

The Vaughan Armorials from Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa

At some point in the 1580s John Vaughan the owner of Llwydiarth, a mansion and estate in Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa in northern Montgomeryshire, is believed to have constructed a new family pew in the parish church and embellished the structure with the coats of arms (armorials) of his ancestors and family. It remained in place (or so we assume) for nearly three hundred years, even though the direct family line of the Vaughans died out. The old church was demolished in 1862 and with it, presumably, the pew, but the armorial panels were saved. They were removed to Wynnstay near Wrexham, and in 1870 were displayed in the Wynnstay Chapel at Ruabon for a meeting of the Powysland Club. With the construction of a new church the panels were returned to Llanfihangel and hung on the walls. In 1988 they underwent serious conservation and since then have been curated by the Powysland Club in Welshpool.

The panels number 32, each one different with no duplicates. They were studied in the Victorian era in great detail by the Revd W. V. Lloyd, whose paper in the *Montgomeryshire Collections* described the arms on each panel and the inscriptions that accompanied them, as well as providing essential contextual information. Each panel is illustrated here, identified by the numbers allocated to them by the Revd Lloyd which connect with the lines of the three families whose descent converged on John Vaughan. We have not repeated the Revd Lloyd's descriptions: these can be found on a website called the Internet Archive as *Montgomeryshire Collections* 14 (1881) 355-396. We have no information on the appearance of the Vaughan family pew, but it may have been similar to one that is preserved in Stokesay church in neighbouring Shropshire.

And so to their importance. Thomas Lloyd, the Wales Herald of Arms Extraordinary has kindly contributed the following:

The coats of arms set up in the Vaughan church pew is unparalleled. There is no other example in Wales and I know of no historical record of a lost one. Great English aristocrats had their coat of arms adorning their private pew but probably no more than their own coat perhaps impaled with that of their wife on a single shield. Here, the status of a Welsh gentleman was defined by his ancestry not his power and wealth, so he needed to display all his forebears (and hence the regular production of heraldic pedigree rolls which Welsh gents were ridiculed by their English counterparts for always carrying).

The usual 16th century place for this display of ancestral heraldry was the great hall of the family home. The only old example that survives is at Gregynog, created in 1636, but the Welsh Tudor bards refer to them in praise poetry. Fragments of other sets survive, sometimes set into later furniture, such as wooden carved examples from George Owen's house at Henllys in north Pembrokeshire. There was a revival of the tradition in the 19th century and examples survive at Mostyn in Flintshire and Glasfryn near Pwllheli in Gwynedd. But none of these, old or new, have inscriptions attached as in the Vaughan armorials, allowing no doubt as to the ancestor on each shield. So these are a precious and unique set of rare 16th century artefacts, and fortunately very well studied and interpreted in the Revd Lloyd's article.