



The Manor of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre



In 1887 George Maddocks of Ruthin bought himself a birthday present; namely the Lordship of the Manor of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre for the lordly sum of 10 guineas. He promptly changed his name to Sior Madog and set to work discovering what exactly he had bought! The Manor of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre is one the old pre-Norman manors and encompasses many square miles of Denbighshire Moors with a scattering of small villages and isolated farms. A manorialship consists of three parts. First there is the title, Lord of the Manor. This is nothing to do with nobility; the holder cannot call himself or herself Lord or Lady So-and-so. Thus Maddocks became Sior Madog, Lord of the Manor of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre. Then there is the property of the manor, such as the buildings and land. In this case, a Manor House that at the time was described as being in a 'distressed condition' and said moorland. Finally there are the rights that the lord of the manor can exercise. These were wide-ranging in the early Middle Ages, with rights such as being able to force tenants to work on the lord's fields for several days a year, punishment of offenders, and being able to block the transfer of property within the manor. Many of these rights were curtailed in 1290, and by the end of the English Civil War the last vestiges of feudalism had disappeared. Much of the lord of the manor's powers and rights had been transferred to the common law courts.

This did not deter Madog. Together with his brother, a solicitor by profession, he ploughed through all the documentation; the scrolls, letters, bonds, deeds, indentures, proclamations and acts of parliament, and he found that while he could not cause much to happen, or prevent much to happen, he could at least impede or influence matters and usually by a financial penalty. For example, if someone wanted to sell a grazing field, while he could not prevent this, he could apply a manorial fine on the transfer of ownership, dressing it up as 'administration costs' as all these dealing still had to be recorded. The word 'fine' does not imply any wrong-doing or punishment. Its original use simply meant a fee payable to a court. Moreover, often there was no set amount payable; each and every case was treated on its own merits. The Lord of the Manor of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre could say what the fine would be, or even waive the payment, at his own discretion. Unfortunately there were upper limits to the fines or payments due to the court, and these had not been upwardly revised for a few centuries. However, lack of revision meant some were expressed in Curt Pennies or Keinhawc Cotta. This was a monetary unit in use in Wales in medieval times and owed more to Roman origins, being worth 2 dimidioms. It was reckoned that a Curt Penny was worth approximately two thirds of the Legal Penny of England. But this was one the loopholes in the rights of the lord of the manor Madog could use. To illustrate the differences between these, bear in mind that goats were valued by the Welsh in curt pence, while sheep were valued in legal pennies.

He now sought to keep his manor as Welsh as possible and even as local as possible. The fines he imposed would only be applied to the 'alltud' (outsiders) and be used to benefit the true folk of the manor. He would be a benevolent lord to his people. While Madog recognised different degrees of outsidersness, the term was applied to anybody from outside the county. He and his brother listed the rights that remained to the lord of the manor, and came up with a series of payments for a number of them which would benefit Madog's aims. Naturally he had a set of fiscal stamps printed which would be placed on the documentation and cancelled to represent payment. Included here are some of those stamps in mint condition. It would have been nice to have some used on original documentation, but the archive room which housed these was destroyed in 1926 in a freak blaze involving a lightning rod, a snuff box and an agitated goose. The rather elegant stamps themselves feature a picture of the Manor House itself; the oldest parts dating back to 1526. The colours were chosen by Madog himself based on local colours and dyes. The text explains that they were issued by the Manorial Court of Pentre Uchaf and Hendre, and showed the value in pence, in numerals and words.

The 240 pence stamp (dragon red and elderberry) was used for Gobr Llety. This was a form of visitor's accommodation tax. In practice this was virtually exclusively applied to visitors staying at Hendre Hall. The one thing that rankled Madog was that Hendre Hall was considerably bigger and grander than the Manor House, and the owner, Sir Harold Scrimshaw, a Saesneg, attracted some colourful if bothersome guests. Sir Harold had set himself up as a patron of the arts, and prior to the

introduction of the manorial payments had had the likes William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti staying with him. The latter was one of the more troublesome guests. Few would forget the night he turned up at the local pub after over-indulging with laudanum, naked from the waist down, and trying to buy a round of absinthe for everybody there. The tax did achieve its aims. When Sir Harold was informed that he would have pay five pounds to entertain Huw Puw Caru, a young aspiring author who was getting somewhat of a reputation for eccentric behaviour, he made sure he was in London and Hendre Hall was closed when Caru arrived. Caru had all but invited himself to the Hall and Sir Harold declared that while he could excuse himself on country pursuits while Caru was a guest, he wasn't paying good money to Madog for that privilege.

One payment Sir Harold couldn't escape was the 180 pence (bilberry and crab apple green), due four times a year, called Gwestva. This was payment in lieu of gifts of food and wine due to the lord of the manor - a sort of entertainment tax. Again it was only levied against the owners of Hendre Hall as they were the only family in the manor who could afford it. When they tried to avoid payment by delivering a wagon load of windfall apples and vegetables from the kitchen garden that had gone to seed Madog promptly doubled the payments to 360 pence.

Gobr Gwarchadw (moss and beaujolais nouveau) was another payment that virtually only applied to Hendre Hall. It was termed as a custody payment, but referred to unoccupied land and property which came under the protection of the Manor during the owner's absence. It was fixed at 126 pence per week. Thus when Sir Harold disappeared to London to escape Caru, he returned to find he was charged half a guinea manorial fine.

An unusual fine, and the highest applied at twenty five shillings bracken brown and slate), was Gwaddal. A maiden, resident in the manor, could petition the manorial court claiming that she had lost her virginity by being seduced and charmed to the point where she lost her reason, inhibitions and morals, and succumbed to a man's advances. Again it was levied exclusively against those living at Hendre Hall or their guests. No-one would believe the local lads were capable of being so charming. Unusually though the payments were neither punishment nor compensation as you might surmise. When paid the maiden's virginity would be reversed or restored, and her future marriage prospects would not be compromised. Interestingly there were some maidens who made full use of this restoration to appear before the manorial court again and again after befriending the sophisticated and artistic guests at the hall.

A 60 pence (malachite and welsh gold) payment called Ebediw was one of the most commonly applied, but very rarely paid. Let me explain. Ebediw was similar to the English manorial heriots, payment for land and property transfer usually at the death of a tenant. Madog applied this across the manor on all land transfers. For those occasions where the new owner already resided within the manor or the county the fee would be waived. But for the outsiders it was demanded. But if you look at the stamp you will notice the denomination is 60cc. The payments would be 60 curt pennies. As no such coins existed, no banks would be able to handle payments, and there was no actual exchange rate for curt penny to legal penny it was virtually impossible for the payment to be made. The transfer to the outsider would collapse and the property would be sold or transferred to a local family. It also had the effect of preventing the owners of Hendre Hall buying up property as the waiving of the fee was purely at the discretion of the lord of the manor.

When these mint stamps were discovered there were also some early versions found. There were a few straight cut very early prints with rather weak colourings. It would seem these were rejected and a stronger colour achieved. These test examples are roulette perforated. Unfortunately there are only enough of these for everybody to have one example of each. Despite these having no overprinting, collectors should regard these as approval specimen stamps.

Madog used the monies raised to help fund a couple of local schools, but is best remembered for laying on an annual Midsummer Gala for all the residents. There would be an afternoon of competitions and fun for the children like bobbing for leeks, a meal of roast ox, bara brith and plenty of *cwrw da*, and an evening of dancing to harpists well into the night; at least for a few years. Madog passed away in 1907, and with no descendants the manor was again put up for sale and was purchased by Algernon Scrimshaw, son of Sir Harold, to ensure no-one else could have similar ambitions.

You may not believe all of this but it is possibly truer than you believe!