

## Aspects of the history of Devauden and the Veddw (newsletter 4)

Ann Wareham

"The Fedw is inhabited by wood-colliers, mule drivers and labourers, connected principally with the wireworks of Abby Tintern, or the adjoining woods, who have encroached on the wastelands of the Duke of Beaufort and enjoy by his indulgence their little cottages and gardens unmolested. These habitations have multiplied considerably within the last few years and are a fruitful source of scholars to Devauden School..... They originally reared their turf and mud cabins amidst the rocks.....They subsist chiefly on potatoes and the coarsest kind of bread..... It was amongst these people, and on this wild heath, that the subject of my memoir took up his abode.... The benefits which he has conferred on them by his example are very apparent; their wretched huts have gradually been superceeded by stone built cottages..."

"Memoir of Davies of Devauden" published 1849 pages 17-18, Gwent

Record Office Library

"That population consists principally of small farmers, quarrymen, woodcutters and labourers, many of whom have reared their cottages amidst the woods, or upon the commons; and by great toil and perseverance, have cleared the ground from stones, furze and heath. These men hold their cottages and the small enclosures by which they are surrounded, of the Duke of Beaufort, as lord of the manor, at moderate rents, usually on life leases. Accustomed to scanty fare, inured to poverty, suffering occasionally from cold and hunger, and exposed to peculiar temptations, they have been accused of dishonest practices, and of those acts of petty fraud, which often prevail amidst such a population."

"The Diocese of Llandaff in 1763 ed. John R Guy, South Wales Record

Society, Cardiff 1991, page 173 - quote from Sir Thomas Philips "Life

of James Davies"

That was the picture I was lucky enough to start with when I began to research the history of the Veddw, twelve years ago. Since then I have amassed piles of papers, maps and books, and spent hours in the local record office and the National Library of Wales feeling like an awful fraud. I have spent hours trying to communicate to other people the fascination of trying to discover the entire history of a small settlement on the edge of a wood. And at the end of that time I am, of course, more impressed by what I don't know than what I do, and I am aware that a lot of what I think I know is probably terribly mistaken. Local history seems to me to be a totally tricky and elusive subject. One of my greatest problems has been failing to see or understand things that are right under my nose. Another has been being totally confused by things which I think ought to be obvious but which I then discover to be totally confusing to everyone - such as the history of enclosure.

I caused great hilarity in the pub once when I said that I've come to the conclusion that Devauden was not a village. Maybe I'm wrong? It's true that it has a "village green" and is still sometimes called Devauden Green. And of course, it has a church, and until relatively recently it had a school. But I believe that for most of its existence it was a small settlement of a few odd cottages - or "turf and mud cabins," (above) close to other similar unfocused settlements.

There is no separate map for Devauden in the maps of the Badminton Estate surveyed by Aram in 1761. The "Plan of Cottages, Lands and Woods in Newchurch East" (Devauden is in the parish of Newchurch East) is essentially a map of the Veddw. It has some bits of Devauden. Another bit of Devauden appears in the map of "Fairoak and Ravensnest". Those bits - presumably put into these other maps to save space, don't add up to a whole settlement, never mind a village. The quote above, which identifies the source of scholars for Devauden School, refers to the Fedw, which tends

to confirm this picture of the Veddw as the more significant settlement until the development of the church and school in the 19th century had actually occurred. Even on the 1881 Ordnance Survey Map there is only a scattering of houses. In fact there are almost more public buildings than houses - a church, school, vicarage, a pub, an inn. It looks as if by this time Devauden is servicing the surrounding settlements of the Creigiau, New Inn and the Upper Fedw, Fedw and Lower Fedw.

So why did Devauden often appear on county maps before it began to take off in the 19th century? I don't know - it just doesn't seem to have been a village. There are references to it on occasions as a "common" - but is this actually a reference to the Criga, also frequently termed a common? When there were turnpikes Devauden had one, but there are references to Devauden long before that, It does seem to have been an important road junction. The road from Wentwood to Tintern, called Coal Lane beyond Devauden presumably from its use by mules carrying charcoal to the Wireworks at Tintern from the woods, crosses the two turnpike roads from Chepstow to Monmouth that circle Chepstow Park Wood. Traffic must have been sufficient to cause a big muddy patch, which was no doubt the physical origin of the "green". Most similar mud patches at junctions locally got bits pinched out of them as land for a cottage or cabin by the squatters, but there is no evidence of this at Devauden. Perhaps because the traffic was so heavy?

The use of the name "green" may also refer us back to the "common" association, according to Paul Courtney. ("The Rural Landscape of Eastern and Lower Gwent c AD 1070 - 1750", 1983 p345) He says that "the term 'green' was often applied to small areas of common or wood.... Such greens often gave their name to small squatter settlements," - which might fit our case exactly.

I live in the Veddw, which makes my assertion that it used to be the more important settlement suspect, of course. It is just that kind of wish fulfillment that so often leads to distortion (at best) in local history. The name "Veddw" itself provokes strong and distorting feelings locally. Documents - a very partial source, since the people actually living here didn't write - give a variety of spellings of the name, mostly variations of the V word = Vedow, Veddow, Vedw, Vedda. There is one Fedwe in 1559 (and a Vedow in 1569) but otherwise Fedw doesn't reappear until occasionally in the 19th century. The censuses all have variations of Vedow. I have a hunch that there might have been an outbreak of political correctness in the 19th century, which continues to influence the issue to this day. Middleclass English people living in the Veddw tend to adopt the spelling Fedw, as this has a reputation for being a Welsh spelling(!). And the Ordnance survey use Fedw,- apart from on the sketch map of the original survey, where the top of the Veddw most intriguingly appears as "Haddon Brake".(a reference to the heath/bracken/thickets?)

The electoral roll, which is the nearest we get at any time to the residents' (20th century) version. This is predominantly "Vedw" at the beginning of the 20th century, occasionally "Vedda", echoing a local pronunciation which can still be heard occasionally. As the century progresses "Fedw" creeps in, along with the gentrification of the place.

All this interest in discovering the "right" spelling has obscured two obvious things for me in the past. One is that spellings were not fixed in the English language until relatively recently, making a nonsense of the notion of correct in this context. And the other is that this is border country, neither England nor Wales, and has been border country for as long as Wales and England have had any existence. This then makes the mongrel names a very satisfying reflection of the nature of the area.