Did John Ogilby complicitly map a route from Aberystwyth to London as part of clandestine plans for a Catholic invasion of England and Wales, at the behest of Charles II?

Or, Upon The Wondrous John Ogilby Esquire and His Mysterious Map of Aberiftwith, Published Upon the Divine Orders of His Majestie Charles II in The Year of Our Lord MDCLXXV

Written by a Gentleman

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to the late Derek Bissell and his widow Ena, who together did so much pioneering work mapping the Ogilby roads of Wales. Following Derek's recent death Ena very kindly lent me his research papers (2009), enabling me to follow the Welsh section of the Aberystwyth route.

I am also very grateful to my son Harry who constructed the table of contents, a personal friend Eirian, who took the time to read my draft dissertation and spot all the typos and grammatical errors – all those that remain are clearly my responsibility – and her husband Chris, who kindly (and greatly) improved the quality of my map photographs.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Secret Treaty of Dover (1670) had, on the face of it, little about it that would concern the people of Wales, least of all those geographically or socially beyond the direct influence of the upper echelons of society. In essence the Treaty covertly paved the way for Charles II to convert to Catholicism with the support of his French cousin Louis XIV, who would assist the transition both financially and, crucially, militarily (6000 troops to help conquer any rebellion) (Hutton, 1986; Uglow, 2009). In *Terry Jones's Great Map Mystery*, a BBC 2 television series first broadcast in 2008, the presenter Terry Jones[1] made the hitherto unremarked claim that in fact Wales, or more precisely the small and (very) remote settlement of Aberystwyth, was directly involved in this putative sea change in the British constitution; Jones proposed that John Ogilby (1600-1676) (Figure 1) in his landmark publication '*Britannia, Volume the First, or an Illustration of the Kingdom of England and Dominion of Wales*'[2] (1675) incorporated three plates - the very first of the 100 in the volume - clandestinely mapping the route by road from there to London as an aid to invading French forces, landing in support of Charles II, at his behest and in his hour of need, in accordance with the Treaty of Dover.

Jones's proposition remains undiscussed within academic literature. Although Alan Ereira considers the topic in his 2016 biography of Ogilby, *The Nine Lives of John Ogilby* (2016), the book is written by the director/writer of the television programme and, not surprisingly, emerges in support of it. There is therefore scope for a more detailed reflection of the idea and an opportunity to evaluate evidence that would appear to support or hinder Jones's claim, and this would be best served by asking a number of fundamental questions. Was, for instance, Charles II likely to have actually wanted such a map and, if so, would he have asked John Ogilby to provide it? Can we test Jones's proposition in more depth by examining the London to Aberystwyth map itself; would it have actually been of significant use to an invading force? And what about the locale: what were Aberystwyth's defensive structures like and was it a feasible landing ground for the French; was the harbour, for

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[1] I refer to Jones for simplicity; Alan Ereira wrote the script and produced the programme
[2] Referred to henceforth as *Britannia* for brevity

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Figure 1. John Ogilby (1600-1676) from his 1660 translation of Iliad (picture: Britannica Image Quest, 2019)

example, physically capable of receiving navy ships? Would the provision of local resources such as accommodation and food be required and, if so, are they reflected in the map to offer assistance? Straying further into the *Britannia*, what other Welsh ports and harbours were mapped in addition to Aberystwyth, and can we propose that any one (or more) of them would have made for more logical places to start an invasion. Most fundamentally, can other viable proposals be put forward that would account for the presence of a map from the capital to, seemingly, such a remote and unimportant settlement in far-flung Wales?

Just two biographies of John Ogilby have been written since his death: Alan Ereira's (2016) is arguably the more complete work available but Katherine Van Eerde's *John Ogilby and the Taste of His Times* (1976) is also an important source of information, after which though there is very little. John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* (Clark, 1898) includes a short resumé of Ogilby's life but its 'gossipy' (McCrum 2013) tone renders it less than wholly reliable.

A number of writers have considered the *Britannia per se* but generally from a fairly narrow perspective: Petto (2016), Fordham (1925), Dickinson (2003) and Satchell (2017) fall into this category whilst other academics, such as Murár (2014), have examined Ogilby's other roles, for instance as a key figure at Charles II's coronation, but also embraced the *Britannia* to a greater or lesser extent. Only the late Derek Bissell (amateur historian and researcher to the BBC television series) has written specifically about Ogilby's maps of Wales (Bissell, 2001, 2005, 2009), though even he did not address the central question of Aberystwyth's role. Mike Parker (2009, pp. 215-216) – yet another contributor to the television series – mentions Aberystwyth's possible role in an invasion and quotes Professor Ronald Hutton as a fellow supporter (albeit in subsequent personal correspondence Hutton has back-tracked somewhat in acknowledging that it was no more than an interesting but unproven idea (Hutton, 2019)).

Work on understanding late seventeenth-century Aberystwyth (as opposed to Wales more generally) is sparse (possibly compounding the mystery as to why Ogilby mapped his way there), however this is pivotal to determining whether it was feasible at a simple geographical level – harbour, terrain, defences – for any large well-equipped army to land and proceed to London. A map was all very well but of little practical use if local conditions were insurmountable. However, Aberystwyth was not altogether ignored by visitors: an anonymous account in the early 1650s (Cornish and Plant, 2001, p. 15) and one by Daniel

Defoe (1724-26) offer some insight and some contemporary (and earlier) maps of Wales other than Ogilby's exist to help determine Aberystwyth's relevance.

But it is the original 1675 *Britannia* maps and accompanying text (all of which I have in my possession) that will be the fulcrum of this essay and, thanks to Derek Bissell's work and his unpublished research papers (2009), the intention is to offer a comparative "on the ground" perspective in conjunction with the maps and text.

So, what is it about John Ogilby and, in particular, his relationship with Charles II that moved them to produce the *Britannia*? On the face of it the two men would seem to have nothing to connect them: one a low-born Scot and the other monarch of one of the most powerful countries in Europe, yet together they produced a work of great importance and set fundamental cartographic standards still used today: as the historian George Grundy noted, the 'modern mile came into use… on the turnpike roads of the eighteenth century, a use promoted in all probability by the work of Ogilby' (1939 p. 259). Did Ogilby really launch his *magnum opus* effectively to invite a foreign power to invade, as Jones suggested?

Chapter 2 – John Ogilby, King Charles II and the 'Secret' Treaty of Dover (1670)

Charles II's celebratory coronation procession through the streets of London on 22 April 1661 was an occasion like little else the city had seen for many years. After nineteen years of puritan, commonwealth zeal the people of England once again embraced, with open arms, a monarch; the event was to be lauded, treasured and remembered so it had to be organised not just by the best but by people in whom the king had complete confidence. So it was that John Ogilby, Scottish, erstwhile dancing master, poet, translator, soldier and lottery winner was asked to arrange the songs and poems and design the triumphal arches *en route* to create nothing less than a 'national experience… [a] virtual parade of propaganda' (Uglow, 2010, p. 113) and 'snuff out… any more alterations to sovereignty' (Ereira, 2016, p. 142).

Ogilby was the age of the century but his Royalist credential were not new-born and putting himself forward for this task was not an opportunistic step to wealth and fame; loyalty to the new king may have been all the rage in the 1660s but Ogilby was 'one of the leaders in that field', a reputation soundly founded on having 'served three monarchs [with] his loyalty never in question' (Van Eerde, 1976, pp. 12-13). Much of his success had been built on a life seeking the patronage of the wealthy: as a dancer-cum-dance-master at age nineteen he was performing before Charles II's father and his favourite, the Marquess of Buckingham; as a soldier he got on 'marvellously well' with Field Marshal (later MP and close friend to Earl Clarendon) Lord Hopton and as a competent – arguably talented – translator, Ogilby's 1649 *Virgil* attracted the sponsorship of a hundred patrons including, *inter alia,* a marquess, a marchioness and no fewer than six earls (Ereira, 2016 pp. 49 and 121). In the interim he collected royal appointments: in 1665, Master of His Majesty's Revels in Ireland, and in the 1670s, Royal Cosmographer (Fordham, 1925, pp. 158-159).

Yet royal patronage and personal friendships only went so far; what brought Ogilby, fourteen years after Charles's coronation, to embrace royal support once again and publish the *Britannia*? Two principal themes emerge: firstly, Ogilby was an established publisher of books with a successful (and profitable) career based largely on popular translations of the classics as well as, between 1669-73, seven large atlases of foreign lands (Van Eerde, 1976, p.

95). Ogilby himself was not necessarily an inherent adventurer (Taylor, 1937, p. 529) but he recognised a potential market when he saw one and he must have heard, as he frequented the coffeehouses of London, a growing interest in exploring strange lands, whether it be for trade or conquest. In response he took to publishing, in particular grand, innovative geographical works that were intended to cover the whole world: a five volume series[3] was planned embracing Africa, America, Asia and Europe and finally Britain, the last publication we now know as *Britannia*. And they were grandiose works, printed on 'fine paper… heavily illustrated… and a handsome addition to any library' (Van Eerde, 1976, p. 96); they were expensive works for wealthy men.

Secondly, Ogilby's work on partially designing Charles II's coronation procession 'saw a significant political use of geographical themes in the public sphere, as the monarchist and loyalist credentials of geography could at last be openly displayed', acting 'together to envisage Charles II as an absolute monarch' (Mayhew, 2000, pp. 68-69). Charles II offered more direct patronage to *Britannia* by pledging £500 towards its completion and, later, another £500 from his queen (Van Eerde, 1976, p. 129) although there is no evidence that these sums were ever physically paid.

Ogilby had further talents that might have appealed to the king; he had been a soldier in the 4th Regiment of Foot and learned how to use the pike and musket (Ereira, 2016, p. 47) yet, it seems, he was equally happy to use his fists if required: he sought redress from the courts following a street brawl in 1633. Perhaps most valuably, from the king's perspective, he was a man 'who could operate on his own initiative, was utterly reliable and… would understand the needs of an army' (Ereira 2016, pp. 54 and 81). One last personal attribute needs to be added to the mix: science. Ogilby was no scientist but his was a scientific age; the Royal Society had been formed in 1660, the year of Charles II's return from exile and Ogilby, whilst never a member or showing any desire to be a member (Tinniswood, 2019) was nevertheless closely associated with a number of its more prominent members – his association with Robert Hooke, for example, was very close throughout 1673-5 and 'assuredly he was a sustaining and innovative force' upon Ogilby. More directly this brought 'new

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[3] Other volumes, for instance on China and Japan were also published, separate to this main series

standards of measurement, precision and verification' to Ogilby's work (Van Eerde, 1976, pp. 125-129), a drive to such accuracy as Ogilby was possibly unfamiliar with; he was reflecting his age – and his monarch – and very much a man of his time. In a nutshell Ogilby demonstrated loyalty, science, intelligence, talent and resilience; he was an ideal man for Charles II to turn to. Yet why would Charles need to turn to anyone for help, and the answer to that lies surely in the Secret Treaty of Dover?

The Secret Treaty of Dover 1670 has been pored over and discussed by numerous historians (Mitchell, 2000; Hutton, 1986) but the intricacies of their various interpretations need not waylay us here. By the Treaty, at its starkest, Charles II would publicly announce his conversion to Catholicism and receive financial and military support from his cousin Louis XIV so to do, he would then stand side by side with Louis as they waged war together on the Dutch. Critically, these negotiations had to be, and were, top secret. Whether Charles really intended to take such a huge, public, step with his religion in a fiercely protestant country remains a moot point, as was his intention or otherwise to convert his country and not just himself (Mitchell 2000), but this is an essay about possibilities, and the possibility that he strongly considered becoming a Catholic is surely undeniable.

Thus, the ingredients for a plot do appear to be coming together: Charles II, a monarch well experienced in the intrigues of high office and with a secret to hide, John Ogilby, a man with an opportunistic eye, proven resourcefulness and numerous skills, and geography, a developing science and a new tool of power; one problem however, remains: Ogilby was not, it would seem, a Catholic.

At least there appears to be no evidence to say so. Ogilby's first modern biographer Katherine Van Eerde devotes just three lines to his religion; she tells us that 'no evidence connects Ogilby with the Old Faith… [and] he died, as he had lived, a Church of England man' (1976, p. 11); rather strangely, Ereira makes no mention at all of Ogilby's religion in his 300 page biography (2016). It is tempting to take Van Eerde at her word: '[Ogilby] took religion as he found it prescribed, apparently untouched by doctrinal conflicts' (1976, p. 11), but proof by absence of evidence is not necessarily proof at all, so for Ogilby to be compliant with what was in essence a Catholic plot he must have either been pragmatic enough to put money and reward before his religion – hardly unheard of at that or any other time – or he was indeed

an unrecognised Catholic. Perhaps we should, despite his gossipy nature, take the antiquarian, writer and friend of Ogilby, John Aubrey literally when he described him as someone who, being a 'cunning Scot'… 'allwayes went through with profits and honour' (Clark, 1898, pp. 105, 103) and assume that when it came to wealth and fame then religion came rather low down on Ogilby's list of priorities.

Chapter 3 – *Britannia* and the Road from London to Aberystwyth

Published in September 1675 from Ogilby's house in White-Fryers [sic], London, *Britannia* took many men five years' of work: a small army of surveyors had tramped approximately 26000 miles (only about 7700 of which were used in publishing) measuring, tracing and recording routes (Bissell 2005, p. 26) whilst countless local officials, ordered by royal command to assist in its preparation, had replied to the first printed questionnaire ever used for historical and topographical research in Britain: one such sought responses to twenty-two questions seeking 'such remarques of the county or place of their residence, or what they may be acquainted with' (Fox, 2010, pp. 597-598).

The finished product weighed nearly 8kg - roughly the same as a modern breeze block - and measured a somewhat unwieldy 20cm by 35cm or so. The financial input was no less eye-watering: £20,000 was absorbed in production costs (a figure equating in today's money to anything from £3m – by annual inflation increments – to £500m, by share of gross domestic product) and it went on sale at a cost of £5, or a somewhat jaw-dropping £750 or so by today's reckoning (Ereira, 2016, pp. 228-229, 209). But such considerable resources were needed, *Britannia* was specifically ordered by King Charles II and funded (at least in part) from Privy Council funds; in short it was a book that 'Charles wanted… done' (Van Eerde, 1979, pp. 127, 224-5, 271).

Every one of the 100 plates that comprise the *Britannia* is a strip-map (e.g. Figure 2) and each is accompanied by about two pages of explanatory text. The six strips of each plate are to be read from the bottom upwards starting from the left, with each strip having its own compass rose to indicate direction. Many plates equate to just one route, but the longest routes require up to four plates; that from London to Aberystwyth requires three. It was the first ever road atlas of England and Wales and quite simply 'the first big advance in English cartography since Tudor times' (Harley, 1970, p. iii) and not 'until the early nineteenth century [were its] comprehensiveness and innovations wholly superseded' (Van Eerde, 1976, p151). Yet when the new (and presumably very wealthy) purchaser of the *Britannia* initially opened their book the very first mapped route they saw was not from London to a location of importance, such as Cambridge, York or even Liverpool, as they may have expected, but of

the road from London to Aberystwyth. So is it possible that the map was not intended for them to use but, as Jones suggests, to offer assistance to a French army in reaching London?

If Louis XIV had looked for alternative cartographic options for his army then he would have been disappointed: they did not exist. Although, somewhat surprisingly maybe, Aberystwyth is depicted on the famous Gough map, one of the earliest maps available to show Britain in any detail (date unknown but certainly late medieval) (Gough Map, 2019) this would have been of little help to anyone in route-finding (although it does of course allocate a degree of importance to the town). Later maps, such as the county maps of Christopher Saxton (1578) and John Speed (1610) (National Library of Wales, 2019a) also locate the town but not any roads or accessible routes (rather tellingly Speed's national map of Wales, also from 1610, is adorned with twelve plans of important Welsh towns, not one of which is of Aberystwyth) (National Library of Wales, 2019b). Even the so-called compact and portable Quartermaster's map published by Thomas Jenner in 1644, and allegedly specifically designed to aid armies in the field, does not show any actual roads, simply because 'no cartographical materials [existed] in 1644 upon which to base their insertion' (Fordham, 1927, p. 50). The new Ogilby map therefore offered strangers the first opportunity to make their way from the Welsh coast to London by road.

The three plates comprising London (Cornhill Exchange) to Aberystwyth (Figure 2-4) cover the route in 199.25 miles (Google maps and the AA record 217.2 miles whilst Ereira claims 209 miles but omits to explain how (2016, p. 253)). Concentrating specifically on the composition of the Welsh plate of the three comprising the route (Figure 4), five essential elements are mapped: the route itself, main roads crossing and/or leaving it (and their destination), hills and mountains (with direction of ascent/descent), rivers (both alongside and crossing) and towns *en route.* Distances between various points along the way are recorded in miles and furlongs. The only towns of any note on this Welsh section are 'Riadergowy' (Rhayader) and 'Prestaine' (Presteigne), both in modern Radnorshire. As the *Britannia* map moves towards London (plates 2 and 1) a number of larger and more important towns are visited, including Worcester and Oxford. Generally, the three plates do not differ from the other ninety-seven in the *Britannia* in terms of presentation and content.

Starting from Aberystwyth and looking at the map in greater detail (Figure 5) there is a promising start: a 'stone bridge' clearly indicates a crossing of the River Ridoll (Rheidol) and an excellent, reassuring piece of information for any invading army, but moving inland it is soon apparent that something is absent from the map: inns to use as accommodation (people and horses) and markets to provide stocks of food. For a foreign invading force, unfamiliar with the territory and travelling with little local support, the provision of such resources may have been a fundamental requirement and ideal information to show on a new map, and Ogilby would have understood this: he had been a soldier and a 'capable organiser' who could 'handle logistics and supplies, whether for actors or soldiers' (Ereira 2016 p. 81). Accommodating 6000 troops would not have been an easy task to take on so it seems remiss that there are no directions as to where soldiers and their trains may physically stay, even if that accommodation could only be obtained at the end of a French musket (or at the mansion of a "friendly" local nobleman). One obvious possibility for this omission is that, in such a remote area, no built accommodation of any significance existed. The principal late-seventeenth-century travellers in this part of rural Wales were the stock drovers, who certainly did not need a huge, expensive book to find their way to market but did they need inns? Some evidence from later years implies that they did: for '[although the drovers] would spend the first night at a stance or pound... [it was] often close to an inn where the dealers... would put up [with] the rank and file sleeping in the barns or under the hedges' (Thomas 1984 p.59). On the other hand, in studying the trunk roads of early modern England and Wales (using surveys examining inns, taverns, alehouses and coffeehouses conducted in 1686 by William Blathwayt, Secretary of State at War), Max Satchell could find no settlement having fourteen or more spare stable spaces at all in the Welsh part of the London to Aberystwyth route (Satchell, 2017, p. 15).

Leaving built accommodation aside, *Britannia* plate 3 indicates that within twenty-one miles of Aberystwyth there are four separate sites described as 'pasture' or 'boggy and moorish on both sides' [of the road]. The presence of these features at first seems vaguely incongruous – hardly the stuff of interest to a seventeenth-century visitor being thrown about in their uncomfortable carriage on poorly maintained roads – so their presence could be either down to the idiosyncrasies of the local surveyor or because it was specifically directed

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Figure 2. Plate 1 of London-Aberystwyth route (Ogilby 1675 - personal copy)

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Figure 3. Plate 2 of London-Aberystwyth route (Ogilby 167 - personal copy)

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Figure 4. Plate 3 of London - Aberystwyth route (Ogilby 1675 - personal copy)

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Figure 5. Detail of Aberystwyth showing stone bridge (Ogilby 1675, plate 3 - personal copy)

that they be included, potentially because they were markers of places that were respectively appropriate and inappropriate for an army to camp. But such features are not a peculiarity of this map; a quick reference to another randomly chosen but equally rural plate in *Britannia* – Tinmouth (Tynemouth) to Carlisle (Ogilby, 1675, plate 86) - shows a moor approaching Hexham and 'a moor on both sides' approaching Corbey… so providing such information was clearly nothing specific to the Aberystwyth map.

One important aspect in considering the plausibility of Jones's claim is that it is based on the arrival of the French army of Louis XIV, where 'order, discipline and absolute loyalty to the king were demanded and obtained' and where officers were 'conversant with the latest theory and practices'. This was a comparatively small detachment (only 6000 men if the Treaty of Dover is to be observed) from the vast but highly trained French army: 'from the 1660s to the 1680s… the best anywhere… [and] the most modern force of its time' (Chartrand, 1988, pp. 9-11), so the lack of visible accommodation to quarter them may not be considered significant, even so there would still have been a need to provide them with food.

Like the inns, there is no indication on the maps of markets or food sources, but in the accompanying text we learn that Aberystwyth enjoys 'good markets on Mondays, for Corn, Wool, etc. and 2 Fairs yearly… yet it is well-frequented for its Fishing Trade for Herings [sic], Cod etc.' (Ogilby, 1675, p 6). At first sight such meagre supplies may be considered insufficient (but helpful) to a travelling army, though again the innovative and professionalism of the French army may be relevant for it is possible that they would have had little need to rely on local communities: 'contemporary continental armies travelled with large supply trains intended to allow them to move… including requirements for bakers, millers and butchers, ovens and mills' (Nusbacher, 2000, p. 148). Then, as the army moves further from Aberystwyth, and supplies start to dwindle, more markets (and occasional inns) are identified (plate 3): Riadergowy (Rhayader) for instance, at a touch under thirty miles distant has The Swan and The Lion offering accommodation and a market on Wednesdays (Ogilby, 1675, p 6).

It is clear that some features on plate 3 are either of little concern to a seventeenth century traveller (moors, bogs) or important but missing altogether (accommodation), but one mapped site is surely a place that very few people would have taken an interest in, namely the lead mines at Cwmystwyth, about fifteen miles from Aberystwyth. In his book in

support of the television series (and *ergo* the invasion claim) Alan Ereira makes much of the importance of these mines, primarily because during his reign Charles I used the lead from them for bullets to arm his soldiers and the silver (which was also prevalent in the mines) for coins to pay them (Ereira, 2016, p. 260). Then the mines became waterlogged and fell into a state of disrepair until a new owner, Thomas Bushell, took them over, drained and repaired them and in 1637 established a mint in Aberystwyth castle (Boon, 2008); the town may have been a 'useless ruin in 1675, but it had a significant past, which indicated a possible significant future' and it is on this basis that Ereira deems the mines to be important because what an attraction to the impoverished Charles II they must have been (2016, p. 260; Uglow, 2009, pp. 494-499). In fact there are potentially two issues that Ereira neglects but which may carry some weight in supporting his opinion: firstly, it is not unreasonable to assume that Bushell the miner and Ogilby the map-maker knew each other. Whilst there appears to be no evidence in direct support of this claim Bushell, like Ogilby, spent much of his life on the peripheries of the court seeking the preferment of Charles I or his son; more importantly, both men were known personally to the biographer John Aubrey and featured in his *Brief Lives* (Clark, 1898). It is not an unreasonable supposition that Ogilby and Bushell, two men with an eye for a ready profit, discussed their working projects and future ambitions thereby bringing the mines well within Ogilby's field of knowledge (and Bushell was clearly not reticent about his plans: 'his tongue was a chaine and drewe in so many' (Clark, 1898, K2). Secondly when, in 1637, Charles I's mint was established in the castle at Aberystwyth, 'technical staff were seconded from the Tower [of London] as were the dies' (Boon, 2008), presumably to help set it up and give it a degree of royal authorisation and approval and in doing this a direct route - literally - between the heart of royal power and Aberystwyth was created.

If Aberystwyth-London is to be considered a secret "royal" route then these unresearched lines of exploration open up possibilities as to how it may have come about and go some way towards dismissing Jones's claim simply on the grounds of Aberystwyth's remoteness: it is 'hard to imagine anyone in [the] late seventeenth century… wanting to get [there]' (Ereira, 2016, p. 193) whilst professor Philip Jenkins is somewhat blunter: 'Prior to

about the 1760s… very few people go to Wales by choice, and if they do…. It is certainly not because anything really Wales has to offer' (Jenkins, 2019). This may not be true.

Chapter 4 – Aberystwyth and other Welsh harbours

Despite featuring on a number of pre-Ogilby maps it would seem that Aberystwyth was not a place of significance around the end of the seventeenth century. One anonymous visitor in the early 1650s described the town as 'a miserable market town' and 'the houses… transformed into confused heaps of unnecessary rubbidge [sic]' (Cornish and Plant, 2001, p. 15) whilst, writing some 70 years later, Daniel Defoe claimed the town to be 'enriched by the coals and lead found in its neighbourhood… [but is] a very dirty, black smoky place… However they [the inhabitants] are rich, and the place is very populous' (Defoe, 1724-26, p. 382). Ogilby himself is somewhat ambiguous, saying it was 'formerly a Wall'd-town, fortify'd with a now ruinous Caftle; and containing many more Houfes than now it does, yet it is a Corporation Govern'd by a Mayor, Recorder etc. fending one Burgefs to Parliament…' (Ogilby, 1675, p. 6). The castle was indeed 'ruinous' by the time of *Britannia*, but it is clear nonetheless that Aberystwyth was important enough to be engaged in foreign trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

> *small quantities of lead and ore were exported from the 1590s to France,*
> *Bristol and London and in 1614 the Dutch began to visit the port bringing in*
> *rye, pilcorn and wheat and returning with lead ore… and continued to buy*
> *ore until 1700. [later, in 1685] Dublin sent the coopers of Aberystwyth 6000*
> *barrel staves, 4000 headings and 2000 hoops* (Lewis, 1980, p. 88).

But regardless of size and importance, the viability of Aberystwyth as a landing ground and starting place for an accessible route to London lies principally in considering two basic topographical features: the harbour to moor at and the terrain to march over.

The feasibility of the harbour to moor at is difficult to judge from accounts available. Received wisdom has it that access by sea for a French force would have been all but impossible because 'before the mid nineteenth century, the sandbar that dominated Aberystwyth harbour made it impossible for larger vessels to make port' (People's Collection Wales 2019) and an Act for 'repairing, enlarging, and preserving the harbour of Aberystwyth…' was only passed in 1780 (Lewis, 1980, p. 76), 100 years after Ogilby's maps were published. To counter this however, there are varying accounts suggesting that in fact

the town <u>was</u> perfectly accessible by sea: 'ample deep water was available immediately under the town hill for the anchorage of ships' (Carter, 1966, p. 208) and 'before the 1740s… any large ships wishing to enter the port [simply] had to wait for the big tides' (Lewis 1980 p. 75). Furthermore, the display boards at Aberystwyth castle indicate that not only was the harbour constructed at the same time as the castle (1277-1289) but that limestone was shipped in from Tenby as part of that process. From these varying accounts it is very difficult to assess accessibility in terms of ship size, but given the international trade, the castle construction and the availability of 'ample deep water' it would appear to be a feasible supposition that any reasonably sized ships needed to ferry 6000 French troops could have landed at Aberystwyth.

It is tempting to imagine that the terrain from Aberystwyth to the English border is hilly, verging on mountainous, and even today a challenge to traverse. Indeed Ogilby's plate for this section of the route (Figure 4) indicates a number of ominous looking mountains twixt Aberystwyth and Bromyard in England, but thanks to the pioneering work of Derek Bissell (2009, pp. 9-11) it is possible to follow Ogilby's precise route very closely and make a more measured, if still largely subjective, assessment.

Clearly the advantages of modern, superior clothing, footwear and, of course, transportation in the form of a car must be accounted for, but having made a personal journey to explore the route there is evidence to suggest that the crossing is comparatively straightforward; it is today and it almost certainly would also have been in 1675. Leaving Aberystwyth, the river is easily crossed via the stone bridge and the ascent to the hills (Figure 6) straightforward enough; and, once height is attained, the moors between Cwmystwyth and Rhayader (Figure 7) may be considered bleak and inhospitable but not impassable. Indeed much of the mid-section of Ogilby's Welsh route has today morphed into the comparative comfort of National Cycle path 81. Steeper and fairly challenging sections exist, that is not in doubt, but as a general route for an experienced and skilled body of men the 60 miles or so from Aberystwyth to Presteigne on the borders of England it appears to present no physically insurmountable obstacles.

Figure 6. The ascent from Aberystwyth using Ogilby's route (personal photograph)

Figure 7. The hills between Aberystwyth and Rhayader using Ogilby's route: bleak, inhospitable but not impassable (personal photograph)

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So why, if Jones's claim is to hold water, would Aberystwyth have been chosen ahead of any other Welsh ports? Of alternative routes from the Welsh coast to London, Ogilby maps just two options in addition to Aberystwyth, namely from St Davids (1675, plates 14 - 17) and from Holyhead (21 - 24)[4]; it would be profitable to briefly consider their viability as landing sites for an invasion force.

On the face of it the St Davids route – via Gloucester, Cardiff and Haverfordwest – was, like Aberystwyth, to a remote, distant and undefended location but, unlike Aberystwyth, the cathedral provided an obvious attraction to travellers and visitors. St Davids also appears to lack a harbour of any significance and, at 269 miles, Ogilby's surveyors measure the journey to London at seventy miles further than it is from Aberystwyth. Yet this route, bizarrely following, as it did, the south coast of Wales (rather than the traditional inland route via Brecon) did allow the surveyors a closer examination of some other undefended and, seemingly, far more accessible ports, such as Carmarthen, an especially important 'key commercial and administrative centre' (Ereira, 2016, p. 260). This would seem to make it far more attractive than Aberystwyth until Charles's ambition is considered: to supply a military force in secret, and secrecy would be hard won at Carmarthen.

To the north of Wales Ogilby maps the (coincidentally) 269 miles from London to Holyhead via Towcester and Chester. This would surely have been an even greater challenge than using Aberystwyth to reach London, not least because of the need to cross the Menai Straits to get to the Welsh mainland (a 'ludicrous' idea; Ereira, 2016, p 82). It is true that based on trade with Ireland Holyhead had been 'a place of strategic importance from the sixteenth century' (Hutchinson Encyclopaedia, 2018) but moving on from there to London was another matter altogether: 'having left the relative sophistication of Dublin, Waterford and Cork, travellers were aghast at the inhospitable terrain of the coastal route from Holyhead to Chester and onwards' (Morgan, 2014 cited in Barnard, 2016, p. 664). Arguably of relevance too, Ogilby, a man with the ear of the king, could recount his personal experience when, in 1644, he was 'wreckt at sea, [off Holyhead] and came to London very poor' (Clark, 1898, p. 102). This part of the British coast had very bad memories for Ogilby.

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[4] Other maps in the *Britannia* go to a variety of English ports – Portsmouth, Weymouth Grimsby for instance; Scotland was never mapped

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This essay attempts to trigger wider research into arguments for and against a largely unexplored historical proposition; what limited research we do have has been put forward via a book in support of a television programme, both written by Alan Ereira (2016; *Terry Jones' Great Map Mystery*, 2008).

The basis of the argument – that the first map of John Ogilby's 1675 *Britannia* (plates 1-3) is a clandestine invitation from Charles II to his cousin Louis XIV to invade Britain via Aberystwyth within the remit of the Treaty of Dover – can at least be founded on a number of facts: Charles II was *considering* a conversion to Catholicism, in league with his cousin Louis XIV, and would possibly require the assistance of a small military force so to do. Reasonable suppositions can be added: with secrecy being the watchword we can deduce that for a French army to march on Oxford or London to meet and protect the king an out of the way route with scant defensive protection would be an ideal option, for which a map would be required because nonesuch existed. That map would most realistically be supplied by John Ogilby: a man not only known to and trusted by the king but experienced in map-making. Logic suggests that the route should be reasonably accessible and discrete and it appears that the road from Aberystwyth to London, though challenging in places, would fit the bill; landing an army should not prove too difficult and the road not impassable for a professional army (qualities that cannot necessarily be applied to the limited Welsh port options available and mapped).

But all these points in favour of Jones's claim can be eclipsed by alternative explanations for the map's presence, and some of them are very simple. Most fundamentally Ogilby declares this map it to be the first in the volume simply by virtue of the alphabet (1675 p. 1), the difficulty with this explanation however is that since the second Aberystwyth map in *Britannia* (to Carmarthen) appears at plate 91, and that from Andover to Bridgwater (for example) at plate 32, this is clearly either a mistake, laziness or deliberately misleading. Simpler yet, if this was indeed a secret map for the highly trained and adept French army why place it at number one, why bring attention to it? We must assume that they had the nous to use a map to London regardless of where it appeared in the *Britannia*?

More pragmatically the map would appear to provide no obvious actual assistance to the French beyond indicating the route itself. Across Britain innovative, scientific questionnaires had been despatched to local officials, on the king's authority, seeking information for the *Britannia* (Fox, 2010, pp. 597-598), so if there was a plot to provide a secret map then they and the maps that followed would surely have been appropriately tailored? Yet there is no indication that this is so: for example no accommodation is mapped and neither are locations of stocks of food – whether for men or horses.

So I would argue that there are two principal reasons why the Aberystwyth map features so prominently in the *Britannia*. The first of these is that Ogilby was, in effect, showing off. The map was ostensibly from London to Oxford – understandable enough – but from there it was in essence a display of science-based exploration to the very remotest parts of Charles's kingdom (Scotland was not mapped). Ogilby had been doing this for years – volumes on Japan (1670), America (1671) and Asia (1673) (Ereira, 2016 p. 187) had all brought knowledge of the most distant lands within the grasp of the educated and wealthy elite, so it was only natural to continue that tradition at home.

The second, and more important, reason for the map's inclusion is the presence of the lead and silver mines at Cwmystwyth. At the time of *Britannia's* publication in 1675 Charles was in desperate need of money, his navy had not been paid and such were his problems that he was demanding £200,000 from Louis XIV to finance his Catholic conversion, rising later to the astonishing sums of £1,000,000 down and £600,000 a year to additionally fund any Dutch war (Uglow, 2009, pp. 494-499). It is therefore logical that any and all steps to identify sources of money and the access to them should be identified. It is true that the mint itself had already moved from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury by 1642 (and later Oxford) but the silver ore was not exhausted (indeed the mines were worked up until 1940 (Parry 2011)) and it is more than feasible that Ogilby, and thus the king, knew this via the mine owner Thomas Bushell. In this sense Alan Ereira is right: the town was indeed a 'useless ruin in 1675, [with] a significant past, which indicated a possible significant future' (2016, p. 260) but it had nothing to do with a French army or the Treaty of Dover; Charles's partial funding of and support for the *Britannia* was essentially an investment, a map to the silver mines of Wales to help replenish his coffers.

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