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PIONEERS AND RADICALS: THE DILLWYN FAMILY'S TRANSATLANTIC TRADITION OF DISSENT AND INNOVATION

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Abstract

The Dillwyn family made a significant contribution to the commercial, industrial, and artistic development of the city of Swansea in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Their legacy remains not only in their published works but also in a number of street names and placenames in Swansea and its surrounding areas. This paper looks at the work of key members of the Dillwyn family, beginning with the American abolitionist, William Dillwyn, and his wider family. As practising Quakers, the Dillwyns were driven by a particular work ethic that was both industrious and unconventional. The paper focuses on the pioneering accomplishments of the Dillwyn women, including the author Amy Dillwyn.

The Dillwyns were pioneers. In science and the arts, in national politics and civic life, in industry and entrepreneurship, they were innovators and reformers. Guided by a Quaker ethos of individual industry and collective duty, this was a family of independent and unconventional thinkers. The achievements of the men are best understood in terms of their extraordinary abilities as networkers and collaborators. Recognising the significance of networks rather than individual exceptionalism enables us to focus on a nexus of scientific, industrial and political activity in which the Dillwyns were pivotal participants and generous facilitators. The women, on the other hand, while benefitting from a supportive family environment, have tended to be iconoclasts – independent thinkers and actors willing to take a sometimes lonely stand.

It would be possible to dedicate an entire study to any one member of a family that, as David Painting remarked, pursued ‘a lifestyle that converted almost unlimited leisure into quite exceptional creativity. [A family that] chose [...] to explore every avenue of scientific enquiry open to an intelligent and cultivated mind’.¹ This essay aims to cover four generations and two continents, though focusing on the family as established in Wales in the nineteenth century. Since most of the Dillwyn men have been the subject of published studies, however short,²

1 David Painting, ‘J D Llewelyn and His Family Circle’, *History of Photography*, 15.3 (Autumn 1991), 180–185 (p. 184).

2 In addition to the sources footnoted elsewhere, see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* for entries on John Dillwyn Llewellyn and Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn (the least well documented of the men). The diaries of William Dillwyn, Lewis Weston Dillwyn and Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn have been transcribed and published online at <<http://www.swansea.ac.uk/crew/researchprojects/dillwyn/diaries/>>.

and the women are only now gaining the recognition they deserve, I give greater prominence to the latter and, in particular, Amy Dillwyn whose combined roles of writer, activist and early female industrialist draw on several strands of the Dillwyn family's collective genius.

Abolition

The Dillwyn story begins with an American Quaker from Philadelphia, William Dillwyn (1743–1832).³ His forebears had emigrated to America in 1699 from Breconshire, contributing to the establishment of the Quaker colony in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Quakers were at the forefront of the campaign to abolish slavery and the young William Dillwyn was brought up in the abolitionist cause, first as a pupil of the French abolitionist Anthony Benezet (1713–1784) and later as his assistant and emissary. In his thirties, William Dillwyn travelled to South Carolina to observe and research slavery and published a pamphlet in 1773, *Brief Considerations on Slavery, and the Expediency of Its Abolition: With Some Hints on the Means Whereby it May be Gradually Effected*. The following year he journeyed to London and began to create the transatlantic network that would ultimately enlist and empower men like Thomas Clarkson (1760–1864). William Dillwyn knew that he needed allies beyond the Quaker community since Quakers were debarred from Parliament. In Thomas Clarkson, William Dillwyn recognized a man who could take the campaign to Parliament and a wider audience. William stayed active behind the scenes, however, and in 1878 he founded the Committee for the Abolition of Slavery which spearheaded the campaign in Britain and in 1783 co-authored a pamphlet entitled *The case of our fellow-creatures, the oppressed Africans, respectfully recommended to the serious consideration of the legislature of Great-Britain, by the people called Quakers*.

Having cultivated and tutored his British allies, William Dillwyn ensured they could work with his American counterparts, thus forging a network of campaigners who would finally achieve abolition in Britain in 1807 and an Act outlawing the ‘importation’ of slaves in America. Dillwyn was, as the better known Thomas Clarkson wrote in his history of the Abolition movement, ‘the great medium of connexion between them all’.⁴ We can see just what Clarkson means with the aid of Figure 1, an ingenious fold-out ‘map’, or ‘visualisation’ as it would be described today. The image represents the eighteenth-century abolitionist cause as a great map of rivers, with tributaries named after the groups or individuals who worked for the cause. On this map the significance of Williams Dillwyn’s role is plain to see. He is not merely a tributary, but a *canal* – allowing two-way traffic across the

3 I draw on David Painting’s article, ‘Swansea and the Abolition of the Slave Trade’, *Minerva*, 15 (2007–08), 10–18 and his lecture, ‘The Dillwyn Dynasty’ (2012) which is published online at <<https://www.swansea.ac.uk/crew/researchprojects/dillwyn/dillwynday/>> [accessed 6 November 2018].

4 Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols (London: L. Taylor, 1808) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1869>> [accessed 3 October 2018] (chap. 6, p. 193).

continents. Indeed, his name, uniquely, appears not on one canal but three.

The historian David Brion Davis, noting William Dillwyn's undeserved historical neglect, has described him as a 'monumental pioneer who made an enormous contribution to the abolitionist cause'.⁵ Why then, has history overlooked his contribution? In part, perhaps, because Dillwyn's own modesty apparently led him to 'demurr' when Clarkson wished to pay him tribute in his landmark two-volume history *Abolition of the African slave-trade, by the British Parliament* (1808).⁶ Perhaps it was also because his most significant role was as a *networker*, rather than a figurehead. He found a means to mobilize and support others – knowing when to lead and when to step back in the interests of the greater cause – a quality that we see again in his descendants.

Lewis Weston Dillwyn: naturalism, pottery and art

If William Dillwyn was inclined to modesty in the public eye, he was nevertheless a shrewd and industrious businessman. Alongside his campaigning, he was laying the foundations for the future success of his children. After the death of his American wife, he had married into an important English Quaker family – the Westons – in 1777 and in 1802 he purchased the Cambrian Pottery in the major industrial town of Swansea for his eldest son, Lewis Weston Dillwyn.⁷ William kept on the former owner to run the place until Lewis Weston was able to take up his duties. Lewis had been working – not very happily – in his father's cloth warehouses, but now found he had an income and some liberty to pursue his first love – natural history. He would go on to become a leading naturalist: a botanist with a special interest in algae and a conchologist.⁸ Denied the opportunity of a university degree by his religion, he nevertheless cultivated an extensive network of scientist friends and allies. He dubbed his home in Swansea an 'Inn of Science', and he made a steady round of meetings and visits to men like the influential French naturalist George Cuvier and Sir Humphry Davy in London. A formidable organizer and taxonomist, he was determined to put his adopted home of Swansea on the map. He was a founder of the Royal Institution of South Wales (RISW) which aimed to serve a town 'seventh in the kingdom in the extent of its trade' but 'surpassed by few in intelligence'.⁹ In 1848 Lewis Weston Dillwyn – assisted by his two sons, John Dillwyn Llewelyn and Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn – was instrumental in pulling off the not insignificant feat of hosting the British Association of Science

5 Personal email to the author, 28 January 2010.

6 Painting, 'Swansea and the Abolition of the Slave Trade', p. 15. Dillwyn's importance is nevertheless indicated in a variety of ways in that volume.

7 I am indebted to the account of Lewis Weston Dillwyn's life in Ronald Rees, *Heroic Science: Swansea and the Royal Institution of South Wales, 1835–1865* (St Athan: Wales Books, Glyndŵr Publishing, 2005), pp. 43–75.

8 A. R. Walker, 'The Dillwyn's as Naturalists: Lewis Weston Dillwyn (1778–1855) FRS, FLS, MGS, LIN. SOC. of PHILEDELPHIA, M.P. (1832–37)', *Minerva*, 11 (2003), 20–42.

9 Reports of the Swansea Philosophical and Literary Institution 1835–38, cited by Rees, *Heroic Science*, p. 71.

annual conference in a town as yet unconnected to the railway. It is impossible to do justice to such a life in such a short space, but it is worth drawing attention to two points that are relevant to my wider aim of portraying the collective qualities which distinguished the Dillwyn dynasty.

Lewis Weston, despite his energy and considerable networking skills, was shy of formal honours. He declined a DCL (Doctorate of Civil Law) from the University of Oxford offered in recognition of his scholarship and he also declined a baronetcy. There may perhaps have been unrecorded personal reasons for his refusal to accept these accolades, but it is tempting to identify his Quaker values as the cause. Though he had nominally left the Society of Friends for the Anglican Church on his marriage to Mary Llewelyn of Penllergare, he still kept in close contact with the Quakers and attended meetings of the Friends in London. For a man raised outside – and excluded from – the establishment and still retaining deep connections to the Quakers, an Oxford degree and a peerage may have seemed somewhat dubious distinctions. Lewis Weston Dillwyn was not afraid of taking public credit or leadership: he was president of the RISW in its heyday and an MP – if one who did not altogether relish the task – but he seemed shy of conventional honours.

In Lewis Weston Dillwyn we also see an example of one of the defining traits of the Dillwyns in Swansea – the merging of science, art, and industry. Though he showed more passion for his naturalist research, Lewis Weston did pay some attention to the pottery, finding a way to combine these interests. Ronald Rees claims that '[u]nder Dillwyn's ownership, the paintings of the flowers [on the pottery] became more precise; each plant was shown separately and flowers, leaves, stems and seed pods were all painted accurately and in their correct proportions'.¹⁰ As one contemporary observed: 'The Porcelain of his Cambrian Pottery became literally the illustration of his labours in natural history.'¹¹ In fact, the relationship between pottery design and Dillwyn's naturalism worked in two directions and Dillwyn used the Quaker artist hired to work at the pottery as a field assistant and collaborator on his major work, *British Confervae*.¹² Thus art, naturalism, and industry were combined in the porcelain and pottery.¹³

10 Rees, *Heroic Science*, p. 50.

11 'Soranus' [Thomas Williams, 1818–1865], 'The Science and the Scientific Men of Wales', *The Cambrian Journal*, 2 (1855) 284–204 <<https://books.google.com/books?id=3B8tAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA284&dq>> (p. 289).

12 William Weston Young was a Quaker from Bristol and examples of his work in the book and on some earthenware pieces can be seen in Elis Jenkins, 'William Weston Young', *Glamorgan Historian* V, 61–101. The publisher of *British Confervae*, William Phillips, was also a Quaker. See Rees, *Heroic Science*, p. 47.

13 As Elis Jenkins points out in his essay on William Weston Young, the assumption that Young's use of flora and fauna at the Cambrian Pottery was taken from his own sketches was called into question by Owen Harding, 'an amateur lepidopterist, [who] noticed that some of the butterflies attributed to Young as "drawn from nature" were extinct in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century.' And it seems some of the images of birds may also have come from books. See Jenkins, 'William Weston Young', p. 75.

Bessie Dillwyn: art and design at the Cambrian Pottery

The pottery would also provide an outlet for the creative endeavours of the next generation of Dillwyns. Lewis Weston was joined in 1833 by his second son, another Lewis – Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn. Lewis Llewelyn was, like his father, more interested in science than commerce, but once married Lewis Llewelyn turned his attention to the works. In this generation, the accomplishments of the women of the Dillwyn family begin to come to the fore.¹⁴ Lewis Llewelyn had married the daughter of Henry De la Beche, later Sir Henry, the eminent geologist, whose friendship and scientific collaboration with Lewis Weston Dillwyn brought their two children together. Perhaps young Lewis recognized something of the unconventional values of the Dillwyn family in this intelligent young woman. Elizabeth, or Bessie as she was known, had had an unusual upbringing which afforded her the opportunity of mixing with highly educated people, while keeping her detached from the conventionalities of English polite society. Her parents separated early amidst scandal, and Bessie had no contact with her mother. Instead, she travelled widely with her father – and her childhood seems to inform the experiences of one of the fiercely independent characters in one of Amy Dillwyn's novels.¹⁵ We know relatively little about Bessie de la Beche's formal education, but she seems to have been an accomplished artist and enjoyed the company and preoccupations of some of the finest scientific minds in Europe. On meeting her during a geological excursion with her father in 1836, Caroline Fox remarked, 'Bessie is a bright, affectionate girl, devoutly attached to her father, with whom she travels from place to place. She is about fifteen, fond of books, but her main education is her father's society'.¹⁶ Even as a married woman and mother she could sometimes find the opportunity to travel and she joined her father on a trip to Brecon in 1844, where the party included 'Professor Forbes, Mr Ramsey and Mr Smyth, who had "some of his Egyptian sketches with him"'.¹⁷ She relished the company, as she recorded in her diary: 'With four clever men in conversation, the evening could not help passing delightfully and I opened all my ears to what was said by them'.¹⁸

Characterized as 'an outspoken, highly intellectual equal in a man's world'¹⁹ by her daughter's biographer, Bessie Dillwyn was more than just 'ears' for the ideas of others. It has been carefully argued by Kathy Talbot that Bessie was the likely co-creator of the designs of Dillwyn's Etruscan ware in the late 1840s. Some of the designs of this classically inspired range were modelled from sketches she made

14 This is not to claim that previous generations of women were not accomplished, active or influential, rather they are under researched. Sarah Weston Dillwyn seems to have been an influential Quaker, but more work is needed.

15 The eponymous heroine of *Jill* (1884) spends her formative teenage years travelling Europe.

16 Caroline Fox, *Memories of Old Friends: being extracts from the diaries of Caroline Fox, Volume 1*, ed. by Horace M. Pym, 3rd edn (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1882), p. 6, digitized at www.archive.org.

17 Kathy Talbot, 'Bessie Dillwyn and the Cambrian Pottery', *Minerva*, 4 (2004), 5–15 (p. 8).

18 Bessie Dillwyn's journal, cited in Talbot, 'Bessie Dillwyn', p. 8.

19 Hilary M. Thomas, *Grandmother Extraordinary: Mary De la Beche Nicholl, 1839–1922* (Barry: Stewart Williams Publishers, 1979), p. 15.

at the British Museum when she visited with her husband in April 1846.²⁰ The Etruscan ware, made from local clay, was designed to be affordable and tasteful, though it was not a commercial success and production ceased after a short time. Today, the elegant but rare survivals are highly collectable. The evidence for Bessie's contribution to the designs is not incontrovertible, but there are numerous details that suggest she was involved. Kathy Talbot notes that the first published suggestion that Mrs. Dillwyn was involved comes from an 1897 history of Swansea ceramics in which William Turner claims, 'Mrs Dillwyn did some effective service at the "Cambrian" during the "Etruscan" period.' Employees remembered a room known as 'Mrs Dillwyn's Room' and sketches survive at Swansea Museum purportedly by Mrs. Dillwyn.²¹

Pioneering photography: Mary, John, Emma, and Thereza

Photography was another field that combined the family's scientific and artistic talents. Indeed, photography epitomizes the interrelatedness of art and science in the nineteenth century. David Brewster, writing in 1843 seems to implicitly acknowledge this, in his article on 'Drawing by the Agency of Light' in which he claims, 'the art of photography is indeed as great a step in the fine arts as the steam engine was in the mechanical arts.'²² The 'innate artistry'²³ of composition is matched by technical skill and scientific innovation in the early photographic work of John Dillwyn Llewelyn (1810–1882)²⁴ and his sister Mary Dillwyn (1816–1906).

The pioneering role of John Dillwyn Llewelyn, Lewis Weston's eldest son, is well-known.²⁵ Connected by marriage, he knew of Henry Fox Talbot's experiments in 1839 and instantly began his own research, routinely working with Emma Thomasina (nee Talbot), his wife, and ultimately developing innovations to the collodion process. These allowed plates and negatives to be stored for days before they were developed. His techniques were widely hailed as changing the face of photography when he made his announcement in 1856. That his sister, Mary, was a similarly early adopter of this new technology has only been recognized comparatively recently and much more research on her work is needed.

20 Talbot, 'Bessie Dillwyn', pp. 8–9.

21 The handwriting on one describing a 'Pelike' appear to me to match other documents penned by Bessie Dillwyn, though this is a casual observation at best.

22 David Brewster, 'Drawing by the Agency of Light', *Edinburgh Review*, 75 (1843), p. 312, Cited in Painting, 'J D Llewelyn', p. 182.

23 David Painting, 'J. D. Llewelyn and his Family Circle', *History of Photography*, 15 (1991), 180–85 (p. 185).

24 John Dillwyn, eldest son of Lewis Weston Dillwyn and Mary Llewelyn, took on the name Llewelyn in order to inherit his maternal grandfather's estate.

25 See Painting, 'J. D. Llewelyn' and Richard Morris, *John Dillwyn Llewelyn, 1810–1882: The First Photographer in Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1980).

Mary Dillwyn: Wales's first female photographer

Mary Dillwyn was Wales's first woman photographer whose work is remarkably informal in style. Mary's pictures were intimate and vivid portraits of an energetic and lively family. Dynamism was not an easy thing to convey with a complicated technology that took painstaking composition, arrangement and time to expose. Both she and her brother were interested in motion, and John Dillwyn Llewelyn was awarded the silver medal in Paris in 1855 for his picture of a breaking wave that captured so effectively the motion of the water. Mary was more concerned to bring individuals to life, and seems deliberately to have adopted a smaller and faster camera in order to facilitate the kind of compositions she sought. She has been credited with the first picture of a smile (Fig. 2): the portrait is of 'Willy' – William Mansel Dillwyn Llewelyn – John's son, who would die in 1866.²⁶ At about the same time (1853–54), Mary took a portrait of another nephew and niece, the young Harry and a smiling Amy Dillwyn. The first picture of a snowman was taken by Mary Dillwyn and she has been credited with capturing the world's first 'photobomb'. In this picture (Fig. 3), a fairly conventional portrait of two elderly women is 'bombed' by a lively girl's face appearing from behind a screen. The inscription, 'Sally and Mrs Reed, Mary L..[illegible] peeping', playfully acknowledges the accidental comedy of the composition.

The intimacy and informality of her pictures are particularly evident in the album she created for a disabled niece. The construction or curation of albums was an important element of the creative processes associated with photography, as art historian, Patrizia Di Bello, argues: 'Women's albums were an important aspect of the visual culture of the time, crucial sites in the elaboration and codification of the meaning of photography, as a new, modern visual medium.'²⁷ Mary's album was not only an attempt to entertain a young person, it codifies a family ethos and connections to the region in which they lived. The album begins with pictures of Penllergare mansion – the seat of the Dillwyn Llewelyns – and moves through dolls, flowers, animals, family members, and finally outwards to a Welsh scene entitled 'Two Welsh Country People'. It 'places' the family very much in their corner of Wales.

Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn: astronomer, botanist, photographer

If there is a danger of categorizing or characterizing the work of the Dillwyn photographers too rigidly along gender lines – John's naturalism and technological innovation alongside Mary's informal pictures of people – then the work of

²⁶ See Kevin L. Davies, "'None Other At All Like Him': A Tribute to William Mansel Dillwyn Llewelyn, 1838–1866", *Minerva*, 12 (2004), 51–60. This article attributes the photograph to Thereza, but the National Library of Wales, which holds the original, has identified it as taken by Mary Dillwyn.

²⁷ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn, John's daughter and Mary's niece, productively complicates the picture. Thereza was engaged in scientific pursuits normally the domain of men. Circa 1857, she captured one of the first pictures of the moon on camera in collaboration with her father from the observatory he had built for her at Penllergare.²⁸ Indeed, Thereza made systematic meteorological recordings, though her father would not allow her to present them at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS).²⁹ She experimented with camera focus, ultimately to take the first picture of a snowflake – again in collaboration with her father. Thereza had her own laboratory, and her diaries for 1857, for instance, give a flavour of the range of her pursuits, referring to experiments with a camera and telescope, preparing cell slides for her microscope, learning to cut glass, and experimenting with dry collodion and oxymel photographic techniques; and this in the course of just a day or two.³⁰ In a period of intense scientific discovery and innovation, Thereza followed contemporary scientific work closely, engaging in a brief correspondence with Darwin via her husband, the mineralogist Nevil Story-Maskelyne.³¹ The latter also wrote to John Lubbock trying to obtain some of Darwin's publications for Thereza, declaring, 'I am sure if Mr. Darwin was acquainted with her and knew with what interest she has followed his work and his development of the botanical questions discussed in these papers he would gladly give her the copies if he has them to spare.'³² Thereza's contributions to astronomy – discussed in some detail by Mary Brück – as well as her expertise in botany and photography warrant further research.³³ Now that some of her photographs, diaries and memoirs have been acquired by the British Library, it is to be hoped that further investigation will be possible. What emerges from her journals is yet another enquiring mind, thriving in a household in which women – and children – were treated as intellectual equals. Though Thereza was not afforded the same freedoms as a son to travel and participate in scientific life, her interests were furthered by the interests and pursuits of her family and their wide network of scientific allies.

28 Mary Brück, in her book *Women in Early British and Irish Astronomy: Stars and Satellites* (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer, 2009), claims John's interest in astronomy was fired by his daughter's enthusiasm (p. 116) and asserts that the photograph ought properly to be credited to Thereza as she handled the telescope (p. 118), as she describes in detail in her memoirs.

29 Brück, *Women in Early British and Irish Astronomy*, p. 117.

30 The papers of Thereza Story Maskelyne 1834–1926 (née Dillwyn Llewelyn) are held at the British Library. Her diary for 1857 is BL Add MS 89120/1–

31 Letter from Nevil Story-Maskelyne to Darwin, 8 December 1871. Darwin Correspondence Project, 'Letter no. 8100' <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/DCP-LETT-8100>> [accessed 3 August 2018]. Also published in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* IX.

32 Letter from Nevil Story-Maskelyne to John Lubbock, 3 December 1871. Darwin Correspondence Project, 'Letter no. 8091' <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/DCP-LETT-8091>> [accessed 5 August 2018].

33 Thereza is referred to as an expert botanist by Vanda Morton in *Oxford Rebels. The Life and Friends of Nevil Story Maskelyne, 1823–1911. Pioneer Oxford Scientist, Photographer and Politician* (Sutton, 1987), p. 127.

New Women: Amy, Minnie, and Essie Dillwyn

A few miles from Penllergare, where Thereza grew up, was Hendrefoilan, home of Bessie Dillwyn, her husband Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn, and their four children, Mary (Minnie), Amy, Harry and Sarah (Essie). According to Olive Nicholl, in her foreword to the biography of the eldest daughter, Minnie, the children were ‘given an upbringing free from Victorian conventions and class consciousness which influenced [their] whole life’.³⁴ If not entirely free from an awareness of class distinctions, they certainly saw status as social rather than innate. Mindful of the duties which went with their privilege, they were concerned with the conditions of the poor and saw the labouring classes as fundamentally equal – this was during a century where the lower classes could be viewed by social Darwinists as almost a sub-species or belonging to another ‘nation’.³⁵ Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn was a radical liberal MP who made his career on campaigning for the disestablishment of the church in Wales – recognising the unfairness of imposing a state church on a dissenting nation. He also worked for the rights of tenant farmers and in later life for Irish and Welsh Home Rule. Much of his politics seem to have been founded on a sense of fairness and assumptions of equality.

At home there was a similar assumption of equality and a disregard for convention – particularly the gender conventions which would see upper-class women as decorative, delicate and domestic. Nor were children relegated to the nursery or schoolroom; their views were sought and accorded some respect. The eldest daughter, Minnie, would pursue the family’s love of travel, mountaineering and entomology. She published numerous entomological articles, as well as the odd book review in *The Spectator*, and her collection of butterflies and moths is now held by Swansea Museum.³⁶ Once the trying years of marriage and childbearing were behind her, she travelled extensively, hiking and mountaineering – including trips to Lebanon, Syria and Canada – well into her sixties and early seventies.³⁷ The youngest daughter, Essie, took a different if no less unconventional path. Having embarked on a fairly conventional marriage which resulted in five children she decided to leave her alcoholic husband – and inevitably her children – to become an actress. She and her husband’s friend, Richard Packenham, eloped, married in South Africa and had a daughter, Oonagh Packenham. They both worked in a travelling theatre company, before Essie died in impoverished conditions aged only thirty-nine.³⁸ It was the second daughter, Elizabeth Amy Dillwyn (1845–1935), who would make the greatest contribution to the family name in her generation.

34 Olive Nicholl, ‘Foreword’, in Thomas, *Grandmother Extraordinary*, 9–10 (p. 9). Olive Nicholl was the granddaughter of Minnie.

35 A concern with social justice did not necessarily preclude benefitting from the inequalities of capitalism and the Hendrefoilan Dillwyns owned slum properties and, shortly before the death of Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn in 1892, were involved in industrial disputes at the spelter works.

36 See A. R. Walker, ‘The Dillwyns as Naturalists: Mary De la Beche Nicholl (1839–1922), Butterfly Collector’, *Minerva*, 10 (2002), 36–48.

37 See Thomas, *Grandmother Extraordinary*.

38 See David Painting, *Amy Dillwyn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987), pp. 68–69. I am also indebted to David Painting for sharing with me some of his subsequent research into the life of Essie and her daughter Oonagh.

Amy Dillwyn took up her father's interest in politics and social justice, pursued her mother's pleasure in the written word and emerged as a novelist of note in the 1880s. An acerbic reviewer, this lady of letters used her literary prowess to expose class privilege, campaign for social justice and – most of all – rights for women. Her unwillingness to suffer fools and her dry wit is neatly displayed in her review in *The Spectator* of *A Woman's Reason* (1884), a novel by the Welsh-American W. D. Howell.³⁹ In Howell's novel, a lady tries and fails to take up business and earn a living for herself. Dillwyn remarks:

[O]ne obstacle is her author, who enunciates opinions as to the worthlessness of women's work which evidently makes it impossible that he should allow her to succeed. Indeed, the book might, not inaptly, have been entitled, "Struggles of a Young Lady to Earn her Own Living, related by a Gentleman who is firmly convinced that she could do nothing of the kind".⁴⁰

Here, as in so much of her writing and reviewing during the 1880s and early 1890s, Amy Dillwyn's rehearsed a determined feminism that would underpin her own independent career as an industrialist. On the death of her father in 1892 Amy found that her father's affairs left her with very little income and was simultaneously forced to leave her home at Hendrefoilan, which was entailed to the male line. Undeterred, she set about making her own living, becoming a celebrated industrialist, and styling herself as a cigar-smoking 'man of business'.

The history of Dillwyn's career as a businesswoman and campaigner needs more research, though the basic facts are well documented – not least because she kept an occasional journal and a scrapbook.⁴¹ Many articles in Welsh and British newspapers were published and her fame reached Australia and the USA, mostly celebrating her role as an industrialist but usually giving equal attention to her identity as 'a woman who smokes cigars'.⁴² While the fuss made about her smoking amused and gratified her, she used her platform as a businesswoman to argue for female suffrage, female representation on boards and councils, and to support exploited women workers.

Having proudly joined the 'confraternity of Welsh traders',⁴³ she poured her energy into turning her father's near-bankrupt spelter works into a profitable enterprise. Her industrial enterprise involved transcontinental negotiations to secure zinc ore (including a trip to mines in Algeria when aged nearly 60 in 1905),

39 Amy Dillwyn was a regular reviewer for *The Spectator* from 1880 to 1896.

40 'A Woman's Reason', *The Spectator*, no. 2909 (29 March 1884), 415–16.

41 For a useful summary, see David Painting's biography, *Amy Dillwyn*.

42 This is the caption of one of several images and articles which appeared from the 1890s to 1913 about Dillwyn's cigar-smoking and her industrial career, many of which were collected by Dillwyn in her scrapbook now held in the Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University. The precise date and source of this caption are unclear. The Australian 'Trove' digitization project also reveals many obituaries published in Australia, with headlines ranging from 'Female Company Chairman, Liked Cigars at Dinner' (*Daily News*, Perth) to 'What a Woman' (*Charleville Times*, Brisbane, February 1936).

43 Amy Dillwyn, diary entry, 7 April 1898.

regular correspondence with European counterparts (she could read and write in several languages), and working daily in the company offices.⁴⁴ In 1905, not long after that trip to Algeria, however, she stood aside when it became clear it was in the company's best interests to do so:

Last October I (most unexpectedly) was asked by the Metallgesellschaft (whose headquarters are at Frankfurt am Main) if I would sell them the whole of my interest in D[illwyn] & Co. at market price [...] I felt it was best for my beloved D. & Co. to agree to the proposal – or at least to sell them the bulk of my shares [...] [S]o I resigned on 31st October but it was a great wrench to me to leave the Board. For a time I was D. & Co. myself; then I was a Director holding a 3rd of the whole capital; & now I am a mere insignificant shareholder, having nothing more to do with shaping or controlling the business. I didn't like giving it up, & wouldn't have done so if I hadn't felt bound to look first at the interests of the company before considering my own inclinations. [Dec 1905]

Like William Dillwyn, Amy was not one to put her ego before the interests of her cause, and the Welsh businesswoman Dr. Carol Bell has remarked that Dillwyn's decision here shows the qualities of a true entrepreneur.⁴⁵

Dillwyn would go on to stand in the first council elections that admitted female candidates, appealing to her fellow women 'in the interest of their sex to do their level best to put her in. Because they would not like to have it said, "What is the use of you women being eligible for election; you can't get in"'.⁴⁶ She was unsuccessful, despite considerable experience and a formidable reputation in civic affairs. One suspects that the cause of her defeat was not dissimilar to that which prevented her from being elected to the influential Harbour Trust a few years earlier, which a local newspaper summarized thus:

[C]riticism of Miss Dillwyn is summed up in a single sentence. She is a woman, not a man. The sex discrimination is, however, so real, that her recognised administrative ability and freedom from the feminine idiosyncrasies which might prove embarrassing at gatherings of business men failed to remove it.⁴⁷

Undaunted, however, she continued to campaign for a range of feminist causes. She was an early and vocal supporter of the radical Women's Freedom League (WFL) from its inception in 1907 and became president of the Swansea branch

⁴⁴ See Painting, *Amy Dillwyn*.

⁴⁵ 'Entrepreneurship', *History of Wales*, BBC Radio Wales, 2013.

⁴⁶ 'Miss Dillwyn's Address to the Electors at the Albert Hall, October 21st [1907]', in the National Library of Wales, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers: Election address of Miss Elizabeth Amy Dillwyn, the independent candidate for the Castle Ward, Swansea, in the Municipal Election, B 18/4.

⁴⁷ Wednesday, 30 December 1903. Article in Amy Dillwyn's scrapbook, publication not given.

of the NUWSS, cooperating with Winifred Coombe Tenant, who served on the National Executive. Her sense of social justice was evident throughout; in 1911, for instance, she shared a platform with female Trade Unionist Mary McArthur and future Labour MP Margaret Bondfield, in support of women striking against sweated labour, calling on a boycott of the large Swansea department store where they worked, until fair wages were paid. She was active in mainstream politics too, working on behalf of the Liberals well into her eighties.

Dillwyn's most enduring legacy, however, was forged during her career as a writer. It is to her radical fiction that I wish to turn for the final part of this essay. Dillwyn's novels have been rediscovered in the twenty-first century; three are in print in the Honno Classics series making her the best represented author in the series. In critical terms, she easily dominates Welsh writing in English in the late nineteenth century and makes a unique contribution to Anglo-American women's literary history in this period, as we shall see.

During the 1880s she published six novels to considerable critical success.⁴⁸ Dillwyn uses her fiction to convey her views on class, gender and social justice but is never dull or didactic. Indeed, what most readers remark upon is how fresh and modern her literary voice sounds. Her first novel, *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) drew on her father's account of successfully ambushing and capturing some of the ringleaders during a major attack on the Pontardulais toll gate in September 1843. These arrests were a significant victory for the authorities who had seemed powerless against the organized riots which had spread from Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire into Glamorganshire during 1843. It was also a daring act of bravery on the part of the eleven men, including Dillwyn's father and uncle (both magistrates), who were vastly outnumbered – Amy Dillwyn claims there were approximately 150–200 rioters.⁴⁹ Amy Dillwyn's novel, however, turns the tables, presenting the story from the point of view of one of the rioters – a Welsh-speaking labourer, Evan Williams. The novel is blunt in portraying class war as the inevitable outcome of a system organized for the benefit of the wealthy: 'the magistrates, to me and to most poor people, simply meant rich people who were in power, and who made laws to suit themselves, and sent anyone who broke those laws to prison.'⁵⁰ Scenes of conflict between the rich and poor run from a skirmish over poaching to two full-scale riots in which Rebecca destroys the gates that oppress the poor and Evan shoots dead a magistrate.

Although the poaching skirmish may seem petty, it illustrates wider injustices

48 *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880), *Chloe Arguelle* (1881), *A Burglary* (1883), *Jill* (1884), *Jill and Jack* (1887) and the serialized novel 'Nant Olchfa', published in *The Red Dragon* (1886–87). A further novel for a younger audience, *Maggie Steele's Diary*, was published in 1892. Dillwyn also published some allegories in the 1870s and some short stories and poems during the 1880s.

49 Amy Dillwyn's postscript to her father's account. She says the claim is based on newspaper reports from the time. Account by Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn of his encounter with Rebecca Rioters at the Pontardulais Turnpike Gate, 10 September 1843. Swansea University, Richard Burton Archive, LAC/26/D/82.

50 Amy Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2001), p. 61.

of class.⁵¹ Evan says:

I never can see that a man has any right to preserve hares and rabbits. When God made the land He put them into it just like the blackberries and mushrooms, for the good of everyone who lives there, and I cannot see what right any man has to take possession of them and call them his own. Why they are common property – just like any moor or common is common property on which the neighbours may turn out their [animals] to graze as they like, and which no man has the right to enclose and shut up from the rest.⁵²

Here, Dillwyn is reminding us of the many Acts of Enclosure which took common land into private ownership during the eighteenth century, as well as foregrounding a regular point of conflict between landowners and labourers. In her second novel she again uses poaching – this time the organized poaching on the Wye, dubbed the second Rebecca Riots⁵³ – to stage a shoot out between poachers and an MP. The poachers win, though no one is killed.

In *The Rebecca Rioter*, however, the skirmish over poaching is just the foreshadowing of Evan shooting Squire Tudor, the magistrate and the fictional double of Dillwyn's own father. At no point does Evan express remorse for this act:

I felt a savage joy [...] that I had rid the world of at all events one of those who defended injustice [...] I felt so sure of the righteousness of the cause for which I had been fighting that I thought no more of the man's death than a soldier does of anyone whom he may chance to kill in battle.⁵⁴

Even when he discovers that the man he has killed is his beloved Miss Gwenllian's father, and sacrifices his freedom to tell Gwenllian he knew not who he shot, Evan's remorse is only for causing Gwenllian hurt not for shooting a magistrate. Given the historical basis of the story, Amy Dillwyn has effectively enacted a literary patricide.

The Rebecca Riots are not simply portrayed as a local battle, or even a class or symbolic gender struggle, but a national one. Evan is 'radicalised' by a powerful speech that lifts the veil on a system that taxes the poor to keep the rich in luxury. The men are called to rise up in the following terms: 'We belong to Wales, to that wild Wales, which, in days gone by would be ruled by none other than her own native princes, and long flung back every attempt of the English tyrant to grind her under his heel.' And each man is enjoined to 'help... his country shake off her chains.' Rebecca and her daughters fight for their country as well as their class.

51 On poaching see Kirsti Bohata and Alexandra Jones, 'Welsh Women's Industrial Fiction 1880–1910', *Women's Writing*, 24.4 (2017), 499–516 <doi:10.1080/09699082.2016.1268346>.

52 Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter*, p. 23.

53 David Jones, 'The Second Rebecca Riots: A Study of Poaching on the River Wye', *Llafur*, 2.1 (1976), 32–56.

54 Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter*, pp. 111, 122.

The radical message of the novel was widely recognized. In Russia it was instantly translated – quite possibly by a female translator – and published by the radical press (and Dillwyn's second novel was also published in Russian the following year).⁵⁵ In Wales, *The Rebecca Rioter* was welcomed for its realism and extracts appeared in historical articles and in the press at intervals well into the twentieth century. The British press recognized the novel as heralding a fresh new voice and praised both its drama and its unsentimental portrayal of the working class, contrasting it favourably to Dickens' sugared portraits.⁵⁶

Alongside class and national revolt *The Rebecca Rioter* is an odd love story, in which Evan falls in love with Miss Gwenllian, the only member of the upper class who reaches out to the poor. Cross-class desire in Dillwyn's writing is connected to same-sex desire; furthermore, in this novel gender identity is deliberately confused, or 'queered' in the language of critical theory. Cross-dressing is both comic and subversive, a carnivalesque upending of the conventional order.⁵⁷ The cross-dressed rioters transgress the literal barriers of the toll gates, while Dillwyn's plot introduces feminist ideas – particularly about the restrictiveness of female clothing – and queer possibilities.

The story of this working-class boy in love with an unobtainable upper-class woman allowed Dillwyn to write out her own love for a woman, her close friend Olive Talbot (1842–1894). Olive was the daughter of C.L.R. Talbot of Margam and Penrice, and the woman Amy described as her 'wife' in her diaries. Dillwyn puts the same language and imagery, sometimes the very same phrases she used in her diary to express her feelings for Olive, into Evan's mouth. For instance, at the end of Chapter Five, Evan longs to see Gwenllian:

I wonder whether my worship of her and longing for her gave my mind any sort of influence over hers – whether my thought was like an invisible thread joining our two minds together, and moving at one end when pulled at the other; so that at the moment that I thought most intensely about her, she would also have some passing recollection of me?⁵⁸

Compare this with what, in 1872, Amy wrote in her diary, after reading some theological work on angels:

The unseen and immaterial world is such a strange and mysterious reality altogether – have spirits any effect or power on each other? Does my spirit, which is constantly seeking for Olive & yearning for her, exercise any influence over hers or ever meet hers – so to speak

55 Kirsti Bohata and Steven Lovatt, 'The Russian Rioter: Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter* in *Otechestvennye zapiski*', *Almanac: A Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 16 (2012), 1–30.

56 'Recent Novels', *The Daily News*, Issue 10742 (Tuesday 21 September 1880), in *Gale, British Library Nineteenth-Century Newspapers*, Document No. Y3203106073.

57 See Rhian E. Jones, *Petticoat Heroes: Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

58 Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter*, p. 45.

– in that strange world? [4 June 1872]

Thus same-sex desire is woven into the fabric of this radical novel.⁵⁹

Indeed, perhaps Dillwyn's most important literary legacy is her contribution to lesbian or queer literary history.⁶⁰ Using cross-class relationships, spiritual union and often criminality, Dillwyn explores same-sex desire and queer gender identities in her fiction. Significantly, she often aligns her queer figures – be they tomboys, criminals or simply adventurous women – with Welshness. In *A Burglary*, Dillwyn's third novel, the rough and tumble, outdoorsy, tomboy heroine Imogen (who is in love with her wealthy cousin, Ethel) is described as a ‘savage’ and compared admiringly to ‘Red Indians’ (who are considered ‘superior’). She is simultaneously, dressed as she is in her practical Welsh flannel garments and heavy greased boots, figuratively connected with the labouring Welsh. Dillwyn's representation of genderqueer characters and same-sex desire between women – via characters as diverse as Jill, Imogen, Evan and others – draws on the figure of a rebellious Welsh peasant. *The Rebecca Rioter*, I would argue, is one of our earliest lesbian love stories.

Amy Dillwyn died in 1935 and with her the Dillwyn dynasty as described here comes to an end.⁶¹ This essay is only the briefest outline of the extent of their achievements, concerned primarily with identifying areas where historical research is urgently needed, and in this it is hardly comprehensive. The scientific endeavours of Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn, who had laboratories in his zinc and silver works, have been largely overshadowed by his brother John, for instance, and Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn's role in the early stages of Cymru Fydd might also be better understood.⁶² A thorough study of the contribution to photography of Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn and Mary Dillwyn and research into the entrepreneurship of Amy Dillwyn would enrich Welsh women's history and the history of women in science, art, and industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Encouragingly, there is mounting

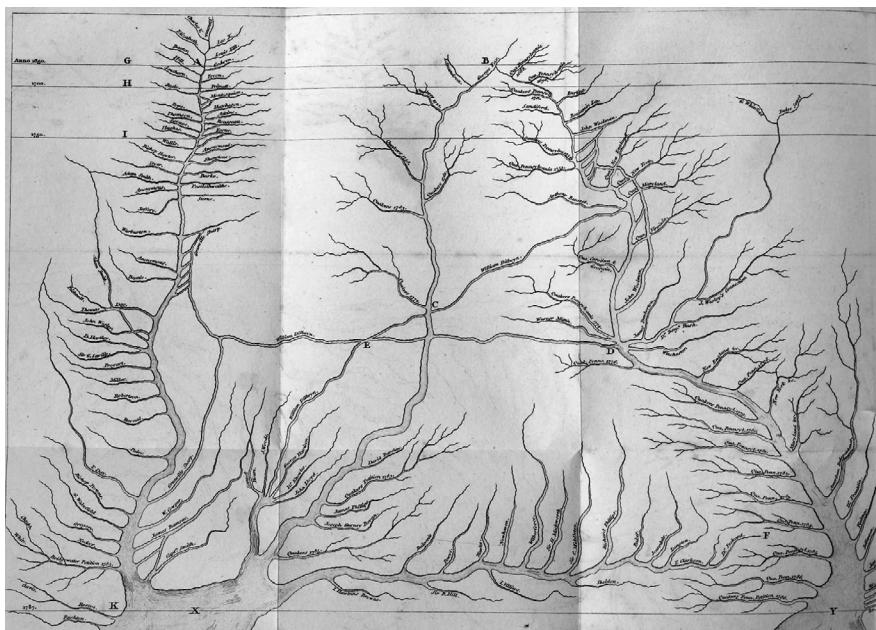
59 For more on this topic, see Kirsti Bohata, ‘A Queer-Looking Lot of Women: Cross-Dressing, Transgender Ventriloquism and Same-Sex Desire in *The Rebecca Rioter*’, *The Victorian Review*, 44 (October 2018), [forthcoming].

60 Amy Dillwyn's fourth novel, *Jill* (1884), is the most directly concerned with same-sex desire, and it is an important strand in *A Burglary*. See the introduction to the Honno Classics edition of *Jill* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2013) and Kirsti Bohata, ‘Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45.2 (2017), 341–359 <doi:10.1017/S1060150316000644>.

61 There were and are of course many descendants of the Dillwyn family several of whom have helped to ensure that the achievements of the Dillwyns as described here are not forgotten. Yet following the death of Colin Dillwyn – Amy's great-nephew whose father, Rice Nichol, had taken the name Dillwyn and become Amy's heir – in the Second World War, the male line and therefore the name Dillwyn died out (Colin was survived by four sisters). Arguably, too, the social order shifted and the kind of activities pursued by the Dillwyns in the ‘long’ nineteenth century became more fragmented and specialized.

62 See Dewi Rowland Hughes, *Cymru Fydd 1886–1896* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006) and M. Wynn Thomas, *The Nations of Wales 1890–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016).

interest in these women in interdisciplinary⁶³ and artistic circles. In the world of art, these three women have recently been the subject of two different exhibitions, Thereza and Mary featuring in an exhibition at the Glyn Vivian in Swansea, 'The Moon and a Smile', in which contemporary artists responded to their pioneering photography.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the artist Kate Milsom made Amy Dillwyn the subject of a painting in her exhibition on queer women, 'No Man's Land'. Most notably, the sculptor, Mandy Lane, has created a series of works based on Amy Dillwyn's writing, including 'The Iron on the Dress', which respond to Dillwyn's queer novels and archive.⁶⁵ The influence of this pioneering family – particularly the women – is on the rise again.



[Fig. 1] Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols (London: L. Taylor, 1808). <http://oll.libertyfund.org/thumbs/2ow-1xl-0-0;2ow-1xl/22559-Clarkson_AbolitionMap1808_3488.jpg>

63 Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter* was selected as one of twelve Welsh novels to be included in a digital literary atlas of English-language novels funded by the AHRC. See <<http://www.literaryatlas.wales>>.

64 'The workshop focused on the work of John (a Welsh pioneer in early photography), but especially the photography of his sister Mary Dillwyn and his daughter Thereza, two of the first female photographers in Wales.' <<https://museum.wales/blog/2017-03-20/The-Moon-and-a-Smile/>> [accessed 22 April 2017].

65 <<http://www.walesartsreview.org/author/mandy-lane/>>.



[Fig. 2] A photograph of William Mansel (1838–1866) smiling at something off camera. Taken c.1853. Mary Dillwyn, '*Willy smiling, 1853*' (1853), photograph, National Library of Wales <<http://www.llgc.org.uk/en/>> Image retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Dillwyn#/media/File:%27Willy%27_smiling._Mary_Dillwyn_Col._1853.jpg>



[Fig. 3] Mary Dillwyn (1816–1906), *Sally and Mrs Reed* (c. 1853), salt print, National Library of Wales, record no. 3377381. <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sally_and_Mrs_Reed_\(4095065677\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sally_and_Mrs_Reed_(4095065677).jpg)>