

CELEBRATIONS AT GREGYNOG A CENTURY AGO

By the late 1880s the Hanbury-Tracy family, the Barons Sudeley, of Gloucestershire and Gregynog, was heading for financial collapse following the failure of a number of business ventures. This did not, however, prevent them splashing out for the celebrations of the wedding of Eva Tracy, daughter of Lord and Lady Sudeley, to Mr H.J. Anstruther, MP for St Andrews, in September 1889

Gregynog Estate Steward William Scott-Owen recorded in his Commonplace Book:

“For a long time preparations had been made for a grand day’s amusements in honour of the Bride and Bridegroom. Tickets for tea were issued to nearly 2000 people & Dinner for tenants provided at the Temperance Inn for over 100.

A large tent 150ft long & 60ft wide erected on the Gregynog meadow, decorated with flags, mottoes and garlands. Tea tables for 800 were laid in the Tent & covered with Pot flowers – looking very well indeed.

Triumphal arches were erected on the Bridge and Entrance to Field and the Gardens & Grounds bedecked with Flags.”

It seems that nearly everyone in the neighbourhood had contributed to a wedding present. The estate tenants gave a diamond spray; the estate workmen gave a silver salver; the people of Llanwnnog gave silver dessert forks, and the workers of the Cambrian Mills in Newtown (which was supported by the Sudeleys at this time) gave a Worcester dessert service. Lady Sudeley’s Mother’s Meeting gave a Biscuit Box. “All the presents,” records Scott-Owen, “were exhibited in the Coach House watched by a Policeman.”

He continues: “All the subscribers from Newtown had been invited to the Hall, the Chief ones by letter from Lady Sudeley & the next Class by letter from Mr Owen. The first lot went to tea at 4 & the rest at 4.30 to 5.30. Every thing passed off well – weather favouring us and every body seemed thoroughly well pleased.

The whole thing was most difficult to carry out owing to the fear of offending some thro’ not being asked to go in first etc etc.”

The programme of events suggests that the family meant to ensure that a good time was had by all:

REJOICINGS
At
Gregynog Hall
On the occasion of the Return of the BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM

Mr & Hon. Mrs ANSTRUTHER

PROGRAMME

O'CLOCK

- 10 Dinner at the Temperance Hotel, Tregynon, to the Principal Tenants on the Estate.
2 Combined choirs to sing "Land of my Fathers" in front of the Hall.
2.15 Presentation of Gifts to the Bride and Bridegroom at the Hall
3 to 5 The Presents given to the Bride and Bridegroom will be on view at the Hall.
3 to 5.30 Tea for Ticket-holders will be served in a Large Tent on Gregynog meadow.

PUNCH & JUDY and COMIC NIGGERS will perform at intervals during the afternoon in the GREGYNOG MEADOW

[among the sports listed are]

DONKEY RACE 1st prize 5/-, 2nd 3/-, 3rd 1/-

Climbing GREASY POLE for Leg of Mutton placed on the top

EGG & SPOON RACE for Old Women, 1st Prize 5/-, 2nd 3/-, 3rd 1/-

CATCHING A PIG WITH A GREASY TAIL

QUOITING MATCH 1st Prize 5/-, 2nd 3/-, 3rd 1/-

Finale: "God Save the Queen"

THE NEWTOWN PRIZE BAND will be in attendance.

CHARLES HANBURY-TRACY'S COMING OF AGE

When Eva's brother Charles came of age in August 1891 the celebrations were just as lavish although by this time the family were in even worse financial straits. On the 8th August William Scott-Owen wrote in his Commonplace book of the "Rejoicings at Gregynog on the coming-of-age of Mr Charles."

Triumphal arches were erected at the various gateways to the estate, from Bwlchyfridd to Galloping Drive. At 10am the estate tenants formed a procession with a fat ox in a wagon and marched to Gregynog's front door where three cheers were given for the heir and the family. By this time, he notes, nearly 4000 were people present.

"Dinner for 200 in the Tent, speeches and presentation of an address & silver writing appointments. All the tenants photographed after dinner. At 3pm the subscribers from Newtown, New Mills and Llanwnog presented addresses and presents. Amusements in the field consisting of Races – Horse Races, Obstacle races, Greasy Pole, Merry-go-rounds, Swing boats. 500 cocoa nuts to throw at – Punch & Judy – Performing dog. Band and tea in tent 180ft long, for 2500 – and 500 at the Hall including all the gentry and tradespeople of Newtown. Weather dull with rain in the morning and again from 6.30 on." Scott-Owen's notes seem to finish with a sigh of relief: "All the people cleared off by 9 o'clock."

NEW PEOPLE AT GREGYNOG: THE JOICEY WEDDING

Only three years later a different family was celebrating a wedding at Gregynog. In 1904 the Sudeleys had been finally forced to sell Gregynog to Sir James, later Lord, Joicey, an industrial magnate from the north of England. William Scott-Owen stayed on as the estate steward and once again the notes in his Commonplace Book record the doings of the new family who seem quickly to have made themselves at home in the locality.

On September 23rd 1904 he records:

"Rejoicings to celebrate the wedding of James Arthur Joicey with Miss G.W. Burdon 250 Tenants and workmen sat down to dinner in a large tent, cost 3/- a head. Sir James gave 8 doz. Port which gave 4 glasses apiece – about 1250 sat down to tea in another large tent. Sports, singing by Male Voice Choir, Conjuring and Punch and Judy were provided, as well as a band. The weather was wet in the morning but cleared up and was fine for the rest of the day. Tenants presented a large silver salver & workmen an address & a family Bible. All went off well."

Lady Joicey became a much-loved figure in Tregynon. Scott-Owen records her helping the schoolchildren to plant daffodil bulbs around the village. When King George V was crowned at Westminster Abbey she entertained all the schoolchildren at Gregynog, providing tea, Coronation mugs, a Punch and Judy show, fireworks and a band. "The Parish provided tea for the adults and the Estate made a bonfire on the Boncin 30ft high",

notes Scott-Owen. "About 400 to 500 people present at rejoicings. Nineteen other bonfires were seen from the Bonkin. All passed off well."

But on July 4, 1911, he records

"To the universal sorrow of all **Lady Joicey** died in London after an operation for acute peritonitis. She was taken in on the 22nd (of June) and died at 12 noon on the 4th.

A Memorial Service was held in Tregynon Church on the 9th, the church being quite full, four of the local Clergy taking part in the service and the Non-Conformist Minister reading the lesson.

There were to be no more celebrations at Gregynog for many years...