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The Stepney and Chambers Families of Llanelly House: Exploring the 'Cultivation of Identity' of the Old and New Squirearchy in the Llanelli Landscape, Circa 1706-1855

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**The Stepney and Chambers Families of Llanelly House:
Exploring the 'Cultivation of Identity' of the Old and New
Squirearchy in the Llanelli Landscape,
Circa 1706-1855**

IMAGE REDACTED

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Abbreviations:

- CHRT - Carmarthenshire Heritage Regeneration Trust
- GA – Glamorgan Archives
- LHA – Llanelly House Archive
- LPC – Llanelli Parish Church
- LPL – Llanelli Public Library
- NLW - National Library of Wales
- PCW - People’s Collection Wales
- UWE - University of the West of England, Bristol

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Cover photograph courtesy of the Carmarthenshire Heritage Regeneration Trust

**This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Margaret
For instilling the love of history in me -
So many books, so little time!**

Introduction:

'I would rather remain at the head of the farmers than be at the tail of the gentry!'

Herbert Vaughan Esq. (1926, p.4).

Words spoken by a farmer following an invitation to become a magistrate, suggest the loss of respect for the gentry in early twentieth-century south-west Wales. Herbert Vaughan Esq., who was linked to the renowned Vaughan lineage of Carmarthenshire, identified the rapid decline of the Welsh landowner 'who will doubtless become as extinct as the dodo in another generation or so' (Vaughan, 1926, p.3). Historically, the squirearchy were leading figures in rural Welsh communities and many were English landed gentry who had the means to invest in Welsh industry. John Garrard identifies the 'notion of squirearchy' as a hereditary group of landed gentry, often titled and 'nurtured by primogeniture' (Garrard, 1995, p. 584). The Stepney family certainly fit this paradigm as generations of the family held landed estates in Pembrokeshire, where they gained the baronetcy, prior to their move to Llanelly House¹.

The early history of Llanelly House and the town is recorded in travelogues which reveal the sparsely populated village of Llanelli in a rural landscape. Observations recorded circa 1538 by English antiquary John Leland in his itinerary describe 'Llanethle, a village of Kidwelli lordship' (Leland, c.1535-1539). Leland made a comprehensive study of England and Wales on his travels, revealing an Anglicised view of Wales under English rule, though it is influenced by the class of the author. Significantly, Leland gathered information from books, local documentation and oral histories, which adds weight to its authenticity. Similarly, in 1795 topographer James Baker described an 'inconsiderable market town [...] Llanelly House is far the best object in the place' (Baker, 1795). Though it may reveal the author's predilection, it suggests that Llanelli had developed somewhat from the earlier village but still retained its isolation in the rural landscape. Following decades of Vaughan ownership, Llanelly House transferred to the Stepney family through the marriage of Sir Thomas Stepney, fifth baronet of Prendergast, to Margaret Vaughan. The baronet immediately remodelled and enlarged the property within the framework of contemporary fashions. Herbert Vaughan identified Llanelly House among a few named 'large and luxurious' Welsh

¹ Prior to 1974, Llanelli was known as Llanelly, therefore the property retains the original name.

residences of the gentry which reveals its eminence in the rural community (Vaughan, 1926, p.84).

David Bowen's *The History of Llanelli*, written for an Eisteddfod competition in 1856, recorded the small 'Stepney mansion' circa 1700 surrounded by minimal thatched housing, though no documentary evidence is available due to a paucity of records (Bowen, 1856, p.3). However, a 1761 Llanelli map does add weight to Bowen's suggestion of a small population. The map depicts Llanelly House in an imposing position in front of the church with very few buildings surrounding the extensive gardens (Appendix 1, Fig. 1). A brief historiography in the *Llanelly Trade Directory 1897* stated that the seventeenth-century Llanelly House was designed by renowned architect Inigo Jones, although it is impossible to evidence these claims due to the paucity of contemporary documentation (LTD, 1897, p.12). Significantly, archaeological finds during a recent restoration have found ornate mouldings from the pre-1714 property, which evidence a substantial and impressive early modern property, suggesting that Bowen may have devalued the importance of the dwelling (CHRT, 2014, p.11).

Existing historiography records the Stepney and Chambers families' residency in Llanelly House within the framework of conventional narratives. In 1902, John Innes wrote *Old Llanelly*, a retrospective book of reminiscence and historical facts, however much of the author's personal opinion is evident in the text (Innes, 1902). Comparatively, renowned historian John Edwards's research comprehensively delineates a general history of Llanelli (Edwards, 2007). The narratives give a clear indication of the elite position held by the Stepney and Chambers families but there is less appreciation of how the families cultivated their identity. While Gareth Hughes' *A Llanelli Chronicle* is a valuable source of historical newspaper reports, he claims it provides the 'opportunity of re-living Llanelli's past' (Hughes, 1984, p.vii). There is a risk of nostalgia clouding the representation of the town's elite figures if literature focuses on title and ancient lineage to define the urban elite. Additionally, Howard Jones's *Llanelli Lives* researches the background of the Chambers family and events in their history, though with less appreciation of Chambers' moral values (Jones, 2000, pp.28-41). This dissertation aims to contribute to Jones' historiography to identify Chambers process of gentrification. William Chambers' benevolence and compassion towards the community is recorded in many local newspaper reports but this

narrative will propose that there was an ulterior purpose to some of Chambers' actions through his cultivation of an elite identity. A report from the Cambrian newspaper in 1828 will be explored with a letter from William Chambers junior to consider to what extent Chambers supported and respected the community in his paternalist role (PCW, 2018). Additionally, Chambers junior's urban business ventures may suggest a change in the elitist identity of the 'new squirearchy' in favour of the community. To this end, a personal interview from the 1847 'Blue Books' report will be examined to reveal his underlying moral values.

There is a gap in existing research which does not consider the importance of the Llanelly House as a vehicle in the process of elite cultural expression. Therefore, Historian G.E. Mingay's *The Gentry* will be explored alongside Dana Arnold's *The Georgian House: Architecture, Landscape and Society* and Alan Wilson's *Comfort, Pleasure and Prestige* to explore the process employed by Sir Thomas Stepney to cultivate status and prestige through the medium of architecture and décor. Mingay argues that a central property gave a district some 'degree of permanence and a stable base' (Mingay, 1976, p.10). Architectural historian Dana Arnold states that country houses were an essential instrument to the development of social values, which suggests that the mansion could have been designed by a renowned architect who conferred aristocratic values within the architecture (Arnold, 1998, p.xiii). Mingay's research will also compliment David Howell's *Patriarchs and Parasites: The Gentry of South-West Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, to examine the processes employed by the Stepney family to cultivate an ancient lineage and identity within a new context. Howell argues that the gentry improved their estates through the process of urbanisation (Howell, 1986, p.110). Certainly, when the Stepney family inherited Llanelly House, it was situated in a rural landscape, but the urban landscape certainly developed following the squirearchy's cultivation of identity.

David Howell's research will also be explored alongside Philip Jenkins's *A History of Modern Wales 1536-1990* to examine the structure of the family groups, and to assess their success as the resident squirearchy. Philip Jenkins states that gentry are identified by titles, official positions in the town, the size of their homes or wealth. Moreover, he argues that the local gentry were powerful landowners who had great impact on everyday life in the community (Jenkins, 1992, pp.40-43). This dissertation will explore Jenkins' assumption in

relation to the Stepney and Chambers families, to determine whether they created positive changes to the community through their cultivation of identities. Moreover, Howell's narrative will be considered alongside M.D. Matthews study *'Adventurer of Both Ship and Cargo': Sir Thomas Stepney, Businessman and Baronet (1725-72)* to determine how successful Stepney was in creating his elite identity through industry (Matthews, 2012). Existing historiography recounts Sir Thomas's successful industrial career, but Matthews claims that Stepney was less successful as an entrepreneur. M. V. Symons' extensive industrial research delineates the business activities of the Stepney and Chambers families, with an intensive focus on their success in the coal industry (Symons, 2012). However, there is a gap in existing historiography in consideration of how both families used industry as a mechanism to reinforce their integrity within the upper elite hierarchy, which this article hopes to address. A reference to Francis Jones's *The Society of Sea Serjeants* will explore how the Stepney family socialised through the exclusive Jacobean society, with a consideration of the elitist criteria necessary for membership. This may reveal a more indulgent side to these squirearchal figures.

Existing historiography often relies on the political accolades, memorials and dedications to their peers. A reliance on these historical sources for urban elite studies can prevent historians from understanding the processes involved in cultivating an elite identity. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a case study on one property to reveal its role in the cultivation of elite identities. To that end, this dissertation will conduct a study of the Stepney and Chambers families of Llanelly House from circa 1706 to 1855 to explore issues identified in this dialogue, within the context of creating an elite identity through the vehicles of architecture, industrialisation and urbanisation in Llanelli. Furthermore, it will assess whether the Stepney and Chambers families were successful in their paternalist role to remain a respected identity in Llanelli town.

Chapter 1:

Architecture – a vehicle for the cultivation of an elite identity

The arrival of Sir Thomas Stepney, fifth baronet of Prendergast at Llanelly House in 1706 marked a major change for the village of Llanelly, and the start of the process to construct the locality. Arthur Mee's 1888 study of the Parish Church and surrounding landscape stated that the arrival of the 'fifth baronet and grandson of Vandyck, commences the connection [...] between our town and an old honourable house'. Previously, Llanelly House was home to a branch of the illustrious Vaughan family of Golden Grove, whose ancient honourable lineage received little recognition in Mee's narrative. Significantly, this reveals the prestige bestowed by Mee due to the renowned identity of Vandyck and suggests that the Stepney squirearchy had successfully constructed an elite identity in Llanelli (Mee, 1888). Although it should be noted that Arthur Mee was a respected resident and son of a minister, an amateur historian and journalist, so it is doubtful that he would portray the Stepneys in a negative light. Moreover, in an article in *The Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* in 1903, Mee argues for the respectful 'four centuries of public service' by the Stepneys. Significantly, a quote in his deferential article in defence of the Stepneys reveals the existence of an alternate opinion of the elite family who were 'unfit men for the performance of their duty to their fellows' (Mee, 1903, p.2). The dominance of accolades bestowed on the squirearchy by their peers often prevents historians from gaining a true insight into contemporary opinions of the Stepney family. However, Mee's narrative suggests a detachment between the Stepneys and the local community.

Sir Thomas's intermarriage with the Vaughan lineage provided the ideal opportunity to assign his own cultural values through the reconstruction of the Vaughan property, as a means to 'cultivate a sense of history' (Jenkins, 1984, p.31). It was a process which Eric Hobsbawm identifies as an invented tradition, to imply some 'continuity with the past' (Hobsbawm, 2012, p.1). The central location of Llanelly house played a significant role in the construction of the family's identity, to root the ancient Stepney ancestry firmly within a new context. G.E. Mingay suggests that the social and political importance of the property was an investment, but also a means to achieve an exclusive status in the community (Mingay, 1976, p.10). However, Dana Arnold warns that the property is not just an

architectural body for investment. Rather, it is an essential instrument in the process of developing social values. Moreover, Arnold states that reading the architectural form helps to understand the relationship between cultural practices and artefacts (Arnold, 1998, p.xii). Taken another way, Llanelly House was a tangible instrument which had a cultural value in the process of cultivating an ancient identity within a new context. This allusion of an ancient squirearchy in the new county was a reinforcement of Stepney's squirearchal roots from Prendergast in Pembrokeshire, where the family lineage dated from 1565. Herbert Vaughan, himself a member of the elite, defines the qualifications for the rank of squire to be a 'mansion [...] home-farm [...] and estate' (Vaughan, 1926, p.4). Indeed, in 1626, one of his ancestors Sir William Vaughan defines the gentry in terms of personal qualities rather than material wealth - Courtesy, mercy and benevolence were essential characteristics (Mingay, 1976, p.2). When read against the process adopted by Sir Thomas, this does suggest a change in the squirearchal values towards a focus on tangible means of identity.

Comparably, Philip Jenkins suggests that the criteria of offices, titles and size of properties can identify the gentry, but argues that ultimately wealth is the fundamental issue (Jenkins, 1992, p.43). Indeed, Sir Thomas successfully qualified on all points through inheritance of his own family estate and as the husband of an heiress. He gained wealth, a substantial estate with a mansion, an income over £2000 a year and Machynys farm. A 1761 Llanelli map shows how Sir Thomas imposed his personal values by surrounding Llanelly House with classical elements from English landed estates (Appendix A, Fig 1). The property became a 'symbol of power and wealth [...] the social, cultural and political hegemony' of the Stepneys (Arnold, 1998, p.16). On the other hand, whilst David Howell agrees on these qualities, he points out that they did not bring 'equality of membership' within the elite circle (Howell, 1986, pp.12 & 171). A pre-nuptial settlement dated the eighth December 1691 secured the manor of Prendergast, lands and mills in three parishes, and rectories, chapels and tithes in six further parishes for the use of Sir Thomas for his life. Thus the estates were entailed to his son John, preventing Sir Thomas from selling any land (Green, 1918, p.134). The continuation of the seventeenth-century practice ensured the success of the family lineage to maintain their wealth and upper elite identity in society; a necessary action due to the nebulous transfer and sale of estates through successive intermarriage between elite families (Habakkuk, 1950, p.15).

It was essential for Sir Thomas to visually evidence his prestige and ancestry, which he successfully achieved through the aggrandisement of the tangible architecture of Llanelly House. The property evolved into a towering three-storey mansion with transposed aspects of the eighteenth-century contemporary revival of Palladianism. The Venetian style windows were a feature often employed by architect Inigo Jones, which could add weight to the claim that he designed the earlier structure owned by the Vaughan family, though it is unknown how much of the original building remained within the remodelled mansion (UWE, 2009). Indeed, the precepts of architect Andrea Palladio - 'utility, durability and beauty', were integral to Stepney's process of constructing a sense of place to cultivate an elite identity (Cranfield, 2001, p.16). Wilson elaborates this point stating that the Welsh gentry's driving force was the pursuit of comfort, pleasure and prestige (Wilson, 2016, p.1). The structural layout of the pre-1914 property still exists, though considerably enhanced and extended through the canon of Georgian architecture. A parapet wall conceals the apex roof, a feature employed by classical designers, raising the frontage to denote a higher status. Fashionable Baroque-style stone urns adorn the roof, with elegant pineapple and acanthus finials dominate the skyline, thereby lifting the eye-line higher to convey grandeur. Moreover, the intricately moulded leaden rainwater hoppers and downpipes carried his coat of arms to impress peers and the community, and was dated on completion '1714', (CHRT, 2014, p.16). It was an essential mark of identity to link Sir Thomas to the eminent structure and a means to acquire a lasting memorial in the Llanelli landscape. The external rendering was scored to represent 'ashlar' dressed stone, a less costly approach to mirror grand English architecture. This could be due to the local craftsmen having limited knowledge of newer building techniques prior to the wide availability of pattern books. It is doubtful that it reveals Sir Thomas's frugality, as the luxurious furnishing of the interior suggests that economy was not of prime importance to the family (Hughes, 2016, p.4). Indeed, it does reveal that Stepney's cultural values lay within the fabric of contemporary English great estates. Stephen Bending suggests that this reveals the commercialised landscaping culture of the patrician elite. Additionally, Bending suggests it was a tangible mechanism employed by the elite to exclude the majority of society, to demonstrate their elitism. Stepney created intricately landscaped gardens, stables, an orchard and a long avenue of trees which stretched out towards the coastline which conforms to the identity-building practices of English society (Bending, in Arnold, 1998, p.61). Furthermore, Dana

Arnold suggests that the metaphorical function of the house is identified by its status as a symbol of power and wealth. Moreover, it reinforces the physical function of the property's identity as a residence, a business and a backdrop to the wealth of collections contained within. Significantly, the values attached to Llanelly House as a symbol of patrician authority are greater than the intrinsic meaning of the property (Arnold, 1998, p. 16).

Chapter 2:

Décor – a reinforcement of a paternalist identity

Sir Thomas Stepney, seventh baronet, continued the process to visually augment the family status through the internal décor of Llanelly House. The interior had the classical features of grand English Georgian mansions embellished with curved archways, an elaborate dog-leg staircase, intricately moulded plasterwork and symmetrical Palladian layouts. Mingay suggests this was a channel to express Stepney's interests and personality (Mingay, 1976, p.148). Conversely, Arnold argues that the property took the form of a stage for the Stepneys to perform their highly visible paternalistic displays, and this study diverges from Mingay's opinion in agreement with Arnold (Arnold, 1998, p. 16). The Décor was a significant tool in the process employed by Stepney to cultivate a superior identity in the community, which can be evidenced through the internal architectural features of the house. Several rooms were lined with full height wainscot wooden panelling which despite the remote location of the property in Wales, was compatible with contemporary taste in grand English estates (Hughes, 2016, p.9). This also suggests the wealth of the baronet, and the extent to which he calculated his squirearchical identity.

Similarly, the first floor Great Gallery was an architectural feature utilised to display twenty-two gilt-framed family portraits. The key point here is how Stepney used classical architectural features and portraiture in a critical process for the tangible display of elitism. The décor is infused with a symbolic communication revealing the Stepneys' own values and aspirations. Significantly, one portrait which stands out as a paradigm of the extravagance of the Stepney family, in the process to cultivate their elitism, is the portrait of Sir John Stepney, eighth baronet, painted by renowned artist Sir Joshua Reynolds (CHRT, 2014, p36).

Moreover, the family's pretention did not stop at portraiture. The antechamber to Lady Stepney's 'Best Chamber' is adorned with hand painted grisaille work, to resemble three-dimensional sculptural features which would traditionally depict the archetypal trinity of the goddess Venus, the god Faunus and Cupid. However, Cupid was replaced with an image of Lady Stepney herself (Anthony, 2018). The imagery played a crucial part in the maintenance of her elite identity, as visitors would pass through the antechamber to her chamber. Significantly, it also betrays how Lady Stepney perceived herself through symbolic imagery to signify her virtue.

Stepney focused on aesthetically pleasing objects in the form of ancient art to furnish the property, to imbue a sense of continuation with the past. In 1764 the seventh baronet wrote an inventory of Llanelly House which itemised the complete furnishings and décor which is a valuable document, reflecting the role of artefacts as a tangible means of identity. The inventory plays a substantial role in translating the lifestyle and abode of the family, delineating the contents of thirty-five named rooms. Of great significance are the values which he attached to the armorial service in particular. The origin of the service is listed as 'Tea Table China with the arms, came to Llanelly House 1762' (GA, GB 0211a). The armorial service depicts the Stepney coat of arms with Lloyd in pretence, thereby proclaiming the seventh baronet's marriage with an heiress – a visual language which exhibited their ancient lineage, confirms and exhibits their elite identity. Only the richest families had the means to commission such an exclusive dinner service, which therefore clearly indicates the baronet's wealth. Significantly, this suggests that Sir Thomas considered it the ultimate achievement of a successful elite identity, and ensured it was well documented. Moreover, these artefacts were used to cultivate an identity and meaning within the rooms of Llanelly house, and in the process of constructing the layout of rooms with these objects, Stepney created a metaphorical 'theatre' where he could perform his paternalist rituals and routines (Arnold, 1998, p.16). In agreement with Arnold, Alan Wilson's *Comfort, Pleasure and Prestige* suggests that the country house provided a 'stage [...] to display their affluence, status and style (Wilson, 2016, p.1). Significantly, Wilson's argument confirms Stepney's use of the fabric and form of the house to entertain and showcase his wealth. Indeed, Arnold further suggests that it evidences the rising interest in

the past, with a validating effect in the present for the creation of an identity (Arnold, 1998, p.107).

Lloyd and Lord describe the service as 'one of the finest ever made for a British patron'. Furthermore, they claim that tangible artefacts played a role as a symbol of the elite Stepney identity and the 'mindset and material success of the money-minded, trading family' (Lloyd & Lord, 2003, p.10). Yet their report in 2003, written in preparation for the restoration of Llanelly House, states and that the fifth baronet 'showed no inclination for expensive boastful refinement'. Furthermore, they claim that Llanelly House architecture has its roots in the narrow streets of mercantile Bristol where Sir Thomas held trade links, as there is little room to admire the house frontage (Lloyd & Lord, 2003, pp. 11-13). While the report unquestionably identifies the Stepney trade links in Bristol, this dissertation counters their claim that Sir Thomas was not ostentatious. The house was reconstructed in a rural area when very few buildings existed in the Llanelli landscape. It is essential to understand how the proximity of Llanelly House to the Parish Church would influence Stepney's decision to create an equally striking presence through the towering embellished architectural monument, visible from the church and at a great distance. Moreover, the authors have understated the importance attached to the armorial service as a vehicle used in the process to cultivate his identity, preferring instead to allude to Stepney's expression of pride in his collection.

Comparably, the symbolic paternalist 'performance' of the property as a vehicle of gentrification should be addressed. Matthew Cragoe states that the Carmarthenshire elite were a well-defined social group not alienated from their communities (Cragoe, 1996, p.16). For fifty-five years the Stepneys disappeared from Llanelli in favour of the London city life and Llanelly House became a desolate entity. Their disappearance deserves further research within the discourse of identity, which cannot be sufficiently explored in this study. Certainly they do not conform to Cragoe's statement. In 1795, English traveller Henry Skrine's *Tours Through Wales* mentions 'the miserable village of Llanelly [...] famous for nothing but a deserted seat of the Stepneys (Skrine, 1795). Skrine was well educated in the legal field, and therefore may have held an air of superiority in his view of a tiny working class village. Significantly, while confirming the disappearance of the elite family, Skrine also reveals that Llanelli had not yet developed into an urban locality.

Chapter 3: Landscape – a transition through industry and urbanisation

As the Llanelly estate landowner, Sir Thomas leased much of the estate to colliery entrepreneurs, choosing not to establish a business himself. Symons argues that landowners were hesitant to establish their own collieries because of the 'risk that scarcely any prudent individual will venture upon', choosing a visible patriarchal identity in the community (Symons, 2012, p.29). In 1724, cartographer Herman Moll who travelled extensively to produce maps, published his travelogue which described Llanelli as 'a pretty good town, well traded into'. Significantly this reveals that the process of urbanisation had commenced through the growth of industry (Moll, 1724). David Howell identifies how the squirearchy exploited mineral reserves on their estates, which was crucial to their incomes, economic development and for the cultivation of prestige. Additionally, Howell disagrees with Symons, claiming that the Stepney family were personally involved in mining enterprises, which suggests they were an active identity in the industrial arena. One significant aspect delineated by Howell is the involvement of Lady Elizabeth Stepney in her business correspondence which reveals her active participation and authority in the business community, which suggests that she retained her elite identity as an heiress (Howell, 1986, pp. 91-94).

The seventh baronet clearly endeavoured to augment the elite Stepney identity further, using shipping and local industry as a vehicle to elevate his status and to bankroll his family's lavish lifestyle. M.D. Matthews's research has revealed that the seventh baronet owned many vessels and also 'inherited a tradition of exploiting coals under his lands'. Surviving correspondence between Sir Thomas and various merchants reveals the diversity of his business ventures, in coal, lead, and copper industries and the worldwide shipping of commodities. A letter written by Andrew Jones revealed that Sir Thomas was building a new vessel and had several others, which suggests his tremendous investments in the shipping industry (LPL, 1101). Similarly, a letter to John Pender of Penzance discusses the fitting out of the vessel 'Prince Charles' (NLW, 1748); a name which, according to Matthews reveals Stepney's 'Jacobite sympathies' (Matthews, 2003, pp.457-464). Matthews' research argues that the seventh baronet's enterprises were not successful due to unprofitable trading deals. Symon's narrative correlates with Matthews, citing a Stepney Estate letter from 1755 to prove that 'Stepney's industrial interests did not flourish'. Though significantly, despite Sir

Thomas's failure as an entrepreneur, Symon's suggests that he was the pivotal figure in the first phase of industrialisation in Llanelli (Symons, 1979, pp.47-49).

Certainly, despite an apparently unsuccessful career, Sir Thomas's seemed to sustain an elite identity in the company of his peers. His business associations and Jacobite affiliations can be evidenced by his membership of the secret elite *Society of Sea Serjeants* based in West Wales, which existed from 1726 until 1762. The exclusivity of its membership, with only twenty-five full members reveals the esteemed identity achieved by Sir Thomas. Francis Jones quotes society President Sir John Philipps, to reveal their aims were 'to spend a week together in innocent mirth', attending teas, dinners, balls and boating trips, though the members' mutual support in the political arena is well documented (Jones, 1967, p.61). Another tangible vehicle of Stepney's identity can be identified in Sir John Philipps's diary on the fifteenth July 1760 when he 'went with ye Gentlemen of ye society on board Sir Thomas Stepney's yacht' (Jones 1967, p.72). Moreover, Jones disclosed the restrictive criteria for membership; almost all were members of landed families, with many linked through the elite practice of intermarriage. Undoubtedly, Sir Thomas was a very active member in the events of high society. Notably, in *The History of Carmarthenshire*, John Lloyd states that members were 'of the most considerable fortune and consequence in the county' (Lloyd, 1939, p.116). Jones and Lloyd both agree on the elite identity and wealth achieved by Sir Thomas, which suggests that Matthews may have understated the success of Stepney's career. Moreover, household bills from the Stepney estate reveal that large quantities of wines, meats and groceries were purchased for the family yacht with no expense spared (GA, GB 211b). Similarly, the 1764 inventory lists 'four pairs of linen Holland sheets for the yacht' (GA, GB 0211a). This study suggests that Stepney conforms to Martin Wiener's argument that industrial success led to a period of gentrification when successful industrialists sought to expand their estates rather than pursue further industrial success (Wiener, in Roderick (1987), pp.66-67).

However, there may be evidence of a change in the community through the actions of the 'new squirearchy' of Llanelly House. The Chambers family moved into the property in 1827, and immediately restored the dilapidated property with Chambers' own elitist values, retaining the gentrified framework cultivated by the Stepneys. F.M.L. Thompson states that the new squirearchy had to adopt the conventions of gentrified behaviour in their style of

living (Thompson [1963], in Wilson, 2016, p.7). Chambers was not from a titled family, though his Oxford education suggests his wealthy background, therefore Llanelly House once again became a vehicle to cultivate an identity. Chambers' arrival was an immediate turning point in the construction of the locality and the growth of urbanisation. In 1828 The Cambrian newspaper reported the opening, of the new Llanelli Market where 'every attention has been paid to the convenience of the public' (Cambrian, 1828, p.1). It is essential to understand the context of the old market, situated in the yard behind Llanelly House which was relocated onto a peripheral area away from the immediate surroundings of the property. Moreover, it is important to recognise this process of gentrification practiced by Chambers' to cultivate his new elite identity through the seclusion of the surrounding landscape. Surprisingly, John Innes revealed how the Chambers family proposed the removal of the graveyard of the Parish Church immediately opposite Llanelly House, to turn the whole area into a garden, with the provision of land for a cemetery elsewhere. Indeed, in the 1840's Chambers successfully claimed four feet of the churchyard to widen the road in front of Llanelly House (Innes, 1902, p. 76). Significantly, this illustrates the extent to which Chambers wanted to develop his exclusive identity by visually incorporating the surrounding landscape within the rural embodiment of his estate, with little compassion for the community. This study suggests that Chambers' actions were a mechanism in his construction of elitism. He ensured that existing businesses were removed from the visual surroundings of Llanelly House through a process which cultivated the landscape, to attach his elitist values within the environment.

The 1854 'Painting by Mrs Harvard' portrays the monumental structure of Llanelly House, but more importantly, it evidences how Chambers further developed the landscape, with walled gardens surrounding property to create Llanelly Park (Appendix 2, 1854). The amateur painting is a valuable record of the developing town which enables historians to visualise Chambers' detachment created through the cultivation of a gentrified identity. Chambers expanded his theatre of elitism into the surrounding landscape, which served to develop an attachment to Llanelli, yet maintained a social separateness from the local community (Mingay, 1976, p.153). Additionally, he took little time to impact a visual presence within the community; taking up prominent positions as High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire, Portreeve, and magistrate to cultivate his authority over the community.

Cragoe's research into Carmarthenshire's magistracy reveals that few men with substantial property were not on the bench. Furthermore, Cragoe delineates the great cost involved to achieve the status of High Sheriff which was regarded as a 'stepping stone to social acceptance' (Cragoe, 1996, pp.76 & 83). However, Mingay contends that only a quarter of magistrates were actively conducting their work (Mingay, 1976, p.128). The significant expenditure indicates the commitment of Chambers in pursuit of a gentrified identity. Previously, the Stepney baronets took the position of High Sheriff in Carmarthenshire, but held less professional roles in comparison to Chambers. Importantly, it suggests a change following the arrival of the new squirearchy, for the benefit of the community.

In the mid nineteenth-century William Chambers junior took a more active interest in the community, signalling a possible change in his paternalist values. A letter written by Chambers in June 1846 suggests his benevolence towards the population. He proposed to devote land, rent free, for the education of poor children. Chambers does however delineate the specific process and exact use of the land which suggests he maintained an authority over the population. Moreover, it shows Chambers' active participation in his paternalist role in the community and reveals the cultural values he held within a framework of English paternalist ideals. In the letter he shows the influence of Anglicisation within the gentrified ranks, stating that 'the system has worked in poor agricultural districts in England' (PCW, 2018). Interestingly, this suggests that Llanelli is still considered a comparably rural district despite the growth of industry and housing locally. This can be confirmed by a drawing of Llanelli circa 1848 which shows clusters of cottages around small industries (Appendix A, Fig. 3). Nonetheless, it does demonstrate urban growth under the leadership of Chambers junior.

Significantly, in his position of authority in Llanelli, Chambers junior was interviewed in 1846 for the *Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales* – a valuable document to gain an insight into the moral values held by Chambers (LPL, 2018, pp.478 & 486). The report on Welsh education followed a period of unrest following the Rebecca Riots, which involved Chambers personally in his role as magistrate. It was seen as a scathing attack on the Welsh language, Nonconformity and the 'immoral' population in Wales. Chambers' interview reveals his harsh views of the community who he believed held 'an obstinate perseverance to ancient customs [...] possessed a degree of intelligence [...]

and impropriety of conduct', which was undoubtedly influenced by his legal authority (LPL, 2018). Historian Neil Evans claims the aim of the blue books was to civilise the Welsh and Chambers certainly conforms to this Anglicised ideology (The Open University, 2018a). Chambers' words imply a less charitable appreciation of the Welsh working class, which mirrored the 'sense of English superiority' of the commissioners of the enquiry (The Open University, 2018b). Significantly, it evidences his air of superiority nineteen years after arriving at Llanelly House, suggesting the successful cultivation of his elite identity and authority in the community. Nevertheless, on his departure from Llanelli in 1855, he was presented with a silver plate by the community which suggests he successfully created an elite benevolent identity. However, a letter from Chambers appeared in *The Welshman* newspaper in August 1855 which suggests a less amicable reception from farmers who accuse him of using inferior hay in his stables (Welshman, 1855). Additionally, it should be considered that insufficient documentation exists to reveal the class of donors for the plate, whether from the workforce or his peers.

One last consideration is the process of memorialisation of both squirearchal families in the Llanelli landscape. The church monument to the seventh baronet alludes to his direct descent from Henry VIII (LPC, 1772). This illustrates the process to cultivate an elite identity continued after death, although the royal connection was through an indirect lineage. A newspaper report in the *Llanelly Mercury* in July 1909 reveals the history behind naming many Streets within the town. Indeed, the Stepney family and many ancient family names, including military service, are commemorated in the naming of Llanelli streets (*Llanelly Mercury*, 1909, p.3). In comparison, only one street bears any connection to the Chambers family, that of Pottery Street, a connection to the distinctive industry in the town. This suggests that the identity and ancient lineage of the Stepneys held more power and authority within the town, than the extensive urbanisation created through Chambers junior in his process of gentrification.

Conclusion:

Through the study of local historiographies, a gap was identified which needed to address how the squirearchy cultivated their elite identity using the tangible architecture of Llanelly

house and landscape as a vehicle to recreate an ancient lineage. Furthermore, it was essential to provide a historic background of the Llanelli rural landscape, to appreciate the process and progress of urbanisation and industrialisation which evolved through the cultivation of identity. To that end, this dissertation has identified that the Stepney and Chambers families successfully adopted and manipulated the English canon of Georgian architecture to create their elite identity and continued to allude to their ancient lineage, which can be seen in many local historiographies. Similarly, it reveals the cultural values that Sir Thomas placed on antiquity to cultivate his identity, which he attached to the armorial service in particular. Moreover, this study determines that they successfully developed the landscape as a tangible vehicle to exclude the majority of society, maintaining their detachment from society to demonstrate their elitism.

Comparatively, local narratives focus on the industrial endeavours of the elite leaving a gap in the research of industry as a mechanism for identity. This study proposes an alternative view to M.D. Matthews to argue that Stepney was successful in creating a business identity, not just locally but worldwide. However, he invested heavily into his social life to cultivate and maintain his prominent identity attained through industry, instead of re-investing in his industrial endeavours. Therefore, this dissertation proposes that his extravagant lifestyle ultimately had a detrimental effect on his business activities, and not his failure to construct an elite identity through the success of industry.

Llanelli's rapid urbanisation under the paternalist authority of Chambers junior suggests that through his process of gentrification, he successfully created business opportunities which benefitted the community as a whole. As the drawing of 1848 has illustrated, workers cottages were built around the new industries in an endeavour to create a positive change in the community. However, whilst he did succeed in becoming a notable identity in the town, his superior authority as shown in the 1846 interview, betrayed his high moral values which unfairly judged the Welsh population. Nonetheless, through Chambers' paternalist identity Llanelli successfully flourished through urbanisation to the benefit of the population. This study has briefly commented on the role of Lady Stepney, but further research is essential to understand the cultivation and role of gendered elite identities in Llanelli House. Moreover, independent studies of the roles of industry, religious authority and politics would be welcome additions through the theme of identity.

Appendix 1:

Llanelli maps delineating urban growth centred around Llanelly House

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1, Llanelli 1761, unknown artist, traced by Evan Evans, Llanelli (LHA)

This map illustrates the development of formal gardens on the Llanelly House estate, with a long avenue of trees which stretch towards Machynys Farm, also owned by the Stepney family.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2 *Llanelly House and estate, 1841*, unknown cartographer (LHA)

The drawing illustrates the expanse of the Llanelly House estate fourteen years after William Chambers' arrival. Significantly it shows aspects of symmetrical English country gardens.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3 *Llanelli circa 1848*, David Hughes, (LHA)

The drawing illustrates the appearance of small industry in the Llanelli landscape, William Chambers' Llanelly Pottery is situated to the rear of his vast Llanelli estate.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4 *Llanelly in 1860* five years after Chambers' departure, (LHA)

This map illustrates the wide development of the town which still retained housing and businesses established by William Chambers junior. Businesses continued to develop around Llanelly House.

Appendix 2:

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4 'Mrs Havard's Painting 1854', Mrs Havard in *Old Llanelly*, John Innes (1902)

The image is painted by the wife of the Reverend Stephen P. Harvard, a Wesleyan minister. It portrays the Parish Church with Llanelly House to the right. The image reveals the impressive size of the property, with a high wall enclosing the gardens, serving to isolate the gentry from the local community.

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