

Thomas Howell - The Legend and the Legacy

A talk by Wendy Grey-Lloyd

Members of the Denbigh and District Probus Club enjoyed another wonderful lunch at the Oriel Hotel, St Asaph at their meeting on Monday 1st July. The speaker after lunch was **Wendy Grey-Lloyd** who gave a talk titled **Thomas Howell – The Legend and the Legacy**.

Wendy Grey-Lloyd who was born and brought up in Aberfan, South Wales, holds an Honours Degree in Humanities from Bangor University and studied drama at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, graduating as a performer and teacher.

Since her retirement as Head of Speech and Drama at Howell's School, Denbigh, she has found more time to devote to her interest in writing.

It was thought that Thomas Howell was born in 1480 and died in Seville in about 1540 – he lived during the reign of five kings. He was a Monmouthshire Welsh man who was an apprentice Draper in Bristol before moving to London as a merchant Draper - one of the great city merchants of the time. He had major success in selling cloth to Spain (he was frequently in Seville and he learnt the Castilian language), Portugal and the Caribbean (San Domingo in the West Indies). He also imported luxurious merchandise such as wine, dye, soap, satins, damask, oils, sultanas etc to England, accumulating a vast fortune.

He became a Freeman in 1507 and a member of the Worshipful Company of Drapers one of the Guilds which protected customers and employees, with members paying to join them. Thomas Howell was elected Warden of the Drapers' Company in 1527.

Thomas kept immaculate financial records in ledgers and his records illustrate the first double entry recording which is still used today.

He was married and very wealthy but had no children but his brother had an illegitimate child. He was a great philanthropist and he actually left three Wills and in the first Will he was going to convert his house – Tower House, into a mixed school for forty poor children. Additionally, he would provide 12 ducats a year each for university training but he changed his mind. He invested in institutions that would shape society. Long before Mr Tony Blair he believed in Education, Education, Education.

When he died, he made provision in his third Will (written in 1540 in Seville, Spain) for the benefit of maiden orphans of his kin. On their marriage, each one was to be given 100 ducats. The executors of the Will could not find the maiden orphans and they invested in property in London purchasing Cannon St. Station and also Thomas Cromwell's House (after his execution, the house was bought from Henry VIII for poor little orphan girls of Welsh origin).

He left 12,000 ducats to be given to the Wardens of Drapers' Hall, London, to be invested by them (in the purchase of land in the City of London) and to produce dowries for orphan girls. As this investment grew, it was sufficient for Howell's School, Denbigh, and Howell's School, Llandaff, Cardiff, to be established by the Drapers' Company 1853 (a little over 300 years after Thomas Howell made his Will).

The MP for Denbighshire asked the Drapers' Company for funding to establish a school in Denbigh and was successful. It was built to provide education for orphan girls and provided board, clothing and education and it was a great source of employment for the people of Denbigh.

The architect was Decimus Burton who had designed the Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner in London and he was commissioned to design both the schools.

When Wendy worked for Howell's School, Denbigh there were 495 boarders and she believes over half of those were being educated for free or subsidised because of Thomas Howell.

Thomas Howell is an adopted son of Denbigh - a legend in his time!

The next Denbigh and District Probus Club meeting, which is an invitation lunch with no speaker, will be on Monday August 5th 2024.

New members are always warmly welcomed.

For further information have a look at the club web site denbighprobus.com or contact the Membership Officer Andrew Faulkner for more details prior to an introductory visit to a Probus meeting.

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