

**The gold cup given to the parish church of St Mary, Welshpool,
by Thomas Davies (d. 1667)¹**

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Figures 1 & 2. Gold communion cup, London, c.1662, belonging to St. Mary's church, Welshpool.
©National Museum of Wales.

The remarkable gold communion cup belonging to St Mary's church, Welshpool, was the gift of Thomas Davies, a native of the parish and a servant of the East India Company. The cup bears the date 1662 and a lengthy explanatory inscription which, in conjunction with archival records of the period, sheds light on a brief but fascinating West African episode in the history of the East India Company.

As Nicholas Canny has written with respect to the early British empire, 'most English propagandists for colonisation conceived it as an exclusively English enterprise to which Welsh people were silently admitted.'² The cup is therefore also a rare and important early

¹ I am particularly grateful to Dr Margaret Makepeace, Senior Archivist in the India Office Records Department at the British Library, for her generous assistance; also to Kathryn Jones of the Royal Collection Trust, Mary Davis at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales and Jason Evans at the National Library of Wales.

² Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.

witness to the Welsh contribution to the development of an English empire in the mid seventeenth century. The cup was placed on loan at the National Museum of Wales in 1994, since when it has been a highlight of the displays at the National Museum in Cathays Park, Cardiff.

The Welshpool gold cup

The Welshpool cup is one of fewer than thirty surviving examples of British gold plate made in the seventeenth century,³ and one of only five recorded gold chalices made before 1800.⁴ Indeed, in April 1664 the Goldsmiths' Company Minute Book, replying to a request from Charles II (1630-1685) for statistics on gold plate assayed in the previous decade, recorded that the enquiry could not be answered as 'it is soe Seldome that any is made.'⁵



Figure 3. Welshpool gold cup, detail showing the sponsor's mark, perhaps GW and double-struck.
© National Museum of Wales.

³ Timothy Schroder, *British and Continental Gold and Silver in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2009), vol. 1, p. 159.

⁴ E. Alfred Jones, 'The Gold Chalice of Welshpool', *Y Cymmrodor*, XLIV (1935), p. 3.

⁵ Philippa Glanville, 'The Bowes Gold Cup: a Stuart race prize?', *Burlington Magazine*, 137:1107 (June 1995), pp. 387-90. Note, however, that in 1660 Charles II ordered for his coronation new gold regalia, supplied in 1661 by the Crown Jeweller Robert Vyner at a cost of over £12,000; and that he also acquired new gold altar and banqueting plate at a further cost of some £18,000: Claude Blair, *The Crown Jewels: The history of the Coronation Regalia in the Jewel House of the Tower of London*, 2 vols (London: The Stationery Office, 1998), vol. 1, p. 368.

The cup is 23.7cm high and weighs 30oz 8¼dwt troy weight (946gr).⁶ The unattributed sponsor's mark is unclear and probably double-struck, but may read 'GW' below two pellets (small dots) (see figure 3). As is usual with gold objects of this date there are no assay marks, which were not required until 1717 and often omitted on specially ordered pieces. The inscription dating this cup to 1662 is therefore invaluable if also – as will be seen – problematic.



Figure 4. The Welshpool gold cup's brass carrying case, c. 1662.
© National Museum of Wales.

⁶ In 1698 the weight was recorded as 'thirty ounces 3 quarters and a half troy weight': 'Lhwyd's Parochialia', *Montgomery Collections*, XXXVII (1915), p. 269.

The cup is Gothic in form, its moulded hexafoil foot rising to a hexagonal stem. The stem has a flattened knob (bulbous knob) chased with converging hexafoil petals and supports a plain rounded bowl sitting on a calyx of 'cut-card' foliage. Overall, the design is a plain one, typical of the surviving seventeenth-century church plate in gold.⁷ There is no evidence that the cup was originally accompanied by a paten (a cover doubling as a small plate used for the bread



or wafers at Communion) but it does retain its original brass carrying case (see figure 4), an extremely rare survival.

Figure 5. Welshpool gold cup, detail showing the arms of Thomas Davies. © National Museum of Wales.

Engraved on one side of the cup is a coat of arms between crossed plumes (see figure 5). The tinctures are not indicated but the correct blazoning is argent, a lion passant sable between three fleurs-de-lis gules. These are the armorial bearings of

several Montgomeryshire families but here they are without doubt those of the Davies family of Kynant (Ceunant).⁸

Engraved on the opposite side (see figure 6), a Latin inscription reads:

*Thomas Dauies Anglorum in Africae plaga
occidentali Procurator generalis
ob vitam multifariâ Dei misericordiâ ibidem conseruatum
Calicem hunc é purissimo auro Guiniano conflatum
Dei honori et Ecclesiae de Welchpoole ministerio
perpetuo sacrum voluit*

⁷ Philippa Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and Early Stuart England: A Social History and Catalogue of the National Collection 1480-1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 142.

⁸ 'Welsh Pool: Materials for the History of the Parish and Borough', *Montgomery Collections*, XV (1882), p. 309. For the heraldic terminology, see for example <http://heraldry.sca.org/armory/primer>.

*a quo vsu S : S [Salvatori Sacro?] si quis facinerosus eundem Calicem
in posterum alienaret (quod auertat Deus) Dei vindicis
Supremo tribunali poenas luat
Cal. Apr. IX. M.D.C.LX.II*

This translates into English as:

Thomas Davies agent general of the English
on the west coast of Africa
because his life was preserved there by the bountiful mercy of God
had this chalice forged from the purest Guinea gold
and gave it as a sacred offering to the Grace of God
and for the permanent service of the church of Welshpool.
If any villain should subsequently remove the same chalice from this use
[sacred to the Saviour?] (and may God prevent this)
may he be punished at the Last Judgement of God the avenger.
9 April 1662

The inscription raises questions about Davies's precise role in West Africa; about what prompted his gratitude for the preservation of his life; about his connection with Welshpool; and about the significance of the date, 9 April 1662. These are all discussed below.

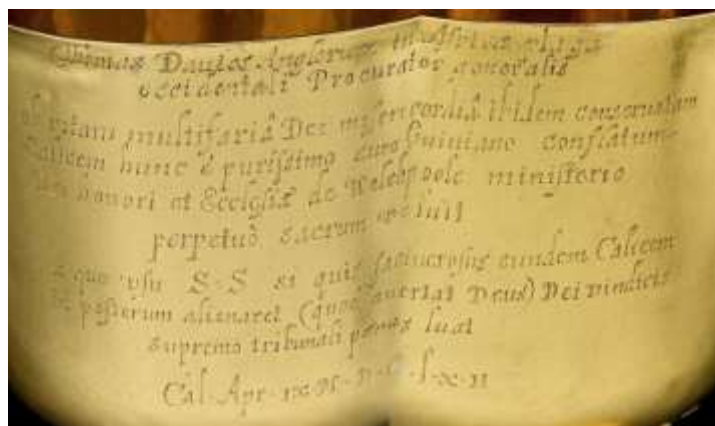


Figure 6. Welshpool gold cup, composite image of the inscription.
© National Museum of Wales.

Enthusiasm for gold after the Restoration in 1660 was fed by the influx of ‘Guinea gold’ from West Africa in the 1660s and 1670s. The English gold standard of 22 carats had been fixed in 1575-6, but by the 1670s gold was often substandard.⁹ Thanks to the purity of West African gold a premium of one shilling was paid on sovereigns made from it, these coins being dubbed ‘guineas’ and the African source of their gold indicated from 1663 by an elephant symbol. It is noteworthy therefore that Thomas Davies made a point of stating the purity and source of his gold in his inscription – *e purissimo auro Guiniano* (‘of the purest Guinea gold’). XRF analysis of the cup confirms the purity of its gold at between 92.7% and 93.9%, comparable to the 94.4% purity of a two-guinea gold coin of 1664 and in excess of the 22-carat standard.¹⁰

The cup is closely comparable to a gold chalice made for the coronation of Charles II and now in the Jewel House at the Tower of London.¹¹ This bears the sponsor’s mark TV for Sir Thomas Vyner (1588-1665), uncle of Robert Vyner (1631-1688) who at the Restoration was official goldsmith to the Crown and supplier of the new coronation regalia for Charles II. 27cm in height and with two additional knops, the royal chalice is slightly larger than the Welshpool cup and, at 43oz 8dwt troy weight excluding its paten, significantly heavier. Along with the paten, which took the total original weight up to 61oz 12dwt 12gr, it cost £277 6s 3d (equivalent to £4 10s an ounce). By analogy, and to use the terminology found in wills, Jewel House records and other sources of the period, we could expect the Welshpool cup to have been a ‘hundred and fifty pound cup’,¹² still a very considerable commission and gift. There is, in fact, evidence from later St Asaph diocesan records that Davies’s cup was originally valued at £168 (*clxviii minis valentem*), equivalent to a relatively expensive £5 10s an ounce and perhaps reflecting the high level of purity of the gold used.¹³ At this time the East India Company had a policy (recorded in a Minute of the Court of Committees dated 8

⁹ Glanville, ‘Bowes Gold Cup’, p. 388.

¹⁰ Analysis by Mary Davis, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, 6 May 2014, using a Bruker TRACer III-SD hand-held X-ray fluorescent spectrometer (HHXRF) with a rhodium tube, and a titanium/aluminium filter.

¹¹ Royal Collection, RCIN 31766 (and paten); Blair, *Crown Jewels*, vol. 1 pp. 368-369, vol. 2 pp. 412-415 no. 11; Arthur Grimwade, ‘New Light on English Royal Plate’ in *The Silver Society Journal*, 7 (1995), p. 370 & fig. 1.

¹² Glanville, ‘Bowes Gold Cup’, p. 390.

¹³ Diocese of St Asaph, Report on Rural Deaneries, 1749 (deposited at the National Library of Wales, SA/RD/26), quoted by Maurice Ridgway, *Church Plate of the St. Asaph Diocese* (Denbigh: Gee & Son, 1997), p. 253; ‘Welsh Pool: Materials for the History of the Parish and Borough’, *Montgomery Collections*, XV (1882), p. 308.

November 1661) of paying individuals in Guinea no more than £3 10s per ounce for ‘good Tiber gold’.¹⁴

The Welshpool cup exemplifies the exceptional nature of a gold vessel in the seventeenth century, which was always ‘a striking piece of evidence as to a set of circumstances, its creation, form and decoration – all offering clues to be decoded.’¹⁵ It underlines its status and intent by copying both the design and the material of the royal gold chalice of 1661. It would be known, after all, that gold vessels were used by the monarch for dining and – in this context specifically – for taking communion. This allusion to the Restoration also suggests that the cup was in part a token of loyalty to the new regime. Its revived Gothic form has pre-Reformation Catholic associations and is a variant of a style that first appeared around 1620.¹⁶ It reflects in particular the ideas of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645), executed in 1645, whose love of ceremony – ‘the beauty of holiness’ as he called it – angered the Puritans and contributed to Charles I’s difficulties in the 1640s. The evidence of Charles II’s chalice, of the one made for James Duke of York (1633-1701) in about 1664 and of the new chalices and patens made for the royal chapels after the Restoration, all variations on the same Gothic theme, makes clear the relationship between this style and the influence of the High Church party on court taste.¹⁷ Furthermore, it may reasonably be speculated that like the Welshpool cup the royal chalices were also made of Guinea gold, so strengthening the association between the three pieces.¹⁸

Thomas Davies and his family

In *Y Cymmrodor* in 1935 E. Alfred Jones published what he had discovered about the family of Thomas Davies.¹⁹ His father was Richard Davies (1583/4-1661), his mother Margaret, of Ceunant on the west edge of Welshpool, a prosperous Montgomeryshire market town overlooked by Powis Castle, seat of the powerful Herbert family which was to play a key role

¹⁴ Ethel Bruce Sainsbury (ed.), *A Calendar of the Court minutes etc of the East India Company, 1660-1663* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), pp. 146-147. The exact meaning of the term ‘Tiber gold’ is uncertain, but it must refer to gold available for sale in West Africa, perhaps in the form of small grains obtained from rivers.

¹⁵ Glanville, ‘Bowes Gold Cup’, p. 387.

¹⁶ Charles Oman, *English Church Plate 597-1830* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 205-210.

¹⁷ Blair, *Crown Jewels*, vol. 2, pp. 12-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

in the East India Company's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history.²⁰ Remarkably the house survives, a relatively modest example of a lobby-entry house, the commonest traditional Montgomeryshire type.



Figure 7. Ceunant near Welshpool, family home of Thomas Davies. Reproduced from *Y Cymmrodor*, vol XLIV, with permission of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion.

Jones searched the records of the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa (established with royal support in 1660) but could find nothing about Davies's African career. He did, however, find his will, signed and sealed on 18 August 1664.²¹ This, interestingly, describes Davies as 'of the Island of Barbadoes', of which more below.

¹⁹ Jones, 'Gold Chalice of Welshpool'.

²⁰ William Herbert, 1st baron Powis (1573?-1655); Percy Herbert, 2nd baron (1598-1667).

²¹ National Archives, PROB 11/326/561, proved 22 April 1668. Details of a copy of the will in the Barbados Department of Archives, RB4/15, p. 514, proved 24 July 1667, are recorded in Joanne McRee Sanders, *Barbados Records: Wills, 1639-1725*, 3 vols (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1979-1981), vol. 1, p. 98: *English Settlers in Barbados, 1637-1800* on-line database, interactive.ancestry.com (accessed 26 November 2013).

Davies's will required his executors to erect a cenotaph for him in the parish church at Welshpool 'as near as possible to where my mother Mrs Margaret Davies is buried, with an inscription thereon giving an account of my life and travels.' Sadly this no longer exists and only a tantalisingly partial record of it seems to survive, in the St. Asaph diocese's Report on Rural Deaneries of 1749 from which we learn only the probable original value of Davies's gold cup.²² Nonetheless it shows that Davies not only wished to make a permanent visual and spiritual impression in his home town but was also conscious that his own career had been remarkable enough to merit a fixed record for posterity.

The will's beneficiaries include Davies's brother Esau (Isaiah) (*d.* 1691), who was rector of Lathbury, Buckinghamshire, from 1656 to 1691. Their father Richard was buried in Lathbury church and commemorated there by a brass plate on the north wall of the chancel bearing the Davies arms and this inscription:

RICHARD DAVIES OF KYNANT, IN THE COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY,
GENT., HEERVNDER BURIED, HEE DECEASED AT THE
HOWSE OF HIS
SON, ISAIAH DAVIES, THEN MINISTER OF THIS PARISH, 20TH DAY
NOVEMBER 1661, AGED 77 YEARES.
HIS SON THOMAS DAVIES, ESQUIRE, AT THAT TIME BEING AGENT GENERALL
FOR THE ENGLISH NATION VPON THE COAST OF AFFRICA,
CAUSED A CÆNOTAPH TO BE ERECTED IN THE CHURCH OF
WELCHPOOLE, THE PLACE OF HIS BIRTH, TO THE PIOUS MEMORY
OF HIS FATHER, AND THIS SMALL MEMORIAL FOR SUCH CAMBRIA-
-BRITTAINES AS SHALL THIS WAY TRAVAILE

This is further evidence not only of Davies's concern for his posthumous reputation but also of the sense he retained of being Welsh and not English. The latter is particularly noteworthy in a period when it is normally difficult to identify with certainty individuals of Welsh origin

²² See note 13, above. Davies's cenotaph was presumably removed as part of the remodelling of the church in 1773-1777.

active in the context of the British empire.²³ It shows, too, that he was not the only member of the Davies family to move from their relatively modest roots in mid-Wales in search of a successful English career. Interestingly Esau's son, another Thomas, in his will dated 10 March 1677/78 and proved 1 July 1678, records himself as a surgeon ('chyrurgion') in St Philips parish, Barbados, having inherited part of an estate in the parish from his uncle Hugh Powell.²⁴

Another beneficiary in the will was a second brother, Edward, resident in 'Surranam'. Edward must have been a member of the short-lived colony established in Surinam in 1652 when Lord Willoughby of Parham (*bap.* 1614, *d.* 1666), governor of Barbados, led 300 Barbadian colonists to settle between the Maroni and Surinam rivers. Like Thomas, Edward not only had interests in Barbados but was another Welsh pioneer of the growing British empire.

Thomas Davies and Barbados



Figure 8. Welshpool gold cup, detail showing inscription. © National Museum of Wales.

Barbados in the 1660s was on the eastern edge of an increasingly prosperous economic zone. It was making a fortune from sugar in particular, for which it was increasingly dependent on slave labour, and was part of a developing trade network involving the Atlantic, the Caribbean and the east coast of North America. The transition from tobacco to sugar production took place in Barbados between 1640 and 1660. White Europeans, typically there as indentured servants, were unwilling to do the gruelling work required and from the 1650s enslaved West Africans were

²³ Andrew Mackillop, 'A 'reticent' people? The Welsh in Asia, c.1700-1815' in H. V. Bowen (ed.), *Wales and the British overseas empire: Interactions and influences* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 143-167; H. V. Bowen, 'Asiatic interactions: India, the East India Company and the Welsh economy, c.1750-1830' in Bowen (ed.), *Wales and the British overseas empire*, pp. 168-192.

²⁴ Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/13, p. 489: Sanders, *Barbados Records*, vol. 1, pp. 97-98 (accessed 26 November 2013). Powell was 'brother' (perhaps brother-in-law) to the older Thomas Davies and one of the executors of his will.

increasingly seen as the answer. Between 1655 and the mid-1660s the enslaved population overtook the white population.

As will be seen, it is inconceivable that Thomas Davies was not a slave owner but we know very little about his Barbados estate. It may have been 200 acres or less, which when compared to the most eminent plantation owners like Colonel Henry Drax (with 800 acres) places him at the lower end of the spectrum of significant landowners in Barbados but certainly living on a far grander scale than had been possible for him in Wales.²⁵ On three occasions in October 1659 and December 1660 a Thomas Davies was recorded in Bristol as a planter engaging an indentured servant destined for Barbados,²⁶ but his was a common name and this individual is perhaps more likely to have been the planter of All Saints parish whose will dated 15 March 1659/60 was proved 12 December 1661, and whose wife was living in Bristol.²⁷

It is possible that Davies, or indeed a relative such as his father Richard, was part of the great influx of British settlers that swelled the population of Britain's Caribbean colonies, and of Barbados in particular, between the mid 1630s and 1660, attracted by the prospect of quick profits and social advancement.²⁸ Davies's will locates him in an elevated social network in Barbados. Beneficiaries included members of the Pead(e) family of Christ Church parish, Davies 'sons-in-law' (stepsons, according to a common usage of the time) William, John and James Pead who received £100 each on condition that they did not molest his executors.

²⁵ 'A list of the most eminent planters in Barbados, anno 1673' transcribed in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Colonial Series, America and West Indies, Volume 7: 1669-1674* (London: HMSO, 1889), pp. 496-497, entry 1101.II: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=70236&strquery=Eminent_Planters_Barbados_1673 (accessed 18 June 2014). Davies's estate cannot necessarily be identified with the one marked 'Davis' near St George's parish church on Robert Morden's map of Barbados of 1687.

²⁶ 22 October 1659, the cook Richard Roe of Wells indentured for three years; 26 October 1659, the labourer John Griffith of Llanvigall [*sic*], Brecknock, indentured for four years; 10 December 1660, James Painter of Dublin, occupation not recorded, indentured for seven years. Bristol Record Office, Register of Servants to Foreign Plantations 1654-1662, 04220/1: http://www.virtualjamestown.org/indentures/search_indentures.cgi?search_type=basic&start_page=0&db=bristol_ind&servant_in=&servant_fn=&servant_place=&servant_occ=&destination=&ship=&year_ops=&year=&year1=&agent_in=Davis&agent_fn=Thomas&agent_place=&agent_occ=planter&result_order=&submit=Initiate+Search (accessed 19 November 2013).

²⁷ Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/15, p. 181: Sanders, *Barbados records*, vol. 1, p. 100. (Accessed 26 November 2013).

²⁸ Canny (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 221-224.

This legacy was revoked in a codicil of 1665 although another ‘son-in-law’, Thomas Pead, was left £100. Davies’s wife Mary was left the residue of his estate after legacies, the nature of which we learn from Thomas Peade’s own will, dated 19 December 1668 and proved 6 January 1668/69. The will describes ‘land, house, negroes, etc, in the occupation of my mo[ther] Mary Davies’, presumably all in Christ Church parish and referred to as her ‘dower’, in other words inherited from her late husband.²⁹

Lieutenant-Colonel Hooper was one of 23 recipients of gold mourning rings to the value of 20s each, to be worn in Davies’s memory according to custom. Other Barbados names include Colonel Timothy Thornhill and his lady, one of the influx of new settlers in the 1650s, sons of the English gentry looking for new opportunities after the civil wars. The owner of a 500-acre estate, he was one of the Barbados ‘aristocracy’ that dominated its legislature, judiciary and all other institutions. Other beneficiaries include Lieutenant-Colonel Jonathan Stanfast and his lady, another of the Barbados élite (with 500 acres); and James Wallwyn junior and his lady (with 300 acres).

Some of the names recorded in the 1666 codicil to Davies’s will – William Sandiford (witness), Thomas Pargiter (recipient of a ring) – occur in conjunction with the name Thomas Davies in other Barbados wills and may therefore be evidence both of the nature of Davies’s social circle and of the length of his residence on the island. Thomas Davies was a witness to the will of the landowner Thomas Meredith of St Peters parish, dated the last day of February 1651/52 and naming Capt. William Sandiford as an overseer.³⁰ The will of merchant William Warr, dated 13 May 1665, names Thomas Davies and Thomas Pargiter as friends and beneficiaries.³¹

²⁹ Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/10, p. 97: Sanders, *Barbados Records*, vol. 1, p. 272 (accessed 26 November 2013).

³⁰ Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/8, p. 286: Sanders, *Barbados Records*, vol. 1, p. 240 (accessed 26 November 2013).

Thomas Davies and West Africa

The best-documented period of Thomas Davies's life is the time he spent working in West Africa between apparently settling in Barbados in the 1650s and writing his will there in 1664. E. Alfred Jones found no record of Thomas Davies in Africa because he looked in the wrong place. It is the records not of the Royal African Company but of the East India Company that illuminate his career in West Africa.³²

By the 1660s Europeans – first the Portuguese (who founded Elmina fort in 1482), followed by the Dutch then the English, French and other European nations – had become familiar with and named much of the West African coast. The English became a significant force in the early seventeenth century, pioneering the trade for African redwood as well as hides, gum Arabic and wax, but paying little attention to gold. In 1618 the Guinea Company (the Company of Adventurers of London Trading to the Ports of Africa) was founded by London merchants and began looking for gold, reaching the Gold Coast by 1628 and establishing factories at Cormantine (also known as Fort Amsterdam) and elsewhere. In 1644 control of this trade passed to Parliamentarian sympathisers like Maurice Thompson (1604-1676), who was prominent in the East India Company, prompting regular harrying by Royalist raiders such as Prince Rupert (1619-1682) as well as Dutch rivals. In 1657 the Guinea Company leased its rights in West Africa to the East India Company for £1,300, putting the latter in control of the English trading posts. These were not colonies, as the land was not suited to plantations and the economic imperative was to satisfy the strong demand for African products, gold and slaves in particular.³³

³¹ Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/15, p. 472: Sanders, *Barbados Records*, vol. 1, p. 371 (accessed 26 November 2013).

³² The primary sources are the correspondence between the Court of Directors of the East India Company and the Company's Agents and factors on the Guinea coast, transcribed in Margaret Makepeace (ed.), *Trade on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1666: the correspondence of the English East India Company* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1991); and the minutes of the East India Company Court of Directors, published with some omissions in Ethel Bruce Sainsbury (ed.), *A Calendar of the Court minutes etc of the East India Company, 1635-1679*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907-38). This material is analysed in Margaret Makepeace, 'English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive', *History in Africa*, 16 (1989), pp. 237-284.

³³ For a useful overview, see P. E. H. Hair & Robin Law, 'The English in Western Africa to 1700' in Canny (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 241-263.

The East India Company's West African headquarters was at Fort Cormantine in modern-day Ghana. Its priority was trading for gold, needed to sustain the Company's factories in India. Ivory was less valuable and on 14 September 1660 the Company made it clear to its employees that the Company was not to trade in slaves:

Wee have ordered our Agent, to forbear the buying and selling of any Negroes, being it hath proued very much to our preiudice formerly and will so continue, if it shall be practized Wee therefore require you not only to forbear it your selfe, but endeavour to prevent it in all others, and to improve your time, and abiliteis for the glory of God, and the proffitt of our trade.³⁴

Thomas Davies was appointed factor by the Court of the East India Company on 8 November 1661, at a salary of £30 *per annum*, with Peter Watson, John Allen and Richard Davis providing the required bond of £500.³⁵ Because the Company held from the Crown a monopoly for trade with Asia and West Africa, it controlled travel to the Guinea coast. The many for whom the lure of this potentially lucrative opportunity outweighed the substantial and often fatal risks all had to obtain permission from the Company and most likely to be employed by it, typically being required to deposit a surety of £500 and to enter into a covenant undertaking to perform a particular service. The wording of the Court Minute, which begins 'Upon the petition of Thomas Davis', reflects this relationship.

We don't know how Davies gained his introduction to the East India Company, but it may have been with the help of acquaintances in Barbados or in Wales. His family's Welsh connections could have included the Herberts of Powis Castle, whose relative the Puritan-sympathiser Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke (1584-1650), became a member of the East India Company in 1614; and Sir Thomas Myddelton (c1550-1631) of Chirk, an original shareholder of the Company.³⁶ More likely, though, he would have relied on the influential

³⁴ British Library, India Office Records (IOR):E/3/85 f.168, East India Company in London to Edmond Child at Fort Cormantine, 14 September 1660, transcribed in Makepeace, *Trade on the Guinea Coast*, p. 78.

³⁵ IOR:B/26/423. For comparison, in February 1662 Samuel Pepys was paying the composer and music teacher Mr Berchenshaw £5 a month, and in March that year agreed with his servant Jane a salary of £3 *per annum*. On 30 October 1664 he spent £17 on 'a dear and noble suit' and a 'cloak lined with plush'.

³⁶ David L. Smith, 'Herbert, Philip, first earl of Montgomery and fourth earl of Pembroke (1584–1650)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2013

patronage of members of London's professional and mercantile elite, among whom Welsh gentry and entrepreneurs were well represented.³⁷ The Richard Davis who offered security for Thomas Davies may have been such a man, and is likely to have been the 'Richard Davies, of the Temple, gent.', mentioned in Davies's will and identified by Jones as the son of John Davies of London, admitted to the Inner Temple 20 May 1647 and called to the Bar in 1654.³⁸

Davies's role would entail responsibility for overseeing the warehouse system at trading posts so that Company ships could exchange required trade goods on arrival without having to wait for deals to be made with local merchants.³⁹ He no doubt also had the standard expectations of personal enrichment from the opportunities for unofficial trading on his own account. He sailed on 10 November 1661 on the *Coronation*, bound for Guinea and Madras under Captain Roger Milner, and arrived in Fort Cormantine on 25 January 1661/62.⁴⁰

The *Coronation's* cargo was typical but, valued at £16,566 15s 6d, the most valuable of the seventeen cargoes sent out to Guinea by the Company between 1658 and 1664. It included 8,060 sheets in 124 chests worth £1,544 16s 8d; 13,488 iron bars worth £4,211 17s 2d; 3,805 pieces of long cloth (128 bales) worth £6,849; four bales of striped carpets; 349 muskets in six chests; forty casks of pewter; as well as a wide range of Indian textiles such as tapseil, nicanees, Guinea stuff, gingham, bafta, and brawles (blue and white striped calico) sent as a sample.⁴¹

The records show that the Company traded with Africans mainly in textiles. These included wool from Britain (Hounscott say, pampilions, perpetuanas, Welsh plains); cloth from Europe (linens, Flemish and Leiden says [finely woven wool], old sheets obtained in Amsterdam which were popular with Africans as a cheap way to keep warm at night); and a huge variety of Indian textiles (a third of the total value) which were sent from India to England and re-

(<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13042>, accessed 11 June 2014); Charles Welch, 'Myddelton, Sir Thomas (1549x56–1631)', rev. Trevor Dickie, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19685>, accessed 11 June 2014).

³⁷ Andrew Mackillop, 'A 'reticent' people?'

³⁸ Jones, 'Gold Chalice of Welshpool'.

³⁹ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company – A History* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 25-26.

⁴⁰ Makepeace, 'English Traders', pp. 268-269.

exported. The Indian textiles included long cloth (white cotton sheeting) amounting to some seventy per cent of the fabrics shipped from India, nicanees (cheap striped calico from Madras and Surat), tapseil (cheap striped cotton cloth), Guinea stuff (colourful striped or checked cloth), blue bafta (indigo-dyed calico from Bengal), gingham (woven dyed yarns), chintz and brawles. These Indian textiles were soon to become essential to funding the slave trade, and Guinea stuffs were also commonly sent to the West Indies to clothe slaves.



Figure 9. Musket, England, 1588. Steel; wooden stock inlaid with engraved staghorn. M. 948-1983. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Muskets were a controversial export. They were felt to cause disagreements and the Africans were often reluctant to buy them. Indeed, in October 1658 the Company's Agent James Conget asked that no more muskets be sent out, a request to which the Court acquiesced in their reply of 23 June 1659 but then overruled in a letter of 8 November which insisted on the need 'to reape good proffitt by them.'⁴²

Davies must have been struck by the realities of his situation almost immediately. On 3 February 1661/62 the English factors were prevented from unloading the *Coronation's* cargo at Cape Coast by a Dutch blockade, although the English had just secured rights to half of the castle from the powerful African merchant-ruler, John Cloice.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Makepeace, *Trade on the Guinea Coast*, p. 39 & 43.

On 23 May 1662 the Agent Edmund Young (who had arrived in December 1661) died, to be replaced by the chief factor at Cape Coast, John Puleston, who himself died on 6 January 1662/63. Meanwhile in October 1662 the East India Company had agreed to hand over its lease in West Africa to the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa. This had been founded in 1660 by a group of courtiers led by James Duke of York and by Prince Rupert, already involved in the slave trade and a scourge of the Guinea Company while in exile during the Commonwealth. These Royal Adventurers were granted a thousand-year trading monopoly in West Africa. Their main shareholders were important nobles and major London merchants, and included Samuel Pepys (1633-1703). Gold and now slaves too were their priority, the latter recognised as a vital lifeline to the Caribbean economy. In 1662 they undertook to supply 3,000 slaves to Barbados. By 1700 the Royal African Company that replaced them in 1672 had become the biggest carriers of slaves on the Atlantic.⁴⁴

This change of management and strategic trading priority dominated East India Company activity during the coming months, as they prepared to hand everything over. From 6 January 1662/63, when he was promoted by his colleagues from principal factor at Cormantine to Agent on the death of John Puleston, this task was Davies' chief responsibility.⁴⁵ His election as Agent was independently endorsed in the Company's written instructions to Captain Stephen Mitchell, sent out on the *Castle* in January 1662/63 'to bee Superintendent over all our Factors and Factories in those parts' and to sort out the Company's affairs with the aid of the most suitable factors there, 'among whome wee doe prefer Mr Thomas Davies and Mr Gilbert Beavis wee haveing received a good Character of them.'⁴⁶

In January 1662/63 the Royal Adventurers gained a new charter explicitly establishing the slave trade as their main objective, and setting a deadline of 25 March for the East India Company to hand over their Guinea estate. We don't know what Davies knew or thought about this. Clearly he himself benefitted from the slave trade as a Barbados plantation owner, but as a servant of the East India Company he was forbidden to coerce Africans to

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 114-116.

⁴⁴ Canny, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 255-259.

⁴⁵ Makepeace, *Trade on the Guinea Coast*, p. 135.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 133.

leave Guinea to work elsewhere. One of his first tasks as Agent was on 26 January 1662/63 to write a letter to the Company reporting that the factors were unwilling to send twenty English-speaking African men to St Helena on the *American* (which had arrived from England on 20 January) because: 'they have all wives and Children in the Countrey and will never thrive after being transported; and the sending of some away will cause all the rest to Run into the Countrey'.⁴⁷

In this hard-nosed and brutal trading environment, we cannot know whether Davies was showing a sense of humanity or simply being realistic. At this time relationships with Africans were generally good, other Europeans being the main source of problems. Typically, there would be an African trading settlement in close proximity to each European trading post. The East India Company was keen to keep the local population happy, eager to get as much gold as they could before they had to leave.

This was a time of change, however, and in early 1662/63 the Royal Adventurers sent out their own factors. Davies was moved on 4 March to describe the problems this occasioned, reminding the Court of 'our civill entertainment given to the Royall Company Factors and their Goods; which according to the present scarcity of provisions; Encreaseth our charge very much.' He added: 'since the arrivall of the Royall Company Factors our troubles (like soe many Hydraz heads[])] have sprung in the neck of each other, Nott that wee Impute anything to the Factors But the declareinge a divided Interest'.⁴⁸

On 2 March 1662/63 'an open warre' broke out when an African shot an English corporal attending 'the dancing day att Cormantyne Towne' (in itself an indication of positive relations). On 4 March Davies had to report in his letter that the corporal had died and 'This being the first English man slayne since the first settlement here Itt behoveth vs to take Rigorous Revenge for the security of the Nation for the Future as allso for owne particuler Honours'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The reference to ‘the Future’ certainly suggests Royal Adventurer pressure to act in this way. Whether it was Davies’s initiative or not, the town was razed to the ground when the murderer was not produced.

Two questions: motive and opportunity

Two questions remain in deciphering the gold cup’s inscription. First, the meaning of *ob vitam multifariâ Dei misericordiâ ibidem conservatam* [‘on account of his life having been saved there by the manifold mercy of God’]. Second, the date: *Cal. Apr. IX. M.D.C.LXII* [9 April 1662].

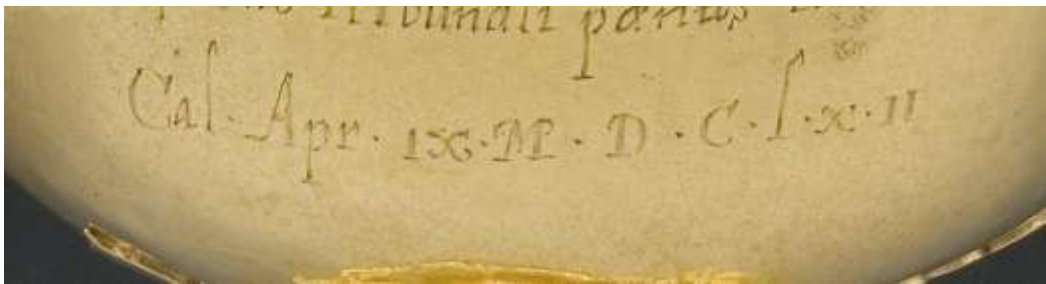


Figure 10. Welshpool gold cup, detail showing the engraved date. © National Museum of Wales.

Life was certainly precarious in Guinea at the best of times but we can only speculate on the reason for Davies’s gratitude at his own preservation. The vast majority of white residents were temporary and considered themselves lucky to get out alive. Conflict, with Europeans and the Dutch in particular rather than Africans, was a significant source of risk, as were accidents such as storehouse fires. Thomas Chappell, brother of the Agent Roger, died in June 1661 after a fire at Cape Coast factory, one of three major fires there.

Mortality was very high mainly because of disease. For example, Edmond Child arrived on 21 January 1659/60, asked to return in April 1660 because of ill health, and died the same year. John Orme and John Saxby arrived on 17 June 1660 and died on 10 and 15 July that same year. Of Davies’ predecessors as Agent, James Conget was in Africa from April 1653, Chief at Fort Cormantine from July to December 1658 and returned to England in October 1659 because of ill health, from where he went straight on to Barbados. Roger Chapell was in Africa from December 1658 to September 1660 and was permitted to return to England

because of ill health, only to return twice in 1663 and 1664. Edmund Young arrived in December 1661 and died there on 23 May 1662. John Puleston came as a factor in May 1662 and died there as Agent on 6 January 1662/63. On 29 May 1662 the Agent and factors at Cormantine wrote to the Court of Directors about ‘the Sad Mortality that hath beene Amongst vs This yeare’ and attached a list of their sixteen colleagues who had died between 18 March and 23 May, with one other bed-ridden and not expected to live. There had likewise been ‘a greate Mortality amongst the flemans [Dutch].’⁵⁰ This period includes the date on the Welshpool cup, suggesting that recovery from a serious illness could well have been the motive behind Davies’s grateful donation to his native parish.

The double problem with the date is that in April 1662 Davies wasn’t in fact Agent general as the cup’s inscription states; and being in Guinea he had no opportunity to commission the cup himself. It is feasible that he commissioned the cup by proxy, as the East India Company records show that it was common practice for factors and agents to acquire gold on their own account and to ship it back to England or onward to India. Although there appears to be no record of it, Davies may have done this himself. A minute of the East India Company’s Court of Committees dated 5 February 1663/64 does refer to a parcel of gold of about 42oz belonging to the late Nicholas Herrick sent by Thomas Davies by way of Barbados into the keeping of the Governor and Deputy.⁵¹ Another minute of the Committee for Debts (31 July 1666) mentions a ‘parcel of gold received from Mr. Davis, the Company’s agent in Guinea, which is pretended to belong to the account of the late Jeremy Sapster now in dispute’.⁵² However, given the time delay involved, it seems unlikely that Davies ordered the cup to be made while he was in West Africa and more likely that he commissioned it on his return in 1663, adding to it the earlier date of an event he wished to commemorate. Likewise, the memorial at Lathbury church must also be a retrospective commission, given that his father died on 20 November 1661 (ten days after Thomas sailed for Guinea) but the inscription

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵¹ Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of the Court minutes, 1664-1667* (1925). Herrick was conceivably the Levant merchant who was the son of London goldsmith Nicholas Herrick (1542-1592), brother of the poet Robert Herrick (1591-1674) and nephew of the royal goldsmith William Herrick (1562-1653). Helen Clifford, ‘Herrick, Nicholas (1542–1592)’; Michael Mullett, ‘Heyrick, Richard (1600–1667)’; G. E. Aylmer, ‘Herrick, Sir William (bap. 1562, d. 1653)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54563>; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13175>; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13076>, accessed 11 June 2014).

⁵² Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of the Court minutes, 1664-1667* (1925), p. 240.

refers to Davies as *AGENT GENERALL FOR THE ENGLISH NATION VPON THE COAST OF AFFRICA*.

Conclusion



Figure 11. The Welshpool gold cup with brass carrying case, c.1662. © National Museum of Wales.

The last record of Thomas Davies in West Africa is the letter that he and the factors wrote at Fort Cormantine on 4 March 1662/63. According to a letter written by Captain Stephen Mitchell at Fort Cormantine on 1 April 1663 ‘Agent Davis was Embarqued on a Dutch Vessel in prosecution of his Voyage for England’ but by the time of the Company’s reply dated 10 August ‘hee is not yet arrived.’ The Company was clearly eager to get Davies’s report on the Company’s affairs in West Africa, writing in the same letter, ‘Wee hope it will not bee long ere the arriveall of Mr Davies with vs, from whom we question not to receive ample satisfaction how affaires stood at his departure.’⁵³ A minute of the Court of Committees dated 21 August 1663 implies that Davies had then arrived: ‘Certain Committees are requested to speak with Thomas Davis, late a factor at Guinea, and take account of the Company’s affairs in those parts.’ This is the first of numerous references in the minutes to examination of Davies’s accounts, which finally appeared close to a conclusion on 21 February 1665/66: ‘Matthew Goodfellow moving the Court to settle the account of Thomas Davies, certain Committees are entreated to endeavour to determine this by compromise.’⁵⁴

Davies was once again resident in Barbados by 18 August 1664 when he signed his will. The proving of the will in Barbados on 24 July 1667 provides us with an approximate date for his death. With typically dogged East India Company thoroughness, the Court of Committees

⁵³ Makepeace, *Trade on the Guinea Coast*, pp. 139-140.

⁵⁴ Sainsbury, *Calendar of the Court minutes, 1660-1663*, pp. 333-334; *1664-1667*, p. 198.

continued to examine Davies's accounts, minuting the need for this on 27 January 1667/68 and 1 July 1668.⁵⁵

By this date Davies's exceptional gift of a gold cup graced the church of St Mary in Welshpool. Here, in regular use as intended and in conjunction with the inscription on Davies's cenotaph, it would have served as a physical reminder to parishioners of its donor in Barbados and through him of the town's connectedness to a wider world of empire and burgeoning trans-Atlantic trade. For Davies himself, the cup represented a material and psychological link in perpetuity to his Welsh roots. It survives to this day to encapsulate how the East India Company was one vehicle for the Welsh to prosper as part of the early development of the English empire. What we know about Thomas Davies of Welshpool and Barbados is tantalisingly sketchy, but the East India Company correspondence in particular evokes a vivid and fascinating picture of a West African trading environment that was logistically challenging, multifariously dangerous and yet for a man like Davies, trusted by his employer and socially well connected, ultimately extremely rewarding.

⁵⁵ Sainsbury, *Calendar of the Court minutes, 1668-1670* (1929), p. 16 & 70.