Life in Hewelsfield and Brockweir during the 16th Century

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"It is the pious duty of the historian to keep the past alive."
Augustine Birrell.

With a Foreword by
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SECTION 1

The Yeoman. The Silver Spoon.

In the year 1500 a family named Hopkyns lived in Brockweir. They were farmers and by the standards of their day were well-to-do. Where their farm houses stood it is not possible to say exactly, but it is almost certain that they occupied the ground near the present bridge and the land they farmed was that between Offa's Dyke and the river. We know they owned land in Brockweir, Hewelsfield and St. Briavels, and one of them also held 'terme' land in the parish of Tidenham, probably at Madgett. This 'terme' land would be held of the Duke of Norfolk then the holder of the Lordship of Striguil or Chepstow. This land was copyhold granted to the tenant for a certain number of years or lives, and rent or services in money and kind paid or given by the tenant to his lord. At this period most of the land in England was cultivated on the open field system, and although the system lasted until the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, in a few places it was breaking down in the south-west, and thus we find the Hopkyns holding small farms of which they could dispose legally by will. Let us glance for a moment at the period in which they lived. Henry VII, the victor of Bosworth Field, was firmly on the throne of England. The senior Hopkyns had lived through the Wars of the Roses but had not experienced any battle at close quarters, for the Wye Valley was not troubled by the savage quarrels of the nobles supporting either the Red or the White Rose. Caxton had set up the first printing press in England at Westminster in their middle lives, and Columbus had discovered the West Indies and Vasco da Gama the sea route round the Cape to India, when they were elderly men. But these epoch-making events were at their best but rumours of the dim far off to them. Tintern Abbey then at the height of its grandeur and the Constable or his deputy at St. Briavels were their high lights and over all was the power of the Church. Few in England could have foreseen the great changes which were to take place in the life times of their children. In some respects the openings of the 16th and 20th centuries were alike.

Brockweir and Hewelsfield – apart from the Church – show no traces of mediaeval building. The oldest house in the village at the foot of the modern bridge dates back to 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, and probably the Old Malt House is as old

from its Elizabethan characteristics, but the dwellings of the Hopkyns and their companions have left no trace. Apart from churches, castles and a few fortified houses, England has no buildings of this period. The house even of a well-to-do yeoman of those days was mean by our standards. A living room and dairy, with perhaps an upstairs room, reached by a ladder, with cattle shed and pig sty built next to the living room to protect them from robbery, was the usual layout. The living room had no chimney; the floor was of earth covered with rushes in winter and no glass in the small narrow windows which were shuttered at night. A rough plank table on trestles, some benches and perhaps a cupboard would be almost all the furniture in the room. Wooden bowls, plates and spoons, wooden or horn cups were chiefly used and rarely a piece or two of pewter and brass might be seen. Glass and china were very rarely seen, forks were unknown and fingers took their place. If there was a second story room it formed the bedroom of the yeoman and his wife and the women folk of the family, though often all the inmates slept on straw in the living room.

One of the signs of wealth was the possession of a bed and if a man could dispose of two beds in his will his social rank was thereby increased. William Hopkyns left his best bed to his wife and his second bed to his second son. At the wife's death the best bed passed to his elder son. These beds were not the massive four-posters which did not come into use until the end of the 16th century, but tester beds hung around with curtains, and their value chiefly lay in the hangings. Rich people carried these beds with them when they made long journeys. Very many wills of the 1500's testify to the esteem in which the possession of a bed was held. William Hopkyns also left six ounces of silver to his elder son and six spoons, presumably silver, to his wife. One of his prized possessions was a mazer. This was a large bowl with a lid, made from maple wood and the lid may have been decorated with silver. It was used at feasts and holidays to hold the wassail drink which he would serve out to his family and workmen when festival days were celebrated. The mazer he gave to his elder son. There were no horses on the Hopkyns' farms. Horses were rarely used for farm work and there is no mention of a horse in local wills until the middle of the century, when Wenlyan Wellvett disposes of a 'graye horse.' William Hopkyns gave his elder son, Thomas, four oxen, four cows, and forty-six sheep, and to his wife, Elizabeth, five cows and half of his 'household while she lived.' When his four children came of age the other half was to be shared between them. William and Elizabeth had two daughters, Agnes and Margaret, who were to receive twenty marks in gold or silver and 'ten marks for their clothes and other things necessary for their marriages.' A mark was 13s. 4d., a considerable sum in those days, so they were likely to

be eligible brides. To his second son William, he gave twenty oxen worth £10 and two-thirds of 'Close Stuff,' probably the present Close Turf Farm in St. Briavels. The remaining one-third of 'Close Stuff' went to his brother Thomas, who was to hold it for twenty-four years.

William bequeathed to his elder son 'all my free lands, etc., in Brokewere or Howelfield or St. Briavell.' (*sic*).

John Hopkyns, a brother of William, left thirty oxen to his four daughters between them at their marriage and charged his elder son to pay his younger son, John, 'twenty marks to help him to a craft when he cometh to twenty-one years of age.' John was not destined to become a farmer. Using his considerable capital he probably settled in Bristol in a merchant family. This is conjecture, but there was considerable intercourse between Hewelsfield - Brockweir with Bristol and William Baker, known to the Hopkyns, had held land in Hewelsfield and given 40s. to the reparation of St. Briavels Church. Baker was a merchant grocer and died a few years before this bequest to John. Both the wills I have quoted contain references to fisheries in the Wye which appear to have been of considerable value. It is a local tradition that the weirs in the Wye were built by the monks of Tintern Abbey, but it is an error. It may have arisen from a confused story of the 14th century. In the early part of that century the monks had raised the height of some of the local weirs with wooden barriers and thus impeded the boats travelling from Bristol to Hereford. After complaint made to the King they were ordered to remove the obstruction but refused to do so. The King's officers began to carry out the work and the Abbot of Tintern with certain monks and lay brothers attempted to obstruct them. A fight took place in Brockweir and the monks were driven off and the barriers removed.

Evidence exists that the Fisheries were established before the Norman Conquest and a reference in Doomsday Book to Lidinci Parva (Little Lydney) refers to St. Briavels which possessed a fishery in the Wye. This was known as Brithekeswere (Bigswier) and in 1326 Edward II granted a moiety of it to the Abbot and Convent of Tintern, but they were not allowed to claim timber in the Forest of Dean for its repair.

Three of the weirs are mentioned in the Hopkyns wills. William held Prior's Weir or a part of it and he left his interest in it, which had twenty years to run from the time of his death, to his widow, Elizabeth, 'provided that she kept herself sole,' that is did not remarry. His share in Lynweir was left to his widow also. Lynweir is the pool on the Tintern side of the railway bridge over the Wye a

few yards from the Tintern Tunnel, and is known by the same name to-day. William Hopkyns leased his share in Lynwier from the Lord of Tyddenham, who was the Lord of Striguil (Chepstow) and apparently his share in the lease had twenty years to run. Lynwier had been attached to Moedgaite, now Madgett, before the Norman Conquest in 1066. William's brother John also held a share in the Prior's Weir and in Plumweir below the Abbey. He left his shares to his wife Agnes for her life subject to remaining a widow and then to his elder son William. The leasehold tenants of these Fisheries probably had to supply certain quantities of fish to the Landlords – The Prior of Tintern and the Lord of Striguil. Thus it will be seen that even 500 to 800 years ago the fishing rights in the Wye were strictly preserved and as fish was an important food in those days the fisheries were a valuable commercial asset. The Hopkyns do not appear to have engaged in the river traffic from Bristol to Hereford. The Norman Lords of Chepstow collected dues on all vessels passing the castle and it is known that much smuggling of wood and venison from the King's Forest of Dean to Bristol took place down the Wye and of course was liable to seizure, before reaching Bristol. In the course of time the Bristol authorities secured protection from the consequences of wood and venison from the Forest being found in their premises. Brockweir men began to take a share in this river traffic and in 1571 we find John Geathene the elder leaving by will his 'best boat' to his eldest son and his 'second boat' to his second son, with the proviso "my wife to have use of the boats to carry to Bristol the wood I have on Wye bank." Geathene was a prosperous man for he left £10 each to his third son and two daughters (both named Joan).

It is probable that John Geathene had been married twice and had a daughter Joan by each wife. This duplication of names was not infrequent in the middle ages and sometimes causes trouble in compiling family trees.

It may be instructive to consider the resources of men in a social position above that of the Hopkyns, and the wills of Matthew Cachemay and William Hathwy (or Hathway), both of St. Briavels, enable us to do so. Matthew Cachemay was a member of a family who crossed the pages of history in St. Briavels and Hewelsfield from the early 14th century to the end of the 18th. He died in 1502 six years before William and John Hopkyns, who died in 1508. He is described as a "Grasier" that is a pastoral farmer. He left his wife Margaret all his household goods and she was to provide 'meat, drink and all things necessary' for the testator's mother during the mother's life. Other items are to Thomas Cachemay 'my uncle' my best gown and doublet ; to John Cachemay 'my sword, hat and cup' ; to Philip Cachemay 20s. ; to Christopher Baynham Esq., 10s. ; to

Sir Roger Brayne-(Amount illegible but probably 10s.) ; to Thomas Rauleyn ‘a tawney gown and my hoses (a kind of long stocking made of cloth).’

Christopher Baynham[1] was a member of a prominent Forest family and Sir Roger Brayne was the Vicar of Lydney.

Matthew Cachemay held land and tenements in Bristol and he laid a charge on some of this property to provide a yearly obit for his soul and those of John Langford and four other men he mentions by name. Other property in Bristol was to provide a chantry within the fraternity of the Bell House, St. Peter’s, Bristol. His wife was to have all other lands and tenements until his son William Cachemay ‘came to his full age of 16 years,’ In his will he mentions another son James, a daughter Alice, his sister Marion, the wife of Thomas Brayne and Philip and Thomas Cachemay. Thomas Brayne was a member of an important Forest family, and the name under the form Brain is still existent in the Forest.

Three years after the deaths of the Hopkyn brothers there died in St. Briavels a gentleman named William Hathway (or Hathaway), members of whose family held high official positions in the Forest. His will is most interesting because it is the only one of the local wills of the 16th century that mentions a book. The item is to Dame Isabel, my daughter, ‘my best book and my best pair of beads’ (rosary). Unfortunately he does not record the name. It may have been one of the early books printed at Westminster, but from its association with the gift of his rosary it was more probably a manuscript volume of a religious character, and he evidently possessed others. Other items are, to Eustace and Thomas, my sons, a silver spoon each; to daughter Margaret ‘a pair of sheets and a calf of one year’ ; to daughters Alice and Katherine ‘each one of my best brass pots and dishes’. The rest, including lands etc., to his wife for her lifetime except three parcels of land specified in a deed of feoffment made to Sir Alexander Baynham, Knight ; and John Katchemay of Bokyswere (Bigsweir). This will was proved in the Provincial Consistory Court on January 31st, 1512.

It is interesting to note that the use of English words and phrases was finding its way into wills of the early 16th century. Previously they had been written for the greater part in monkish Latin of the Middle Ages. The will of William Hathway was in Latin throughout but the wills of the Hopkyn family contain several clauses in English interspersed in the Latin text. This tendency grew quickly with the

[1] He and his brother Thomas were joint constables of St. Briavels Castle at this time.

coming of the Reformation and the later wills of the century have an English text with an occasional Latin phrase or legal term only.

How did the Hopkyns fare at table? Meat was not plentiful. Cattle and sheep were small compared with modern livestock. Oxen were used for ploughing and drawing farm carts. They were too valuable to be lightly disposed of and only the oldest and toughest were used for food. Each autumn a small number would be killed and the meat pickled in brine. Salt was dear and hard to come by and spices were needed to taste down the pickled meat. These would be obtained from Bristol, then the second largest town and port in England, and were very dear. In the middle of the 15th century the overland route to India and the East had been cut by the Turks and this was one of the reasons that drove Columbus across the Atlantic and Vasco Da Gama to double the Cape seeking a sea route to the Far East. Animals were difficult to keep during the winter months for no root crops such as carrots, turnips, mangolds and swedes were grown in England. Hay was poor in quality. Manuring was then a haphazard science, and artificial fertilisers were undreamt of. The land was cultivated with wooden ploughs, heavy and cumbersome. Crops were reaped with the sickle and the grain beaten out on the barn floor with a flail. This instrument was in use in the Brockweir district as late as 40 years ago. Fields were fenced with timber and this was not easy to provide. The woods were strictly preserved and the cutting of timber without the permission of the Abbot of Tintern brought penalties in its train. Quick set hedges were unknown in the early part of the century. Haywards had to guard the growing crops from cattle, sheep and other animals. Pigs they had but they had to find most of their food in the woods under the care of the swineherd. They rarely became fat for meal for pig food was scarce. Bread made of oatmeal and rye flour was the mainstay of the meal. Wheat was not much grown and its quality was poor. Beans, dried, used in soups, or boiled and baked, formed an everyday dish even on the table of the lordly monks of Tintern. Peas were grown, but potatoes and salads were then unknown in England. It may be remarked that Henry VIII's Queen, Katherine, was the first to eat salad in England. She was a contemporary of the younger Hopkyns and sent messengers to the continent to bring her a dish of salad. It was at least a week old when she got it. Kale was grown in the garden plot together with sweet herbs. Sugar was extremely rare and highly priced, but the Hopkyns kept bees and honey took the place of sugar. Privileged people kept pigeons in large numbers in a dove-house or colombarium. The right was granted by the Lord of the Manor, in this case, the Abbot of Tintern, and the Hopkyns may have been allowed to do so, paying for the privilege by supplying the Monastery kitchen with eggs and birds. Our 16th century forefathers used many of the birds of the field and coppice for food

as continental people do to-day. Larkpie was a luxury, but there would be fish on Hopkyns' table. The customary drink was small beer and cider for all including children. Not much milk was drunk, but butter and cheese were made. The menfolk quaffed a stronger brew from the mazer bowl on special occasions. Probably their malt was made on the site of the present Old Malt House. Shopping problems did not trouble the farmers' wives. There were no shops, All they ate, wore and used had to be provided on the farm. A travelling packman might on very rare occasions visit the district and provide some brightly coloured ribbons or other small knick-knacks for the women folk. For clothing they had to rely on the home produced wool and the distaff was in constant use. Few new garments fell to the lot of the average person. Fortunately fashion changed very slowly and the women folk saw little or no change during a lifetime. Children were small editions of their elders. We have seen that in this period well-to-do people bequeathed their garments to friends and neighbours. Very little money was in circulation and much of what there was was either clipped or debased. The standard coin was the silver penny, 240 to the pound. It is difficult to fix the value of money in the 16th century with the value of our pound of to-day, but some approach may be made by comparing the salary of the village priest with that of the parson of to-day. The priests whom the Hopkyns knew received £6 7s. 0d. a year and the priest whose emoluments were valued at £10 was looked upon as well paid. This give a ratio of about 1 to 45 at the least.

It is interesting to note that when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries provision was made to provide the monks with pensions. The monk, Nicholas Aston, Cellarer of Tintern Abbey was awarded a yearly pension of £4. Later under the alias of Page he was made perpetual curate of Hewelsfield, bringing his income up to £10 11s. a year, and he enjoyed this for many years as the record of his pension etc. is found in returns for 1544 and 1576. When the Chantries were abolished a few years later by Edward VI, the Lady Priest of St. Briavels, Richard Fletcher, received 'by yere, £4' as a pension. George Whaddam, Lady Priest of Newland received a like sum and became Vicar of Frampton in Severn 1537-49 and was curate of St. Briavels in 1551.

Contrary to much current belief men in the 16th century did not often live to ripe old age. Both the Hopkyns left sons under age, and all their daughters, well dowered, unmarried. Matthew Cachemay's son was not sixteen years old, and William Hathwy seems to have left a young family almost all of whom were unmarried.

Medical science was almost unknown. Bleeding at regular intervals was practised and we know that the monks had to submit to it at definite and regular intervals. Skin diseases, low fevers, measles and scarlet fever were scourges even in the King's court, and the Grand Monarch scratched himself in public. The laws of hygiene were not known and disease was accepted as the will of God.

But Brockweir had its brighter days. Early some summer morning boys and girls would see a stately procession slowly wind its way through the wood on the river banks, cross the Acres and emerge into the village. The Lord Abbot on his palfrey with one or two monks in attendance and guarded by a small band of lay brothers was about to survey his Manor of Hewelsfield or visit Flaxley Abbey-Cistercian like Tintern-or some more distant goal. He represented a power before which all bowed low. He was the chief landlord; from him support and protection could be claimed, but his charges had to be met. At stated intervals the Hopkyns and others in Hewelsfield attended at the Abbey to pay their dues in money or kind. The stately buildings of the Abbey spread over 26 acres were at the height of their grandeur and none then dreamt that the young children who gazed on the procession would see when they were men and women the downfall of that imposing edifice with all its wealth and power. The Abbey church was the private church of the Abbot and his eleven or twelve monks. The religious life of the Hopkyns did not mix with that of the Convent, though a Brockweir man John had risen to Sub Prior of the Abbey in the days of their grandfathers. The church at Hewelsfield was their meeting place. Mother Church dominated their lives and few there were who could doubt her supremacy. She held the keys of life and death hereafter, especially the death that did not die. The Church kept the horrors of the Inferno ever before their eyes and few doubted but that they were only too true. Certainly the Church had another and happier picture to show as we shall see. In the Middle Ages Englishmen and women lived under two distinct codes of law – Canon or Church Law and Civil Law, and of the two, Canon Law was the more humane for it shed no blood. But this was not absolute for an offender against the Church could be excommunicated and was subject to civil power. Canon Law ruled when a man's will had to be proved, his morals looked into by the Bishop's Apparitor; and all offences against the Church were tried in the Bishop's Court. This was at Hereford, for there was no Diocese of Gloucester until the Reformation, and this explains why the livings of Hewelsfield and St. Briavels are still in the gift of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral. Neither Hewelsfield nor St. Briavels was a Parish Church and did not become so until 1859. Both were chapelries of Lydney, but appear to have had priests in charge.

The population was then very much smaller than it is now. From the evidence of the Chantry Commissioners Report of 1547 it would appear that St. Briavels had about 200 to 250 people living in the Parish. Hewelsfield would have a much smaller population. Probably the ratio between the populations of the two parishes would not greatly differ from that of to-day. This would make the population of Hewelsfield about 50 to 60 persons including children. Of these rather more than half appear to have lived in the Brockweir district and probably averaged 35 souls.

SECTION II.
The Church.

It is Easter Sunday in the first decade of the 16th century, the Hopkyns and their workmen, their friends and neighbours are early afoot to attend the great Christian Festival. Everyone, unless sick, will be there for fines and punishments may await the absentee. With Hopkyns in the van they climb the rough track from the village, and cast an eye over some of the most fruitful land, Onnifields, now known as Hineyfields. But the name derives from the brook and not the hive. Onni is an Anglo-Saxon term for a stream and is met with elsewhere in England. Fancy later added an H to the word and associated the fields with the Honey Bee. Both the brooks are mentioned in early perambulations of the Forest boundaries under the name 'merebrook' or mark brook. Where the Rock and Fieldgate now stand they would enter the Hudnalls which then stretched from the river bank about a mile above Brockweir across the parish of Hewelsfield. It is now represented only by the trees and undergrowth of Cutt's Orchard and the Free Wood on Cowshill Cliff, sometimes known as Cowsale Cliff. The northern portion of this wood was known as Harthill then and now while a small holding on the north-east extremity is still known as the Hudnalls. The whole of this wood was then the property of the Abbot of Tintern. After the dissolution of the monasteries all this large wood appears to have become Common Land and cattle were placed in it and wood taken by the inhabitants of the parish. In 1544 John White of Hewelsfield left in his will 'To Tace 4 bolockes the wych be in Huddenalls' 'To Edward a bolocke wich is in He-hill' (Harthill). The whole of the Common was gradually cleaned and enclosed by cottars but in the third quarter of the 18th century there was still wood on Harthill. A small cleared portion is still Common ground. At the bottom of Cutt's Orchard our party would see the Abbot's mill built before 1270 and which gave the name of Mill Hill to the steep ground on their left. No trace of the mill remains to-day except for a portion of the millrace and the rough outline of the millpool. The mill had adjoined Offa's Dyke and in 1270 and 1282

the Prior of Tintern had been accused of using it to harbour poachers of the King's deer. The mill was a source of profit to the Abbey for all were compelled to use it for grinding their grain and a certain amount of the flour remained with the Abbot and Convent of Tintern.

The modern road from Brockweir to Hewelsfield did not then exist and the party would trudge along the ancient parish road or track which even in the early years of the 20th century was referred to by some of the older people as 'the burying road.' After passing 'Cockshuts' where traps were set for woodcock they would climb the last steep hill and emerge at Tumpkin Hales (Tump in the Marsh). Here a halt would be made to allow the stragglers to join up, packs would be counted, for they have brought food and drink for the day. The Priest's Bell sounds. It still rings in Hewelsfield Church Belfry – the only pre-Reformation bell in the church. Only eighteen such bells are existent in Gloucestershire and one is at Woolaston. It bears an inscription in Latin which may be translated 'I am the bell of Mary the illustrious virgin.' It was probably cast at Gloucester in the middle of the 15th century.

A short walk brings the travellers to the sacred acre. The churchyard is almost a perfect circle, enclosing an area but slightly exceeding one acre, bounded by a revetment wall and in its turn encircled by roadways. Here was the spot sacred to the first pagan Celts who had held their tribal meetings and buried their dead within its mystic circle. In course of time the Celts or Welsh had become Christians, but the same sacred spot was used by them for worship. Later they were evicted by their Saxon conquerors, heathen probably still, but in their turn to become Christians and to erect some small wooden building as the priest's oratory or church. The Saxons rarely used stone for building and though a very small number of Saxon stone churches, or part wood and stone, still remain in England, there is nothing here to indicate that a Saxon stone church had stood there in Hiwaldstone, as the Norman scribe enrolled it in Doomsday Book. 'The tun, or farm settlement, on the high wold' which by 1227 had become Huwaldsfeld, or 'the open space or clearing in the high wold.'

The present Norman church appears to have been built about the end of the 12th or the first years of the 13th century, probably by the Norman Lord of the day, and consisted of a nave separated from a north aisle by Norman arches, and a chancel. An addition of a transept or chapel was made in the days of the Hopkyn's grandchildren by a Gough, then owner of Hewelsfield Court. This estate had belonged to William Warren of Wilsbury, St. Briavels, and whose wife was a Mary Cachemay or Cachemaid. The remains

of an altar tomb erected to their memory lies scattered in St. Briavels Church to-day. Their daughter brought Hewelsfield Court as part of her marriage dower when she married George Gough in 1558. Their grandson, Richard Gough, left two daughters and the youngest Elinor became owner of Hewelsfield Court. She married Sir William Cachemay of Aylesmore. Tradition gives 1588 as the date of the building of the Gough Chapel, but the date appears unverifiable. The windows of the south wall have been altered since the 16th century. They were probably like those in the north aisle but higher.

In a letter written at the end of the 19th century a former Priest-in-charge refers to two "Saxon Windows" (sic) near the pulpit and which were taken out in 1849 and a single large window inserted in the wall in their place to provide better lighting, at the expense of a Mr. Sharp, a railroad contractor, then living at Hewelsfield Court. The Priest – the Rev. J. Burleigh – would seem to have been mistaken in the style of windows. They would be Norman and like those existing in St. Briavels Church in 1840, a drawing of which appears in Ormerod's Strigulensia, and made by him when living at Sedbury Park, Tidenham.

The church contains an ancient font which helps to mark the foundation date. It is a freestone, a product of the very early 13th or late 12th century, 'the golden age of font design.' It is in the form of an octagonal capital, having a circular pedestal and a very deep circular plinth. Each face of the bowl represents a scallop and between the scallops are narrow projecting mouldings; it is free of ornamentation. It stands on a modern octagonal plinth and step, probably placed there when the church was restored about 1861.

But Sir John Comcarvan, otherwise Kye, the priest is nearing the Priest's door, now walled up, and glancing at the twelve rayed scratch dial cut on the left hand window sill of the sanctuary, brought again to light when the Rev. R. Elphick removed the ivy which covered the south east wall. As the worshippers entered the church they would see in a recess over the door a brightly painted effigy of the Blessed Virgin or perhaps of the patron saint, Mary Magdalene, alas destroyed in the iconoclastic days of the 17th century. Entering the dimly lit lighted church they would see the Norman Arches and Font and at the head of the North Aisle the Altar of Our Lady. Looking to the chancel arch they would see the Holy Rood, with its candle light flickering before it. They would cross themselves piously and did William and John then determine that that light should be remembered in their wills. Both ordered that their bodies should be buried in the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene at Hewelsfield. William's will reads, 'I give to the Cathedral Church of Hereford 12d., to the High Altar of Hewelsfield

for tithes forgotten 4d. To the Lights of the Holy Rood in Hewelsfield and St. Briavels churches 12d. severally.' And brother John declared 'I bequeath to the Cathedral Church of Hereford 8d. To the High Altar of St. Mary Magdalene at Hewelsfield for tithes forgotten 4d. To the Light of the Holy Rood in the said church 6d. To that light in the church of St. Briavels 6d.'

We must not think that the Hopkyns were more religiously minded than most. All wills of this period, almost without exception, contain similar items to those quoted. Such gifts were given as a matter of duty and of righ

The mass begins. The parishioners stand in the body of the nave and kneel on the earthen floor at the prescribed times. There are no pews or chairs, but against the wall are rough benches for the aged and the infirm. Being Easter Sunday all from the age of 12 years upwards partake of the Holy Sacrament.

The service ended, preparations for a meal are made. Packages are undone, the children run outside carrying their food with them; their elders seated on the wall benches or sitting on the floor of the nave eat and gossip at will. Children quarrel and their parents draw their attention to the Doom picture in bright, gaudy colours on the wall plaster. They see the mouth of Hell open, with its terrifying devils grasping and tormenting the souls of the condemned. Even the elder men and women may shiver as some peccadillo of their past days comes into mind for the Mediaeval Hell was not a place to doubt.

The parishioners gather together to discuss parish affairs. Amongst them were John Warren of Hewelsfield Court and a younger man, Thomas Jane. He was a much poorer individual and never succeeded in making wealth, for when he died in 1526 his executors were excused the usual fees of the Diocesan Court because of the low value of his estate. But he was a member of a family which increased in social position during the 16th and 17th centuries, and about the middle of the 18th century possessed Hewelsfield Court and land in Brockweir. During the 19th century they declined and the last male representative died in Bank Street, Chepstow, about the turn of the present century. What did the meeting of parishioners do? One of their duties was to arrange for church finance, and so it is resolved to hold a Church Ale. They decide the amount of beer to be brewed and the price at which each horn or flagon is to be sold. The beer will be brewed near the church and the church officials will sell it in the church porch or churchyard. Games will be held, running, wrestling, shooting with the bow and

dancing round the maypole. The nave of the church may be used. The church was the centre of their social life. The sum realised by the sale of ale will be an important asset to the Church Fund.

If a wedding is to take place and the young couple not too well endowed with this world's goods, a Bride Ale may be held; and when sickness or poverty afflicts the elders, a Bid Ale is the recognised method of raising funds. Englishmen of the 16th century were stout drinkers of ale and there is little doubt that the Ales with their merrymaking were well patronised.

The association of the Church and Churchyard with games and rejoicings continued throughout the 16th century. After the Reformation some attempts were made to curb the practice but without much success. A Canon of the Church in 1571 and 1603 denounced the use of churches and churchyards for 'feasts, banquets, suppers, church ales and drinking.'

But in Elizabeth's day it was law that archery should be practised in the church yard 'on Sundays and holy days.' James 1st at the beginning of the 17th century tried to improve matters and it was enacted that none might take part in the 'lawful games in the churchyard' unless he had previously attended the Sunday service.

The practice of playing the Game of Fives against the church walls long continued and it is recorded as being carried on well into the 19th century at St. Briavels.

Tithes and oblations were the source of the priests' income. Farmers gave every 10th sheaf, 10th lamb, 10th egg, etc., to the priest and also certain proportions of his hay and wool. Craftsmen compounded for a sum fixed by custom and servants and hired labourers paid ½d. to the church four times yearly. All these dues could be sued for in the Consistory Court of the Bishop.

At churchings the women paid one penny to the priest and each of the three friends who must accompany her paid half that amount. At weddings the clerk usually received 3d. or 4d., and at the mass which followed the bride and bridegroom paid 1d. each. At burials a mass penny was paid and a farthing for two candles. Mortuaries were another source of income to the priest. These were clerical heriots and might consist of bedding or garments belonging to the deceased. The priest was also entitled to the large centre candle on the hearse or platform in the church on which the body of the dead person was laid, sometimes all the candles were claimed. We occasionally read of a priest, though not in Hewelsfield, doing quite a good trade in waste wax.

Once a year the villagers gathered together in the church to hear the Great Sentence or Excommunication pronounced after the mass. Preceded by the cross bearer and accompanied by a boy carrying a handbell the priest led the congregation into the churchyard and there in all solemnity spoke by authority of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, "We accuse X.Y. of……" and then would follow misdeeds ranging from murder to the withholding of tithes. After pronouncing the Anathema the priest holding aloft the Holy Book in his right hand, extinguished the lighted candle he held in his left, threw it contemptuously to the ground and spat on it while all the time the bell knelled the doom.

He was a bold man who defied the warning. But there are cases on record.

In 1510 Sir Roger Brayn – the title Sir was the equivalent of the present Rev.-perpetual vicar of the Vicarage of Lydney sued John Warren, of Hewelsfield, for subtraction of ecclesiastical dues and sacrilege. On 15th April of that year the defendant confessed that he had subtracted certain tithes and oblations and other ecclesiastical dues belonging to the said Mr. Brayn from the altar of the church of Hewellisfilde and expressed penitence. So the cause was adjourned 'in the hope of his good conversation.'

Four years later John Warren was dead and his executors paid a fee of 5s. at the proving of his will.

In 1512 Mr. Roger Brayne had trouble with one of his curates, Sir Thomas Wever, of St. Briavels, who was accused of subtracting church dues to the value of 40s. The Bishop's Court found him guilty and ordered the curate to repay the amount in two equal instalments.

Two years earlier the same vicar took action in the Consistory Court to protect his curate, Sir John Comcarvan, otherwise Kye, priest, 'late celebrating divine service in the church if Hewelysfied' and to uphold the Canon Law of the Church. The defendant, John Lawrence of Newland, was accused of 'laying violent hands' on the curate. The defendant denied that he 'laid violent hands' on the said priest, but confessed that he arrested him on suspicion of felony.

How this quarrel between Church and State ended we do not know.

The womenfolk lived busy, hardworking lives. No doubt but that Elizabeth and Agnes ruled their households firmly and were worthy mates of their farmer husbands, working on the land and in the

home. They would be consulted in every detail of daily life for to them would fall the household economy. The provision of food and clothing lay almost entirely in their hands. They made cheese, baked the dark coloured bread, tended the hives, grew their simples and sweet herbs in the garden patch, spun the wool, wove the cloth, and the required garments. They had to know the medicines of the age, and fearful concoctions they often made mice, lizards and frogs often entering into them. 'The witches brew' in Macbeth was but an exaggerated version of them.

They would look forward to the Christmas holiday and busily prepare all the food and drink they could. They would join in the games of blindman's buff and apple bobbing; sing the carols and the wassail song which is still hers in Hewelsfield on Twelfth Night.

With their husbands they may have made the pilgrimage to the shrine of Edward II, murdered in Berkeley Castle, in the great Abbey of St. Peter in Gloucester. The shrine was a source of income to the Abbey and the monks built the New Inn, now one of Gloucester's best known hotels, as a guest house for visitors. The spirit of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims flowed on into the 16th century.

Though a married woman's property passed into the control of her husband he could not alienate it. Sometimes by 'kisses or kicks' he might get her consent to dispose of it, but the law did give her some protection. Agnes evidently brought some property as her dower when she married John Hopkyns and her jointure is mentioned in his will. After his death it again became her sole property and could be willed as she might wish. Unmarried women over 21 years of age had the sole control of any property or money they might have inherited.

But this was not always an unmixed blessing. Covetous eyes were cast upon them and they might find themselves abducted and forced into marriage before a complacent priest. A certain Alice Carpenter, or Carpender, a member of a family which had lived in Hewelsfield for over 100 years, was a spinster with property of her own. She attracted the attention and interest of one of the Hopkyns family, named William. He claimed in 1520 to be her husband and Alice denied this. He brought his claim before the matrimonial court of the Bishop. The first hearing was held in the church of Ross on May 8th. No decision appears to have been reached. On June 23rd, of the same year, Alice Carpenter was sworn and asserted on oath that she had not contracted marriage with the plaintiff William Hopkyns nor had treaty with him. Our record does not give the court's decision, but then or shortly afterwards it must have

pronounced in favour of William Hopkyns, either on the grounds of an actual marriage or a betrothal ceremony, which was usually looked upon as binding in law. Alice was not resigned nor beyond rebellion. In 1523 a complaint was made to the Bishop's Court at Hereford that a young man named Heynys of Lancaut, with the support of his father and Sir John Pole, Rector of Lancaut, had made a clandestine marriage with Alice Carpenter, who is described as the wife of William Hopkyn of Hewelsfield. The two Heynes and Alice Carpenter were cited to appear before the Consistory Court at Hereford. The Bishop's Officer was seized by the Heynes – helped by the Rector, Sir John Pole. They proceeded to carry him to Chepstow Castle, threatening him that he would be imprisoned there until he had given surety. Before they reached Chepstow they became alarmed at their own temerity and released the officer.

The Diocesan Court summoned the Heynes, Alice Carpenter and the Rector of Lancaut to appear at Hereford to answer for their conduct. They did not obey the call and were promptly excommunicated. This severance from the church had an immediate effect. All surrendered and attended the Consistory Court at Hereford. The cause was heard, the defendants admonished and penances imposed. They were ordered to undergo six fustigations or public whippings in the churchyard of Lancaut.

We do not know whether the sentences were carried out. But they probably were, unless they managed to make a composition with the Court. It was possible to do this for a money payment, for in 1518 Matthew Wittynton of St. Briavels, who had been sentenced to three fustigations for irregular living had compounded for a fee of 10s., which was then the equivalent of four months daily pay for a workman. The fear of daughters being forced into unwelcome marriages led in the mediaeval ages to the custom of very early marriage. Even children of the tender years of five upwards, girls and boys, were often married and brought up together. These marriages of convenience were dictated by family ambitions, occurring almost without exception in well-to-do families, and did not apply to the young people in the more humble walks of life. Readers of the Paston Letters will recall the harsh treatment of daughters who rebelled against the prospective husband chosen for them, imprisonment in a room, short commons and severe whippings being not unusual.

The Hopkyns would attend the Court Leet at St. Briavels Castle, meeting Catchmays, Goughs, Machens, Whittingtons and Hathways, who flit across the pages of St. Briavels history. Places like the Synderhill, Petty Marsh, The Gill House, Aylesmore (or the great marsh), Harthill Court, St. Margaret's Chapel were well known to

them and they would probably enjoy the Indulgence of 90 days given in 1522 to those helping in the reparation of St. Margaret's Chapel near Bigsweir. They would now and then attend the Chantry Mass in St. Briavels Church, especially on the obit day of one of the family who left a sum of money secured on land in St. Briavels for a mass on the anniversary of his death. They would chat with the Chantry Priest, the remains of whose dwelling still stands in St. Briavels in East Street, then called Venys Street, speak to Juliana Hulin at her house door or salute Marion Catchmay in Horsepools. The Hulin family met with during the 18th and 19th centuries is still represented in St. Briavels and Hewelsfield.

SECTION III.
ODDS AND ENDS.

The Chantry Priest was not the priest who carried out the duties of the vicar, but one who served the Chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary in St. Briavels Church and daily prayed for the souls of the founders, now unknown, and all Christian souls in Purgatory. He also kept a village school and taught the Paternoster, Credo, and simple formulas of religion, with a little reading and writing to such children as presented themselves. The good cleric's salary was £6 3s. 9½d. per year, and when the last holder, Richard Fletcher, lost his post in the days of Edward VI he was compensated with a pension of £4, about two-thirds of his annual salary.

Chantries were wide spread in England during the 14th, 15th and early decades of the 16th centuries. Men donated lands to found and endow chantries, where in Shakespeare's words "the sad and solemn priests sing still for Richards's soul." The hopes and dears of the next world prompted these foundations. From the king on his throne to the humble cotter each and all endeavoured to be free from the wrath to come. The wealthy left large endowments, the poor gave their mite to ensure the never ending prayers, to quote the will of King Henry VII, "as long as the world shall endure." But alas, for their hopes. A marriage tangle in his son's life changed all and new ideas taking advantage of it brought the old order crumbling and toppling down to the dust.

The Hopkyns family continue in the records of the period. The last will proved in the Hereford Consistory Court was in 1530 and the next reference is found in the records of the then new Consistory Court at Gloucester, when Thomas Powell, the Vicar General of the Diocese, prayed for the imprisonment of Thomas Hopkyns and Katherine Hopkyns, widow, of the parish of Hewelsfield, who remain

excommunicated for 40 days and more after being denounced as excommunicates in their parish church for not appearing to answer the complaint of John Gethyn in right of …….Gethyn, his wife, administrator of the goods and credits of William Williams and Elizabeth his wife. What happened we know not.

In 1585 the will of William Hopkyns of 'Brockweare' was proved. The guardianship of his three children was granted to William Heynes and Pasck Williams who were bound in the sum of £40. This was a large surety and William must have been a prosperous man and apparently a widower. The name Heynes recalls the events of 63 years before 1585.

The Jane family were becoming richer. In 1560 William Jane, with William Lawrence were churchwardens, and they with parishioners Perdie, Lawrence and John Williams, presented at the Annual Visit of the Bishops Officer, that "the Channcell (Hewelsfield Church), lacks, reparation and glazings"; "that Elizabeth Gethin the younger of "Brockworthe" in the said parish 'is a common scold and is able to bring all the hole parish in discord.'

Was she doomed to the ducking stool? In 1543 and again in 1572, the churchwardens declared the 'chancell in decay.' It was the duty of the Vicar of Lydney to carry out these repairs but he appears to have been negligent.

In 1580 William Jane died and probate of his will was granted to Elizabeth his relict. The inventory exhibits £109 5s. 8d., about £5,000 in to-day's money.

In 1544 an interesting will was entered on the books of Gloucester Perogative Court Register. A part of it was quoted on page 17 in this record. Other items from it read John White of Heweldfielde "intendying by the grace of God to goo in the Kynges warres do make my testament as hereafter dothe follow," "my solle to God," "To Ancell the shoppe and the mylle etc." "and if my wyff do mary all my denture hold wych I have in Hewellsfylde at the day of her marage" "Johan my wyff to enjoy thes indenture durying here wedohod and after to Annchell" and "Anchell to teatche Edward (his youngest son) his craft or at the end of lafull yeres to deliver Edward a anvyel with a tole of every s." "I make Johan my wyff executryx." " Witness, Thomas White and Anncell My----------"

There is no date of proof and the year 1544 refers to the last call up of men for the wars with Scotland and France in the reign of King Henry VIII. John White was evidently a miller and a blacksmith. Anncell appears to be his partner, and perhaps a relative or even

his son. Three sons are mentioned in his will. The writer thinks this mill must be the one now standing at Brockweir or at least on the same site. About 50 years ago, when the mill pool was cleaned out a mediaeval pot of earthenware in a good state of preservation was found in it and is now in the possession of Mrs. Alice Prince, the owner of the mill, now disused.

The year 1587 brings the first-mention of a deep water sailor from Brockweir. Apparently he had been absent a long time and was thought dead for his wife Agnes applied for the administration of his goods which was granted. John Gethin, a yeoman, was surety for the execution of the order. Agnes was the wife of Richard Williams, spelt Willins in the text and Willim in the margin. There is a marginal note stating, "This man beinge at sea his wife took administracion his is livinge."

Did Richard Williams sail with Hawkins or Drake, or in a ship out of Bristol?

In 1603 George Catchmay of Bigsweir, Grandfather of Sir William Catchmay who married Elinor Gough of Hewelsfield was a partner in the 'Wyrre Works' at Tintern and the 'Yron Works' at Redbrook. His descendant, Tracey Catchmay, died in 1733 and his sister and heiress married James Rooke, carrying the estate to that family. This line became extinct in the early 19th century and the estate was willed to a collateral branch of the Rooke family, from whom is descended the present owner of Bigsweir. The name Catchmay still exists in 'Catchmay's Court' on the Monmouthshire bank of the Wye between Llandogo and Brockweir.

Useful dates.	Henry VII.	1485-1509.
	Henry VIII.	1509-1547.
	Edward VI.	1547-1553.
	Mary.	1553-1558.
	Elizabeth.	1558-1603.

Dissolution of Tintern Abbey.	1536.
Dissolution of Chantries.	1547.

Abolition of the Lord Marchership of Striguil, 1536 and the inclusion of the land between the Cone and the Wye in the county of Gloucester.

COATS OF ARMS.

The arms of Catchmay of Bigsweir “Two bars on a canton, five billets in saltire.”

According to Were, they should be “Or a fess between 3 demi lions passant azure.”

The Arms of William Warren of Wilsbury (died 1572).

“Checky or and azure.”

Gough of Huelsfeld. No Arms tricked.

According to Bigland, the family was descended from Sir Matthew Goche or Gough, who served in France under Henry V. The respect in which he was held by his Welsh countrymen is expressed in a monkish rhyme.

Morte Matthei Goghe – Cambrie clamitat Oghe!”
“At the death of Matthew Goche – Wales cries, Oh!”
(Itin W. de Worcester).

The Arms of Carpenter of Hewelsfield.
Arms; Quarterly 1st and 4th. Paly of six, Gules and Argent, on a chevron Azure, three cross Crosslets or, for Carpenter; 2nd and 3rd, three Estoiles and a chief vaire.

FINIS.

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