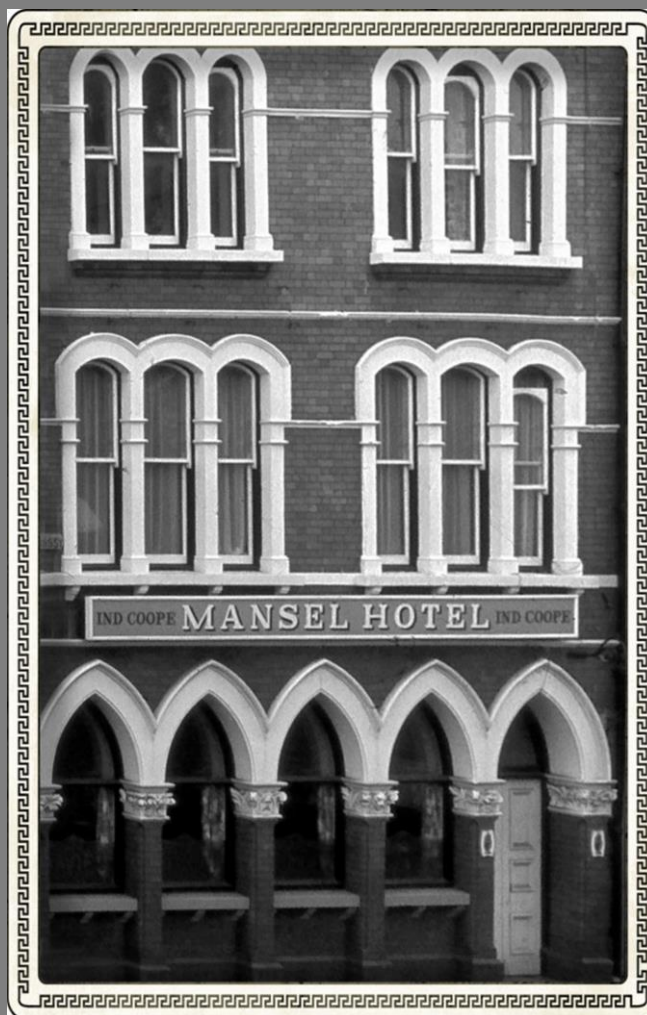


THE MANSEL HOTEL

The history of the building 1788 to 2020

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THE OLD MANSEL ARMS ~ *written by Lyn John*

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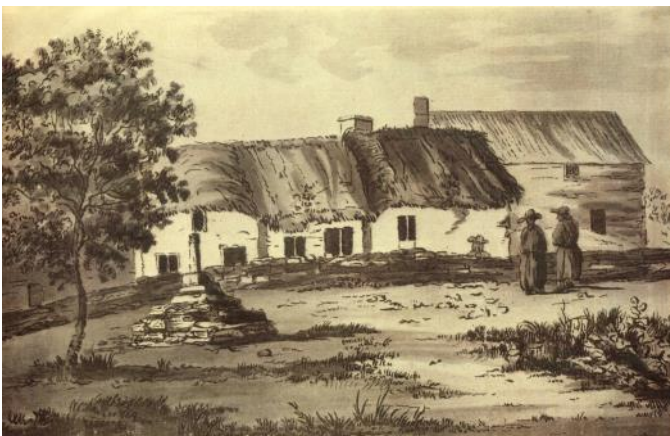
The Mansel Hotel-c1965 by Douglas Simpson Llanelli Unseen

In 1805 an agreement was made between... *Edward William Richard Mansel Esquire, of Stradey and David Howell of Llanelly, Mercer, for the lease of two houses in Llanelly, one called the Mansel Arms and of the fields in the Llanelly Parish called Park yr Erw, Cook and Garddebach for 21 years at the rent of £36-15-0.*

Park yr Erw, Cook and Garddebach were fields located at what we know today as 'Sunny Hill' and 'Union Buildings' on Felinfoel Road. [2]

No doubt, from the above agreement, the inn was named after the Mansel family who lived at the Stradey Mansion. The Mansel family were the main landowners in Llanelli west of the river Lliedi. It is probable that the Mansel Coat of Arms would have been depicted on a sign in a prominent position swinging outside the inn. There is no known complete photograph of the old *Mansel*, but an

interesting print dated 1798 of a sketch of Church Street shows a small portion of its frontage adjacent to the thatched cottages that once stood in that place. Over the years the published name of the establishment has changed its spelling in a number of ways i.e., *The Mansell Arms, The Mansell's Arms and The Mansel's Arms*.



Thatched Cottages 1795 – Llanelli Library ILL858



The Church Cross 2020

Living opposite the inn was the Stepney family, the other prominent landowners of Llanelli. As well as vast acres of land and property in the town, they owned Llanelly House and its park, a park that encompassed the area of land that we are familiar with today as the main shopping centre of the town. Interestingly the inn's initial licensing date of 1748 was the year that Sir John Stepney, 6th Bart died.



*Llanelly House by permission Kate and Sam
Lighting*

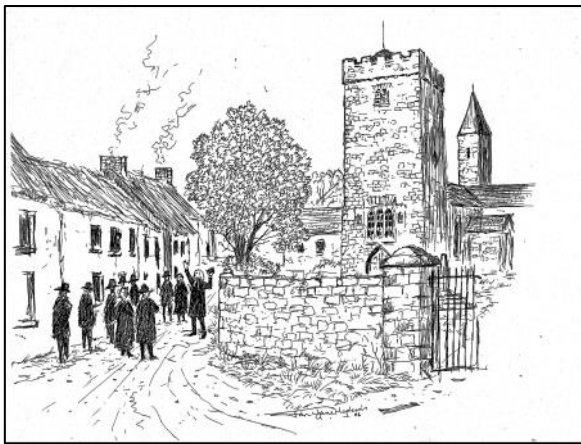
While members of the Stepney family kept a close eye on the *The Mansel Arms*, one could place a safe bet that one or two of them may have crossed its threshold to sample the potent 'refreshments'. At the same time customers of the inn kept an eye on the people crossing under the church lych gate and discussed the actions of the 'residents' who temporarily occupied the town stocks from time to time, since this instrument of humiliating punishment was situated in full view of the inn's windows.

For many decades the commercial hub of the town was centred around the Parish Church, its graveyard and surrounding walls. Here was to be found the main market place of Llanelli. It was a market that stretched around the walls and across the square in front of the main gateway, bringing much trade to the nearby inn.

Over the centuries the town and the *Mansel* witnessed many travellers, visitors and tourists passing through the town. One such visitor was the famous itinerant preacher, evangelist and founder of the Methodist faith, John Wesley. Apparently he had been invited to come to Llanelli by two local brothers, John and Robert Deer who lived close to the *Mansel*. [3] Wesley is recorded to have made twelve visits to the town, preaching on a number of occasions. Although there is no mention of him staying at the *Mansel Arms*, he would have been familiar with the place as he addressed the townspeople standing very close to it. In his journal Wesley frequently comments on his visits to the town and in one particular entry made on 18 August 1774 he mentions the death of John Deer and the loss to the cause adding...

I preached at five near Sister Deer's door to a good company of plain country-people...

According to the Victorian historian Arthur Mee, Sister Deer's door was on the site of the office of Johnson & Stead (Solicitors) which would place it next-door to the present *Mansel Hotel (Ruby's)*. [4] In his stops at Llanelli, John Wesley is said to have stayed at Llanelly House, also with Mr & Mrs Henry Child at Wind Street. [5]



Llanelli Community Heritage installed a Blue Plaque on the site to mark the spot where he preached, which was unveiled by Leslie John Griffiths, Baron Griffiths of Burry Port, and former president of the Methodist Conference in 2006 and sponsored by Messrs. Koddus Ali & Abdul Khalique of *The Verandah*.

John Wesley preaching near Sister Deer's house – by John Wynne Hopkins

1785

One tourist who was accommodated in the hostelry on Easter-day of 1785 was William Mathews of Bath. He had travelled from Swansea to Llanelli in the middle of a heavy rain storm. This is how he described the town's church with its flower-decorated graves and his hosts at the *Mansel Inn*..,

Llanelthy (sic)

Pushing forward as a traveller wishing to get from wet to dry, I reached a comfortable little inn at Llanelthy, sixteen miles in about two hours, which, considering the increasing roughness, and even disagreeableness of the road, was considered by my host, when I got in, as very extraordinary travelling.

I was thankfully wet through when I alighted, and had eaten no dinner. But adjoining to the Inn was the parish churchyard, which immediately drew my attention so powerfully, by a second display of a scene which I had before remarked at Pile (Pyle?), that I could not resist an inclination, wet and hungry as I was, to go into it, and indulge a second most pleasurable and sympathetic speculation among flowery graves, and the whitened and ever-greened sepulchres of the dead.

It may be reasonably supposed, that on the very day of celebration, I should have found old men and women, dwelling with affectionate contemplation – and children, with filial and fraternal tenderness, treading the paths which they had garnished round the graves of their departed parents and lamented relatives! But that was not the case. Whether such absence was owing to the wet which had fallen, or to any other particular cause, I know not: but though there were many dozens of graves, of different dimensions, ornamented in this manner, I was the only contemplative being among them. It could not be, however, that so much pains should have been taken without some particular view to the piety and sacredness of this annual season: and as I remarked a very general absence of people on the roads, and in the streets, I conclude that the day is more distinguished among this simple, and, I hope, virtuous people, by sequestration and annual mourning, than the more lively kind of sacred celebration.

I found my Inn the abode of two most respectable persons, of their order, in the middle station of life. The landlord was a grave steady looking man, having more the appearance of a venerable magistrate than an English landlord. His wife, also the mother of numerous offspring of the most healthy-looking children, was more adapted if possible, than her husband, to command respect: while the mildness and benignity of her aspect could not fail of exciting the affection of real esteem. This sensation, perhaps incompatible with dirt and nastiness, had full scope from the peculiar cleanliness and neatness of her person. She was faded a little in her countenance by childbearing and maternal care – but on the whole, a woman calculated to adorn any dwelling however sacred to benevolence, piety, and love. I began a conversation with her, by remarking on the church-yard scene; and observing her to be a woman of superior, and, as I thought, of cultivated understanding, I asked her concerning the antiquity of this custom. She replied, that she could not tell how old it might be - supposed it to have been long before the time of our – Saviour.

Mathews concludes with the opinion that the inn keepers were Methodists. If he was correct, they would have been very familiar with the famous visitor – John Wesley! [6]

A search of various trade directories and census returns gives the following information on the generations of the Howell family who were the innkeepers of the *Mansel Arms*. It is worth noting here that they also operated a draper's shop adjacent to the building.

John Howell 1830-1851

Henry Howell 1851-1858

Elizabeth Howell 1858- 1861

Henry Seys Howell 1861-1896.

Following the death of Henry Seys Howell, the old *Mansel Arms* was put up for sale in October of 1896 at an auction to be held on 10th November at the Stepney Arms Hotel where the highest bid was £1700 by a Mr David John but the property was withdrawn and sold by private treaty. There was uproar in the town when the Llanelli Temperance Federation discovered that the Llanelli Borough Council were to effect a purchase. Protests of...

I object to becoming a landlord of a public house against my will! It's a monstrous proposal''

and similar objections were voiced. A deputation of fifty members of the Federation was appointed to protest against the proposal. [7]

The Llanelli Borough had a very good reason for purchasing the *Mansel Arms*. A portion of Hall Street, near to the building, was very narrow and formed an unfortunate bottle-neck in an important part of the town. The problem was exacerbated when in 1879 a tramway was laid in Llanelli that was intended to go as far as New Road but because Hall Street was so narrow at the *Mansel Arms* 'pinch point' the idea was abandoned. On 26th August a survey was taken on the traffic at that spot and was found to be considerable. Between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. there were 5208 foot passengers, 705 vehicles, 86 cattle and horses. The council planned to acquire the freehold and re-sell with the stipulation that the building was

to be moved back the necessary distance. Evidently, the building would have to be demolished. [8]

On 27 January 1898 an auction was held at the Thomas Arms for the sale of the *Mansel Arms*. Bidding was said to be brisk but S. N. Powell's gavel fell to Mr Davies of Machynys, who was bidding on behalf of his brother, the proprietor of *The Halfway Hotel*. [9]

The following year an advertisement appeared in the *Llanelly and County Guardian*...

The Mansel Hotel, Llanelly

Headquarters of the Llanelly Football Club

This old established hotel has been entirely rebuilt in the modern style, with all conveniences, perfect sanitary arrangements, centrally situated. Opposite the Athenaeum Hall. All wines and spirits of the best quality. Single bottles at wholesale prices. Private order Department.

Billiards. Hot and cold baths always ready.

D. Davies Proprietor. [10]

The architecture of this new *Mansel Hotel*, has been described as...

An uncompromising late nineteenth century red brick Gothic hotel. It is a three storey building with steeply pitched slate roofs.

There is some evidence to support the fact that William Griffiths, a local architect, and T. P. Jones, a local builder both had a hand in its construction. [11]

1900



*Trevethin, Home of Elizabeth Howell,
New Road*

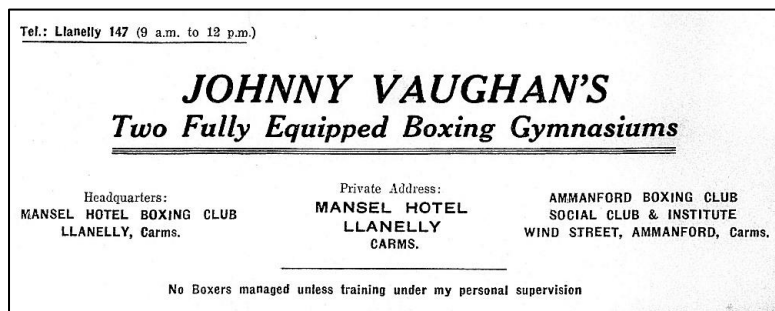
It was a new building for the new century with a new name and a new landlord.

During the Boer War a fund was set up for the relief of the widows and orphans of the soldiers and sailors, and forces of the of the Yeomanry, who might lose their lives in South Africa. Numerous collections were in all the public houses in the town of Llanelli and the top fund came from the *Mansel's Arms* with £2-2-1, followed by *The Greyhound Hotel* £1-15-7, and *The Whitehall Inn* £1-19-6

As well as serving the community as a hotel, a public house and a meeting place, it was the venue for the sporting game of billiards, although Thomas Davies, a wood carver by trade was not very 'sporting' because he was sentenced to twelve months hard labour for stealing six billiard balls valued £ 4/14s/6p from the hotel in April 1903. [12]

The following year it was reported that Elizabeth, the wife of Henry Seys Howell had passed away at *Trevethin*, her home in New Road. She was 74 and the last of the Howells to keep the old *Mansell Inn*. [13]

The new *Mansel Hotel* continued to serve the people of Llanelli through two world wars as a hotel, a pub and place of entertainment. It was also the headquarters of *The Mansel Hotel Boxing Club*. Here, Johnny Vaughan, the manager and coach had two fully equipped boxing gymnasiums. It was where many a budding Llanelli boxer practised the ‘Noble Art’.



1948 Advert for Johnny Vaughan's Gymnasium – Glyn Millard

1960

In the 1960s one of its upstairs rooms was rented out as the venue for local rock and roll bands and pop groups. The *L-Club*, as it was called, was where the Llanelli group known as *The Corncrackers* frequently played and there is some local opinion that *Tommy Scott and the Senators* from Pontypridd featured at the *L-Club*. Their lead singer later became more familiarly known as Tom Jones! [14]

Recent History

In more recent times it changed its name and style becoming *The Camelot* or *The Camelot Lounge* and *The Llanelli Working Man's Club*.



Ansell's Sign, seen for many years on the west end of the hotel – Paul Brookfield

Sadly, by 1991 the proud building had fallen into a state of decline which was almost ‘terminal’, its windows were boarded up, holes began to appear in its roof which became a roosting place for pigeons, and it was termed a ‘blot on the landscape’. There were even calls for the building to be pulled down.

A spokesman for *Ansell's*, the owners at the time, said it would be closed while decisions were being made about its future.

Fortunately, The Llanelli Civic Society shone the spotlight on the building by warning that Llanelli's image could be badly affected if the building was left to degenerate. Its secretary Mr Brynmor Voyle, called for early action on its future...

Someone has to make a decision on it because it is only going to deteriorate. It's bad when things like this happen in the town centre, maybe the council could make a compulsory purchase order?

The building, described as a fine example of Victorian architecture, standing next to the proposed 'Parish Church Conservation Area' was under consideration by CADW for listed building status, which it later acquired in March 1992. [15]

It was not until 2003 that there was any hope for *The Mansel* when it was reported that a Bengali businessman Mr Ali, was looking to restore the building to its former glory by relocating the *Verandah Restaurant* from Market Street to *The Mansel Hotel* as the premises were much larger and afforded more seating space. This he achieved with the help of CADW and the Carmarthenshire County Council, thus saving the building for the town of Llanelli. Today *The Mansel Hotel* continues to play an important place in the community as ***The Sultan*** and ***Ruby's*** [16]



The Mansel Hotel (now Ruby's) 2020



Two examples of the many Impost Blocks around the Mansel Hotel 2020.

The Impost Block is the support between the pillar and the arch.

The Mansel Hotel 1965 image by Doug Simpson *Llanelli Unseen*.
Llanelli Library image ILL858 *Thatched Cottages 1795*
Wesley Preaching sketch by John Wynne Hopkins

I would like to express my thanks to Doug Simpson, *Llanelli Unseen* and Llanelli Library for information and the image supplied, also to both Caroline Streek and Robert Ephgrave for their work on this article.

- [1] *Llanelli Mercury* 3 Feb 1898.
South Wales Press 3 Feb 1898 p3c6.
- [2] Mansel Lewis Papers, Cat No. 860.
1814 Howell's Plan LPL. (Field names)
- [3] *John Wesley in Carmarthenshire* by Kemmis Buckley. The Carmarthenshire Antiquary Vol. IX (1973) Page 107.
- [4] *Llanelly Parish Church* (1888) A. Mee. page xxix footnote.
Llanelly Directory James Davies & Co page 84 "No2 Church Street (upper) Johnson & Stead".
Kelly's South Wales Directory 1895 P413 "Johnson & Stead, solicitors, Church Street".
- [5] *Some Aspects of Early Nonconformity and Early Commerce in Llanelli* by Kemmis Buckley. The Carmarthenshire Antiquary Vol.VI (1970) Page 15 P25 footnote 25.
Bathafarn Cyfrol 25 Llanelli Library LC5562 John Wesley in Llanelli 1970.
- [6] *The miscellaneous companion.... Being a short tour of observation and sentiment, through a part of South Wales.* By William Matthews 1786.
- [7] *Llanelly Mercury*, 29 Oct 1896; 19 Nov 1896; 26 Nov 1896 p5.
- [8] *Llanelly Mercury* 2 Sept 1897.
- [9] *South Wales Press* 3Feb 1898.
- [10] *Llanelly and County Guardian* 1899 April 20th Page 2
Mansel Hotel, Llanelly.
- [11] CADW Listed Buildings Database (11920)
Llanelly Mercury 30 Aug 1956, Death of T P Jones builder of the Mansel Hotel.
- [12] *Llanelly and County Guardian* 16th April 1903
- [13] *Llanelly Mercury* 14th January 1904
- [14] *Maybe I Should've Stayed in Bed?* By Deke Leonard pages 8, 58 & 59
- [15] *Evening Post* 1991 5th June 1991
- [16] *Llanelli Star* May 2003