put an advert into the *Montgomeryshire Express*, offering himself as the candidate.³⁶ The published election results show that Scott Owen was a Conservative, and that he lost to the Liberal candidate by 20 votes, in contests that the newspaper described as 'decisive Liberal victories'.³⁷ This of course

mirrored national experience and trends at that time. He stood for election yet again in 1910 but lost to the Liberal candidate in a result that was repeated widely throughout the principality.³⁸ In Wales the Liberals were more successful in county council elections than the Conservatives. Apart from Breconshire, Welsh county councils were around 65 percent Liberal whereas in England the picture were commonly reversed.³⁹ At the time of the elections in 1892, an article appeared in the local newspaper which promoted the Liberal cause:

As the county council elections proceed, it becomes more and more evident that party considerations will dominate the contests throughout the whole of Wales and a large part of England...While the introduction of politics into the actual management of county business would be voted by all to be mischievous... they should reflect public opinion in its proper proportions. For that reason, Liberal leaders advise the election of Liberal candidates...Every Welsh Nonconformist who in these days votes on the Tory side stabs the cause of Welsh disestablishment and Welsh national recognition in the back.

By 1916 Scott Owen was back on the county council. A newspaper report shows him taking a place on the education committee, on which there were two women members, showing the changes taking place in community representation.⁴⁰

Many further changes affected the great estates. Following Lloyd George's so-called People's Budget of 1909, and the resulting New Domesday survey, which assessed land holdings with a view to a new tax upon the very wealthy, many landowners sold their properties.⁴¹ Joicey, now Lord Joicey, sold 3,500 acres of the Gregynog Estate to the county council.⁴² Sales of land by great landowners went on and in 1913 more of the estate was sold, this time by auction. Some properties were buildings such as the school and Temperance Hotel in Tregynon, but many were farms. An ordinary farmer in this region was unlikely to have sufficient funds to purchase his holding outright, therefore the purchase of the whole estate by a trusted, neighbouring landowner was many tenants' preferred option. Tenants feared purchase by a speculator in case they should then find themselves being evicted. In the case of tenants who were confident enough to think of purchase there was also the issue of mortgages, and the worry associated with repayments, notably in the context of agricultural depression and unreliable prices. It has been reported that in

April 1913 Lord Joicey was prepared to ask for a deposit of one-third, the rest to remain on permanent mortgage at 3.75 percent.⁴³ However, at the auction in October 1913 the auctioneer gave information that was slightly different. He spoke of funds from which money could be drawn by those who wished to raise mortgages.⁴⁴

Scott Owen's later career

It is worth mentioning features of Scott Owen's later career, for they show further diversification and the resourcefulness of this land agent. He was present at the opening ceremony in 1911 of the new county infirmary situated in Newtown.⁴⁵ Plans for this had begun in 1906 when the existing infirmary, situated on the southern bank of the River Severn, was deemed too small and too gloomy. Scott Owen became chairman of the fundraising committee, possibly because Lord Sudeley had been a great supporter of the old infirmary.⁴⁶ Scott Owen worked hard on this project, soliciting donations and organising the annual Christmas ball. He made a speech at the opening ceremony and handed over the key, all part of his ongoing and constant concern for the well-being of local people who were not gentry or aristocracy. He also had a role as an executive member of the County Nursing Association, and from his words at a presentation ceremony that took place in 1907, his respect for the community was clear. He organised a ceremony to mark the retirement of a Gregynog Estate stalwart, 62-year-old Thomas Humphreys, and this event took place at the school he designed.⁴⁷ He spoke of how it was an honour to make Mr Humphreys realise how well regarded he was, and how much kind feeling there was towards him. He talked of Mr Humphreys' loyalty and diligence, and of his courage and pluck, and that these were constant features of Humphreys' life. Scott Owen's words become more meaningful upon investigation of the censuses and the churchyard memorials. They show that in 1881, Mr Humphreys was working as a gardener and living with his wife, Jane, in an estate cottage. From Mr Scott Owen's accounts, it can be seen that the man's tasks included repairing fences and hanging gates, felling timber and removing the bark, and sundry work in the woods. Sadly, Jane Humphreys died in 1887, aged only 39 years. The 1891 census shows Mr Humphreys remarried to a lady named Mary and by 1901 was working as a forester. The second Mrs Humphreys was not on that census however, as she too had died, in 1896 – not long after her 41st birthday.

The First World War saw further distinct activities by this land agent. Scott Owen became deeply involved with the British Red Cross Society and its efforts to support the armed services. He was director of the Montgomeryshire branch of the society and was involved in the scheme to

created hospitals for wounded servicemen. In October 1916 he toured the workhouse in Machynlleth in western Montgomeryshire with Lord Henry Vane-Tempest, with a view to instituting a hospital there but the premises were found to be unsuitable. As a Red Cross director, he organised fundraising activities around the county, for example a sale of livestock in Newtown in order to raise money. For this, farmers were persuaded to donate animals and the £220 raised contributed to a countrywide total of £1 million.⁴⁸ Also, in 1916 the gardens of the Scott Owen house in Tregynon were the venue for a fete that raised £12.⁴⁹ Entertainment included a game entitled 'Smashing the Kaiser' organised by the local Boy Scouts, of which Mrs Scott Owen was the leader. For his services to the Red Cross, Scott Owen received the O.B.E. in 1920.⁵⁰

As more of the Gregynog Estate was sold and Scott Owen's workload in Tregynon reduced, he agreed to become acting agent of the Leighton Estate near Welshpool and the Brynlllywarch Estate near Newtown when their owners and agents went away to war. He administered both estates from the Leighton office and travelled to work on horseback.⁵¹ These roles lasted from shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 until early summer 1921.⁵² Scott Owen used his 40 years' experience as a land agent to handle cases such as a dispute between tenant farmers and an incompetent blacksmith, the apparent theft of livestock from the Leighton home farm, and requests for compensation for damage caused to land by German prisoners of war. The Brynlllywarch estate included woodland that provided timber for the war effort and a contract was made with the government's timber supply department. Much of the labouring work was done by the prisoners, and organising them was a task with which Scott Owen was very familiar from the Gregynog estate which was famous for its production of oak and larch. It is also possible that he was a German speaker as he had employed a German governess for his daughters, who became fluent in the language and were involved in the war effort on the continent. Part of his work as agent was managing sales of timber to both local and distant merchants as well as the Government, and he attended an important conference in late 1917 at which land owners, agents and surveyors discussed the future replanting of woodlands after hostilities ended. His experience and contacts were invaluable. Scott Owen clearly had thoughts about the coming times as he wrote a letter to the *Montgomeryshire Express* in 1917 giving ideas for returning soldiers.⁵³ It is a measure of the respect felt for the Gregynog agent that his letter did not appear in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, but as a standalone article entitled 'A letter from Mr Scott Owen'. He suggested that motor tractors could be used more, taking produce to railway stations for transportation. He called for government funding for civil engineering and

indicated that small colonies of houses could be built as 'the Montgomeryshire country working man does not like living in a village.' Preferably, he wanted to see a measure of indemnity 'which the German barbarian will have to pay for all his misdeeds.' He also wrote of forestry being a potential supply of opportunities for profitable manual labour, of Montgomeryshire's rivers and lakes being sources of hydroelectric power, and he argued that the use of electricity could create work for many hundreds of men. He may have found inspiration for these ideas from Leighton which was a remarkable 9000-acre estate containing some items of advanced technology including a water-driven turbine and funicular railway.⁵⁴ There was also a thriving farm there, and correspondence from the bailiff, Hutton Stallworthy, illustrates the work and the agricultural opportunities, as well as some of the repercussions from political changes that Scott Owen faced:

27 April 1917

With regard to breeding more cattle I am weaning every calf I can get & all we breed. I was obliged to sell two or three calves with those old cows or I could not have got rid of them. The 40 Bullocks I now have grazing every one of them I weaned or bought as calves. It is of no use for us to think of feeding bullocks as we have done with the price of cake today at £18.2.6 per ton and not likely to get much of that. What I intend to go in for if Captain Naylor [the owner of the estate] and yourself are willing is to sell milk and take it to the station once a day. I can get a good sale for it at Wolverhampton or Birmingham.⁵⁵ I believe it would pay far better than breeding shorthorns. The bull calves as they come we can castrate them and the heifers in due time would come into the milking herd. We should not want to feed the young stock so heavy as we do now, and as we have a good lot of heifers in calf we should be just right to start them in the milking herd instead of feeding them so heavy to bring on their calves. Please let me know what you think of my suggestion. My father kept 150 dairy cows in Oxfordshire, so I am well up in the milk producing trade, there is nothing nowadays pays better than milk and we have a good supply of water for cooling the milk and float ready to take it to the station.

With regard to the minimum wages for men, it is a big job and I suppose it means no extras for any of them but I expect if men work overtime in the evening after the regular working hours are over, that would have to be paid for, what do you say? Or

would it be difficult to get men to work till 8 or 9 o'clock at night in harvest time when others went home at the usual time and had same pay.⁵⁶

At the end of his career, Scott Owen became a magistrate. One of his last sittings was at the Quarter Sessions at the end of October 1920 when the county's first lady magistrate was sworn in.⁵⁷ Two months later he died suddenly at home.⁵⁸ The funeral took place on 11 January 1921 when heavy rain meant that plans for sawmill workers to carry the coffin from the house to the church had to be abandoned, and instead a Red Cross ambulance was used. Mourners included members of the education committee, a detachment of the county constabulary, Anglican and Nonconformist ministers, and magistrates. The newspaper reported that the service was simple and unadorned, unaffected and impressive, and that the final resting place – a sunny spot on the southern side of the church – was entirely fitting 'for one whose disposition was always genial and sunny'. The card accompanying his younger son's wreath bore the words, 'To a perfect father' and on his wife's card was written, 'To my precious and my darling husband.' Inscribed on the tombstone, where Mrs Scott Owen was also interred when she died in 1944, are the simple words, 'They left a good name.'

Legacies and judgements

William Scott Owen figured large in the lives of working people in late Victorian and Edwardian Montgomeryshire. He worked hard with the tenants on the Gregynog Estate, and on other estates in the county, and contributed to significant local government and social welfare matters. The school building he designed and the Montgomeryshire Infirmary stand as solid reminders of his contributions.⁵⁹ His manner with those among whom he lived and worked was such that he was liked and respected at a time when many land agents were despised.⁶⁰ **Figure 2** is a drawing of Scott Owen by his daughter. His legacies are easy to find: the results of his research published in the *Montgomeryshire Collections*; his detailed records at the National Library of Wales and other collections; his impressive tomb in a prime spot in Tregynon churchyard, and a stunning stained-glass window dedicated to him in the chancel. The window is above Scott Owen's tomb and is in three sections with the middle section bearing an image of St Benedict. St Benedict was an early saint described as 'wise, discreet, flexible, learned in the law of God, but also a spiritual father to his community'.⁶¹ This at any rate was how one land agent was viewed by many in the area where he worked. He was a notable exception, perhaps, to a more widely generalized stereotype

of the role in this period, and one that is all the more striking because it pertains to an Anglican Englishman in mid Wales, such a Nonconformist region with a large element of Welsh speakers. Only further research can clarify whether Scott Owen was unique or characteristic of a broader number of land agents whose qualities may have been underestimated by historians.

Figure 2: William Scott Owen, drawn by his daughter
(Courtesy of Lord Middleton)

Notes

¹ C. Beardmore, 'Landowner, tenant and agent on the Marquis of Anglesey's Dorset and Somerset estate, 1818–44', *Rural History*, 26 (2015), 182.

² F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), 151–83.

³ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, 157–9; P. O'Brien and D. Heath, 'English and French landowners, 1688–1789' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *Landowners, Capitalists and Entrepreneurs: Essays for Sir John Habakkuk* (Oxford, 1994), 37, 38, 40, 43; G.E. Mingay, 'The eighteenth-century land steward' in E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay (eds), *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution: Essays presented to J.D. Chambers* (London, 1967), 3–27.

⁴ S. Webster, 'Estate improvement and the professionalization of land agents on the Egremont estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770–1835', *Rural History*, 18 (2007), 47–69; J.P. Bowen, 'A landscape of improvement: the impact of James Loch, chief agent to the Marquis of Stafford, on the Lilleshall estate, Shropshire', *Midland History*, 35 (2010), 191–214.

⁵ J.O. Parker, *The Oxley Parker Papers: From the Letters and Diaries of an Essex Family of Land Agents in the Nineteenth Century* (Colchester, 1964).

⁶ National census, 1851 and 1861.

⁷ National census, 1851; personal correspondence, Lady Middleton of Birdsall, 6 November 2007. Lady Middleton was Scott Owen's granddaughter. She died in 2015, see 'Dowager Lady Middleton', <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11595572/The-Dowager-Lady-Middleton-obituary.html> (accessed 15 April 2018).

⁸ Personal correspondence, Anna Sander, Archivist, Balliol College, Oxford 17 April 2008.

⁹ Personal correspondence, Terry Rogers, Hon. Archivist, Marlborough College 12 February 2009.

¹⁰ Lady Middleton, 2007.

¹¹ Lady Middleton, 2007.

¹² Gregynog Estate labour books, National Library of Wales ref. 1957112/56 & 57.

¹³ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 2 March 1886.

¹⁴ Game books, National Library of Wales ref. 1957112/61-63.

¹⁵ *Report of The Royal Commission on Land Holdings in Wales and Monmouthshire*, 1896, p. 929; A. Fletcher, 'Game laws in the late nineteenth century: a case study from Clwyd', *Local Historian*, 26 (1998), 142–54; P. B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: the English Game Laws, 1671–1831* (Cambridge, 1981).

¹⁶ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 29 April 1884.

¹⁷ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 24 February 1885.

¹⁸ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 23 September 1884.

¹⁹ D. Howell, 'The estate and its owners, 1795-1920', in G.T. Hughes, P. Morgan, J. Thomas (eds), *Gregynog* (Cardiff, 1977), 43.

²⁰ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 21 April 1891.

²¹ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 13 October 1891.

²² *Montgomeryshire Express* 3 January 1893.

²³ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 18 April 1893.

²⁴ *Minutes of evidence, Royal Commission on land in Wales and Monmouthshire*, 1895, Appendix (Vol. IV).

²⁵ Lord Sudeley, 'Gregynog before 1900', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, 62 (1971, issued 1973); G. T. Hughes, P. Morgan and J. Thomas (eds), *Gregynog* (Cardiff, 1977), 42–60.

²⁶ For details of this see R. Jones, 'The Gregynog Estate, 1880–1920', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Leicester University (2008).

²⁷ Economic Life Assurance Company, *Directors' minutes 1889-1900*, Guildhall Library ref. 14065/19 & 20.

²⁸ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 7 September 1897.

²⁹ W. Scott Owen, 'Parochial history of Tregynon', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 30 (1898), 1–68.

³⁰ *Marlborough College Register from 1843 to 1909* (Marlborough, 1910), 215.

³¹ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 18 May 1897

³² *Montgomeryshire Express*, 20 March 1894.

³³ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 12 April 1892.

³⁴ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 18 May 1897.

³⁵ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 17 September 1895.

³⁶ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 23 February 1904. For analysis, see M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832–1886* (Oxford, 2004).

³⁷ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 8 March 1904.

³⁸ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 16 February 1910.

³⁹ D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1993), 159.

⁴⁰ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 1 February 1916.

⁴¹ See B. K. Murray, *The People's Budget, 1909–10: Lloyd George and Liberal Politics* (Oxford, 1980); B. Short, *Land and Society in Edwardian Britain* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁴² *Montgomeryshire Express*, 9 August 1910; 6 September 1910.

⁴³ J. Davies, 'The end of the great estates', *Welsh History Review*, 7 (1974), 202–3.

⁴⁴ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 4 November 1911.

⁴⁵ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 5 September 1911.

⁴⁶ A letter from 'An Elector' published in the Liberal-supporting *Montgomeryshire Express* (6 July 1886)) contains praise of Lord Sudeley's financial support of the infirmary.

⁴⁷ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 8 October 1907.

⁴⁸ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 5 November 1918.

⁴⁹ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 1 August 1916; 8 August 1916.

⁵⁰ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 6 April 1920; personal correspondence with British Red Cross Society Archivist, 12 September 2008.

⁵¹ Lady Middleton, 2007.

⁵² An archive of material containing correspondence and other records was sent to the author by Lady Middleton. These are now at the National Library of Wales ref. NLW William Scott Owen papers, ex 2720.

⁵³ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 29 May 1917.

⁵⁴ R. Haslam, *The Buildings of Wales: Powys* (London, 2003), 115; 117–9.

⁵⁵ Wolverhampton was an important market town with a range of types of market, including three cattle markets, pig market and fruit market. There is an excellent description at the web site <http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/MunicipalServices/CattleMarket/CattleMarket.htm> (accessed 10 March 2018). Although livestock had long been sold in the streets of Birmingham, a sited market was created in 1817 ('Smithfield Birmingham,' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithfield,_Birmingham (accessed 10 March 2018).

⁵⁶ H. Stallworthy, letter to Scott Owen, 27 April 1917, William Scott Owen papers, (see note 52). Stallworthy was one of several sons of William Stallworthy who farmed 200 acres in Waterperry, Oxfordshire. Before taking the post in Leighton, Hutton was a farmer in Buckinghamshire and then bailiff on a farm near Southampton. Hutton's brother Frederick was also a farm bailiff. (National Censuses 1851-1901). The Minimum Wage Amendment Act 1917 act came into force ten days before Stallworthy wrote this letter.

⁵⁷ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 26 October 1920.

⁵⁸ *Montgomeryshire Express*, 18 January 1921.

⁵⁹ As well as the paper 'Parochial history of Tregynon', the paper 'Arthur Blayney and his home, Gregynog Hall' was published in *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 29 (1891), 105-114. At the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagin's, there is a collection of vernacular furniture named the William Scott Owen Collection. It comprises 27 pieces, which were loaned to the museum by Scott Owen's granddaughter. The collection was purchased by the museum in 2004.

⁶⁰ See B. MacMahon, 'George Sands of Listowel, land agent, magistrate and terror of north Kerry', *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, 3 (2003), 5–56.

⁶¹ Farmer, D.H., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (1978, Oxford, 1992).