

A story of Cwrt Pembre or Pembrey Court in Pembrey, Carmarthenshire, Wales.

Researched, compiled, formatted, copied and written from many sources by Rodney G. Dalton, whose ancestor married into the Vaughan family who owned Cwrt Pembre in the early 1600's.

My Dalton family is originally from the Dalton/Bispham/Thurnham area of Lancashire, then emigrated to Witney/Curbridge, Oxfordshire and then in 1651 they lived for over 100 years in Pembrey South Wales starting with; Walter Dalton III, James Dalton, James Ormonde Dalton, James Dalton and my G-G-G-G-G-Grandfather, Thomas Dalton who sailed for America about 1559 and so this story is about my roots in Wales.

To all the other Utah Dalton family members; this is also about your ancestors roots through Thomas Dalton.

Walter Dalton III, was the Royal army paymaster, who fled from Curbridge into South Wales in the winter of 1651 after the defeat of the Royal army of King Charles II in the battle of Worcester during the English Civil War. Three of his children died during this terrible trip. After Walter III was safe in South Wales, he bought land around Kidwelly Castle. He probably would have even went inside to view its contents, now in a state of ruin. In about 1656 Walter III and his family then moved onto land somewhere in the little village of Pembrey. I have documented evidence of some of these lands in Kidwelly and Pembrey.

In June of 2003 I had the opportunity to travel to Pembrey as a member of the Dalton Genealogical Society and visited the very places were my Dalton family lived and died 350 years ago. I attended services in the same church that they did, St. Illtyd's, and took pictures of the Dalton graves in side the walls of the church yard. I went to visit the old ruins of Pembrey Court and then went to Kidwelly castle for a tour. As I said before it was one in a life time visit. This is a very long article because I have tried to give the history of the many places and people mentioned.

Known 'officially' as Pembrey Court, and to the inhabitants of Pembrey as Cwrt Pembrey or just the Court, this historic manor-house stands on a hill about a half a mile north-west of the church of St. Illtyd in the little village of Pembrey. The present buildings are dated from the early sixteen century manor house.

Go to this URL address to view pictures of the ruins of Pembrey.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southwest/sites/local_history/pages/restoration_06.shtml

Dedicated to Saint Illtyd, the parish church contains heraldic memorials to the families of Butler, Vaughan's and Mansell. It is told in our Dalton history that Walter Dalton III is buried somewhere inside the church. In the courtyard is buried the citizens of Pembrey, including some

of my own Dalton family. There is a old door bolted to the wall at the entrance that reads; William Dalton, church warden.

In the courtyard against the outside stone wall is the grave site of James Dalton and his wife Joyce. Below is the transcription on this tombstone which is a large flat stone and is inscribed as follows:

“Here Lieth the body
Of James Dalton of Caldicote
Farm of this parish Gent who
Departed this life on the 15thday
Of May Anno Domini 1721 aged
71 years son of Walter Dalton of
the parish of Witney in the
County of Oxford Gent
Here also Lieth the Body of
Joyce the wife of said James
Dalton who departed this Life the 10th
Day of march Anno Domini 1731
Ages 84 years

The information below is from a booklet I bought in this very St. Illtyd’s Church, Pembrey when I attended services there on Sunday, June 1st. 2003. One of the great events of my life.

Eglwys Illtud Sant, Pen - Bre; the name of the church in the Welsh language.

“The Pembrey parish church with Llandyry is in the deanery of Kidwelly, the Archdeaconry of Carmarthen and the Diocese of St. David’s. Pembrey is a name derived from the hill or ridge which overlooks the village and juts out in the south westerly direction towards Carmarthen Bay. Pembre the Welsh form is precise in its meaning, ‘Pen’ meaning head or end and ‘bre’ meaning ridge or hill.

The church was dedicated to St. Illtyd, who it is believed lived about 450 to 525 A.D., during the Age of Saints 5thto 8thCenturies During the Age of Saints hundreds of devout and saintly men journeyed throughout Wales teaching and preaching and helping the needy. Usually one of them would eventually settled in a particular place and preach to the local people from the most suitable spot, rise or mound; this chosen spot or enclosure gradually came to be regarded as hallowed ground, known in Welsh as ‘Llan’. In time a simple crude church of wattle and timber would be established within the enclosure and the Saint’s name added to ‘Llan’, resulting in hundreds of place names in Wales beginning with Llan, as in Llanelli and Llandeio. No exact date can be given for the foundation or building of the church, but it is one of several churches in this area mentioned in the “Book of Llandaff” which dates from about 1066-71.....

Due to the many alterations and renovations over many centuries it is impossible to discover whether any of the original building exists today“.

Has Pembrey Court a tale to tell? You bet! read on.....

As the Norman conquerors advanced through South Wales, they left in their wake a string of castles, the nearest one being Kidwelly. One of the Norman lords, a certain Le Boteler, was granted lands in the Lordship of Kidwelly, at Pembrey. Le Boteler was later anglicized to Butler.

The Lordship of Kidwelly had been in Anglo-Norman hands since c.1106.

Kidwelly was one of the Norman towns strung out along the coastal plain of South Wales. There is no evidence of any occupation before the King Henry I granted to Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, or even if a small Celtic settlement existed, without influence on the subsequent development of the area..

In 1106, after the death of Howell ap Gronw, who was a Welsh chieftain of Ystrad, Tywy, Kidweli and Gower, Henry I granted these lands to his minister, Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, who erected a castle at the mouth of the Gwaendraeth Fach. This was named Kidwelly Castle and formed one of a series of Norman strongholds designed to secure their newly won conquests in South Wales and to command the passage of the rivers across which the road to the west passed. A mention of the hall of the Castle in a document of 1115 or earlier shows that the building of Kidwelly must have been practically completed by that year. During the up-rising which followed the death of Henry I, the Battle of Maes Gwenllian was fought a short distance away from the castle (1136). The account speaks of Maurice de Londres, Lord of Kidwelly, and Geoffrey, Constable of the Bishop, as leaders of the Norman army. Maurice, who is mentioned for the first time in connection with this district, already possessed Ogmore in Glamorgan, where his father William de Londres appears to have been one of the original conquerors. The coupling of the two names suggests that Roger of Salisbury, while retaining possession of the castle, had granted the lordship of the district to Maurice de Londres, who probably acquired the castle also when the bishop died in the following year.

The Battle of Maes Gwenllian:

Maes Gwenllian, Gwenllian's Field, lies a mile north of Kidwelly.

It commemorates a woman who, with the martial instincts, led a Welsh army against the Normans. The battle followed the death of King Henry I in December 1135, when the Welsh revolted against foreign rule and threatened a national uprising.

An army was raised in Breconshire and attacked the Anglo-Norman settlements in Gower. The battle fought between Loughor and Swansea resulted in a crushing victory for the Welsh where 500 Normans were killed.

The ruler of the South, Gruffydd ap Rhys, saw the exciting prospect of expelling all foreigners from his Kingdom. He rode north to Gwynedd to seek reinforcements. While he was away, Maurice de Londres, Lord of Kidwelly decided to counter-attack.

Gwenllian, the beautiful wife of Gruffydd ap Rhys gathered her forces and led the Welsh army to attack the town and castle of Kidwelly. At Maes Gwenllian, the spot that now bears her name, she was engaged by the forces of Maurice de Londres, the local lord, and utterly defeated.

Gwenllian and her son Morgan were killed and another son, Maelgwn, taken prisoner. The story tells that Gwenllian was decapitated and that her headless phantom never found rest until someone searched the ancient battlefield and returned her skull to her grave.

Gwenllian's name is inextricably linked with Kidwelly. Even today, her name still provokes admiration and respect locally. Hail Gwenllian - Kidwelly's unequivocal heroine after 900 years!

Kidwelly - The settlement: Remember the settlement of Kidwelly started as a hill fort with timber walls. Slowly over the years a few farms and buildings were built around the Castle. The inhabitants of this small village had to soon build a wall around their houses.

The settlement consists of two parts, the castle and the walled town on the west bank, and the priory church with the new town on the other side of the river. The two are joined by a two-arched bridge of fourteenth- or fifteenth-century date. This carried the great road to West Wales, probably replacing an earlier structure. Modern development has greatly altered the appearance of the new town, the last of the picturesque medieval houses having recently been destroyed (1931). The priory church of St. Mary was founded by Bishop Roger before 1115, and became a cell of the abbey of Sherborne. Such foundations are typical of the Norman settlements in South Wales, the alien monks being introduced as a counterpoise to the patriotic sentiments of the native monasteries which too often served as focuses of anti-Norman feeling. The present building dates from the fourteenth century.

From the bridge the road to the castle leads through the defenses of the old town. The walls have mostly disappeared, but the main gateway, apparently of early fourteenth-century date, still spans the road. The line of the defenses can still be traced by the earthen bank which preceded the walls. It encloses about eight acres including the castle which it surrounds on all sides except the east.

Although the medieval buildings within the walls have been replaced with modern houses, the line of the existing roads probably follows the original layout. Another feature of exceptional interest is the ruins of the medieval mill which with the contemporary weir and leat can be traced on the low ground between the old town and the river. At a comparatively modern date this was replaced by a more efficient type of mill, which in its turn is now disused.

Kidwelly Castle:

Perched high on the banks of the River Gwendraeth are the impressive remains of a stone castle on the site of some extensive 12th century earthworks. The earliest castle was probably an earth and timber 'ring work', built in the first half of the 12th century when the Norman invaders came to the area. There were probably some Welsh small farms there at the time.

Kidwelly Castle began as a semi-circular earthwork built on a ridge above the River Gwendraeth by Roger de Caen, Bishop of Salisbury, early in the 12th century. A memorial outside the main gate of the castle commemorates the death of Gwenllïan - wife of Gruffudd ap Rhys, Lord of Deheubarth - who was killed in battle as she led Welsh forces against the castle in 1136. (Read her tale below) The victor that day was Maurice de Londres, and his heirs kept the castle until 1216, although they had to endure several successful Welsh raids during this period.

Kidwelly Castle is one of the finest castles in South-West Wales, it remains remarkably intact. Dominating a long disputed region, the strong and splendid castle developed during more than three centuries of Anglo-Norman/Welsh warfare. A chronicle in stone of medieval fortress technology. With its walls within walls fortifications Kidwelly looks today as an outstanding examples of late 13th century castle design.

Kidwelly is a mighty and imposing monument of Norman power. It is also a beautiful example of castle development, as the castle was dramatically altered on a number of occasions to conform to the latest thinking in military science. Roger, bishop of Salisbury, the Minister of England, established Norman power in the area and the ring work castle that he built here was one of a series of strongholds designed by the Normans to secure the new conquests of south Wales by commanding the river passes here.

This castle fell to the Welsh on a number of occasions in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, including once in 1159 when the Lord Rhys took it and burnt it. He is later credited with rebuilding the castle in 1190. By 1201, however, it was back in Norman hands and remained English from then on, despite periodic attacks.

It was the Chaworth family, who gained possession of Kidwelly Castle in the mid-13th century and who built the impressive stone castle that we see today.

In 1298, the castle passed on to Henry, Earl of Lancaster, who constructed a great hall within the inner bailey to provide a more comfortable accommodation. He also constructed the great chapel-tower, overlooking the river.

In the early 13th century, the outer wall was constructed, either replacing the older wooden-wall, or just being an improvement of an already existing stonewall. Two gatehouses were incorporated into this wall, a smaller one to the north, and the mighty main gate to the south. The four inner towers were also heightened, in order to maintain an effective field of fire.

The great southern gatehouse took more than a century to complete, and was still unfinished by the time of the Welsh uprising under Owain Glyndwr, during which the castle was besieged in 1403. The castle held out for three weeks until an English army arrived, breaking the siege.

A Story about the Castle in 1403:

“The year is 1403 AD, and you, sir Owain Glyndwr, leader and true prince of all Wales, approach Kidwelly Castle. The castle is owned by John of Gaunt (the Snake), Duke of Lancaster, one of your most hated enemies among the oppressing Englishmen. From this castle his men has

raided and overtaxed the surrounding towns and villages for decades, and he holds the castle, as well as his entire fief, in an iron grip.

Although the castle is well manned, the Duke himself however has abandoned his men holding the castle, not daring to risk his own life, and has fled back into England, from where he still has a great amount of men at his disposal, meaning that even if we capture the castle, we are by all means not safe.

However, it is of great importance that we capture the castle, in order to not lose the strength and impact of the rebellion. A defeat here would lead to a great loss of troop moral, and would allow the English to possibly refortify their positions in Wales. Also, commanding the passage of River Gwendraeth has a great strategic value”.

In the late 15th century, a few stone buildings were added to the castle, including the great hall in the outer ward and the great gateway you see today’

The castle played a minor part in the Civil War, laying as it did far from the central area of the struggle. But it’s use as a fortification was at this time long since over.

Today Kidwelly is surprisingly well preserved, since it didn’t suffer from Oliver Cromwell’s slighting during the Civil war.

A story about Gwenllian the Brave:

Script by Gill Clarke.

After the Norman Conquest a beautiful princess from the House of Gwynedd was married to Gruffydd, son of the soil and natural heir to South Wales.

The Welshman's power was threatened by the Norman lord of Kidwelly Castle, so Gruffydd went north with his eldest son to raise support. His wife, Gwenllian, and their two youngest sons remained at home in the Tywi Valley.

One day a messenger arrived: ships had been seen near the coast of Glamorgan. Soon English soldiers were marching across country to join their French allies at Kidwelly.

There was no time to call back her husband, no time for advice, no time to lose. The princess donned a light coat of mail, put a helmet on over her long hair, and reached for a shield and sword.

Then, riding a Scottish pony, Gwenllian led out her sons and a small army into the path of the English troops.

On a high bank above the river Gwendraeth Kidwelly Castle overlooked the flat sea marshes. Creeping beneath its round towers, the Welshmen stole upriver and camped under the protecting brow of Mynydd y Garreg.

Gwenllian sent half the party ahead to intercept the enemy whilst the rest stayed with her, silent and hidden.

For one day they waited and nothing happened. Another day passed, and all was still.

Unknown to the princess a Welshman, traitor to his country, had met with the English force and led them along secret paths to the top of the hill.

In one mad moment they swept down from above onto the idle Welsh below. At the same time the castle gates opened: Maurice de Londres, the Norman Lord, dashed out on horseback, followed by his well-armed men.

There was no hope for Gwenllian, though around her all fought courageously. One son, Maelgwyn, was killed fighting to defend her, and many others were quickly slain.

Before long the princess and those of her men who survived were taken captive. She was wounded and helpless but even so de Londres had no pity. In front of the cheering Frenchmen her remaining son, Morgan, was held back as his mother was beheaded.

For many years afterwards the headless ghost of the princess could be seen, walking in the field of battle which still has her name today. And in the legends of Wales the memory of Gwenllian, a brave and beautiful lady, lives on. * The end *

Now onto the story of the Butler family:

The Butlers had obligations to their Kidwelly overlords; for instance, in times of war they had to provide 5 archers to the Lord of Kidwelly. The Butlers also had to provide one knight to attend 'At the Court of Foreignry of Kidwelly'. There were other duties, which the humbler inhabitants of Pembrey had to perform; for example, the men of the parish had to give a day's ploughing and help with the hay.

The earliest connection with this large amount of land occurs in April 1361 when a John le Botiler is recorded as holding the manor of Pembrey as of the Lordship of Kidwelly. (the present day Court Pembrey house was not as yet built) After the Botiler family changed their name to Butler and as many as 6 generations lived on the lands of the future Pembrey Court, all named John.

The daughter of the last John Butler, named Ann inherited the Manor (lands) and she married Sir Richard Vaughan at his resident at Bredwardine Court, Herefordshire. From this marriage started the Vaughan family dynasty at Pembrey Court.

Sir Richard Vaughan when he inhered by marriage the vast lands of the Manor of Pembrey, he then had Pembrey Court house built on a piece of land on a hill over looking the town of Pembrey as a wedding present for his son Walter.

Sir Walter Vaughan, born in 1500 married Blanch Rydal and they lived at Dunraven Castle in Glamorgan, Wales in 1534. This was for one year only while Pembrey Court was being built. Walter Vaughan and his wife and family continued to travel between Dunraven and Pembrey.

In the past there have been many recordings of wrecks along the coast of Glamorgan, and tales tell of smugglers who were known for looting these vessels. One story is about Dunraven Castle at Southerndown, Glamorgan, and was the home of the Vaughan family.

The last Vaughan, though to be Sir Walter Vaughan to live there had a son who had been at sea for many years. His father's greed led him into the evil pursuit of wrecking, which is enticing ships on stormy nights by the use of lights on the cliff tops (their captains believing the lights were a harbour) to rocks such as the Witch's Nose on Dunraven Head, and their doom. Vaughan and his helpers then plundered their rich cargos from distant lands. On one occasion one of his helpers who was known as Matt of the Iron Hand (as his hand had been removed as a punishment for piracy and replaced by an iron hook), found the body of the captain of the latest wreck washed up on the beach. He was unable to remove the captain's ring and so cut off his hand and gave it to his master who screamed loudly as he recognized it to be the hand of his son returning at last to his family. Vaughan sold Dunraven shortly afterwards and subsequently turned mad.

Rowland Vaughan was the second son of Walter Vaughan of Bredwardine, Herefordshire. He had spent time in the Court of Queen Elizabeth I under the patronage of his great aunt, Blanche Parry, a close friend of the queen. It was the 'bitternesse' of Dame Blanche's 'humor' which forced Vaughan into the Irish wars where bad diet and standing waist deep in water damaged his health and he returned, an invalid, to Bredwardine.

After Sir Walter Vaughan died in 1584 his brother Sir Thomas Vaughan moved into Court Pembrey. He had 4 sons and three daughters. His eldest son, Rowland Thomas Vaughan inherited Pembrey Court. Rowland Thomas Vaughan was the ancestor of many Vaughan's to live at Pembrey Court.

Many famous people visited Pembrey Court, including Oliver Cromwell who visited the manor when he passed through Pembrey during the English Civil War. He stayed there on Sunday, July 3rd, 1648. Other visitors were entertained at The Court, many of them noblemen. Writers came, painters such as Van Dyke, Lely and Reynolds. The latter came and stayed for months to paint the many ladies and gentlemen of the Vaughan family and also their guests. The Vaughans welcomed many of their cousins from the North, South, and mid-Wales and even those who had moved to England. All of these loved Pembrey Court and spent many enjoyable weeks boating, fishing and shooting game in the woods.

In the 1560 the first Rowland Vaughan (and who may be the same Rowland Vaughan whose father was the Sir Walter Vaughan of Bredwardine) lived at Pembrey Court was a keen gardener and made flower and vegetable gardens and a large fruit orchard. He also planted the great spread of oak forest which runs across the hillside from Pembrey to Pwll and as far as Kidwelly.

There was a sizeable pond fed by three springs. There was also a deep well of pure drinking water from a blue rock. This well supplied the house for centuries.

The Vaughans used Pembrey Court as a base to buy and build other houses around the area, one of which was built after 1650 in the town of Llanelli, 5 miles east of Pembrey on the main road to England. This was built by a son of Rowland Vaughan, one of several Rowlands to live at Pembrey Court. His name being Walter Vaughan, and there is a record of 1671 that Walter Vaughan was assessed at twelve hearths for the house which suggests that it was a very large house.

Llanelli: this small village was to become the largest town in the area due to the rapid industrialization of South-east Carmarthenshire. Like nearby Kidwelly, this started as an Anglo-Saxon borough in the medieval period. The antiquary, John Leland, writing in the 1530s, observed that Llanelli was only a 'village where the inhabitants dig coal'. In 1609 a survey of Llanelli was carried out by the Duchy of Lancaster and only 59 freeholders were listed. The church, dedicated to St. Ellwy, was an older formation and there is a late 11th, reference to it in the Book of Llandaf.

Edward, Richard and James Ormande Dalton, all sons of James Dalton, are listed as dying in Llanelli.

This Walter Vaughan had a younger brother named Rowland Vaughan who married Margaret Ann Mansel, of Muddlescombe, Carmarthenshire, Wales. They had a son named Rowland Vaughan Jr. and whose daughter, Joyce married our James Dalton and by this event James Dalton became part of the Vaughan family's involvement with Pembrey Court. James Dalton is listed as an estate agent to the later Lord Ashburnham who married into the Vaughan family; More on this later.

The eldest son of Rowland Vaughan Sr. was Thomas Vaughan who inherited Pembrey Court, but he moved onto Tally in Dyfed.

The above mentioned Walter Vaughan, brother to Rowland, had two wives, and by the second, two sons, names George and Frederick. George succeeded to the family estates. The eldest son Walter Vaughan was knighted in 1603. In 1607-8 Walter was granted and purchased the lands called 'Caldicott' in Pembrey at a price of ?900.00p. These lands stayed in the Vaughan family for years.

Between November 1661 and November 1662 the Pembrey estate passed to an heiress, Bridget Vaughan, the daughter of Walter Vaughan by his wife Alice. A cousin, Rowland Vaughan however, disputed her title in the Bill of Complaint already referred to. He claimed that previous family settlements had stipulated that the estate should devolve upon male heirs only. He also alleged that Bridget Vaughan's mother had persuaded Frederick Vaughan to make a settlement favoring her daughter and that advantage had been taken of the 'age and infirmity' of Frederick Vaughan who was, or so Rowland Vaughan claimed, blind from birth and 'so by his impotence easy to be abused and not knowing what he did but as the confederates should inform him'.

Naturally, this version of events was denied by Alice and Bridget Vaughan, as was the assertion that Frederick Vaughan had been blind from birth. They maintained that his blindness resulted from an attack of smallpox in his infancy. That Frederick was blind cannot be disputed since he signed documents with a mark, even though he was a clergyman.

Rowland Vaughan's claim was rejected and Bridget married in 1677 John, 1st baron Ashburnham, of Battle, Sussex.

Of note is because of the dates, 1661 and 1662, I believe this cousin to be Rowland Vaughan Jr. the father of Joyce Vaughan.

George Vaughan, son of Walter, in April 1641, took steps to recover the manor lands called campos de Caldicott, and other lands in Pembrey Parish that his father Walter has lost to the Crown.

Caldicott is north of Pembrey at the top of the coast line in Pembrey Forest, and was also called Towyn. James Dalton leased Caldicott from the Vaughans and he and his wife Joyce lived there all their lives, as shown in my Dalton history in Pembrey. In Mrs. Edith Dalton Leanings "Dalton Book" she tells us that James Dalton was a Barrister-at-Law and also a receiver for the Duchy of Lancaster.

The story on how one gets to be a Barrister-at-Law. It was necessary for him to begin as a student at one of the Inn's of Court" in London and a candidate had to either pass a general examination, or to produce evidence of having done so at one of the Universities. After James Dalton received his degree he returned home to Pembrey and as luck would have it, he was named as a receiver of the Duchy of Lancaster. This Duchy was originally created to provide income for John the Grant. The Duchy owned land in many parts of England and Wales. This lucrative position provided a very large income and was enough to give his wife and 7 children a very good life. All these children were born at Caldicott in an area on the coast of which was quite barren, with little woodland. From the positions which they afterwards filled, it is evident their parents did a very good job of educationing them.

James Dalton, who was lucky to survive the winter of 1651 as a one year old, lived a long and rich life in South Wales before he died in 1721 when his will was probated.

The story of the little village of Pembrey:

Here is a extract from the 29th years transactions of the Calvinists Methodist History Society;

"Teulue Daltoniaid Pembre, Sir Gaerfyrddin" or the Story of the Dalton family of Pembrey, Carmarthenshire. "Joyce Vaughan, one of the Trimsaran Vaughan's who died on the 10th, of March 1731, 84 years old". Joyce Dalton's death place is shown to be at Caldicot Farm, Pembrey, Wales.

Trimsaran: "Near the northern side of Pembrey is the village of Trimsaran overlooking the vale of Gwendraeth Fawr. The first landowner there was Howel fychan (Vaughan) who come there in the first part of the 16th, century. He descendant from the family of Gwempa, and his son named David succeeded to Trimsaran.....A few generations later there was another David Vaughan of Trimsaran who was the father of Rowland Vaughan Sr. and whose son was Rowland Vaughan Jr. was the father of Joyce Vaughan.

Pembrey village at the time amounted to about twenty houses. If you think about this, those of us who have visited Pembrey today, there must have been a very large distance between houses. This would account for the very large acres that Court Pembrey occupied.

Pembrey: (Pen-bre in the Welsh language) is a village in Carmarthenshire Wales, situated between Burry Port and Kidwelly, overlooking Carmarthen Bay.

Pembrey is a parish in the hundred of Kidwelly, county of Carmarthen, South Wales and is 5 miles (S.S.E.) from Kidwelly, and today contains about 2645 inhabitants. The name of this place, signifying literally the head of a hill or promontory, is derived from its situation at the extremity of a mountainous ridge, beyond which a low promontory extends into the bay of Carmarthen. . . The substrata abound with mineral wealth, this district being thought to be the richest in South Wales in both bituminous and hard coal, both being worked to a very great extent. The quality of the soft coal is peculiarly adapted to the production of gas, the working of iron, and other manufacturing purposes; and vast quantities of both sorts are exported to various parts of the kingdom. . . a capacious harbour was constructed in 1819. . . This part of the coast is of difficult navigation, and to sailors unacquainted of it the most fatal on the shores of the Bristol Channel."

The coastline of Pembrey began its retreat from the foot of Pembrey Mountain some 6,000 years ago, revealing land which shows human occupation since the Iron Age, with hill forts dating from around 400 BC. Roman pottery remains have been unearthed in the oldest parts of the village. Evidence of an early Norman motte-and-bailey castle has been suggested close to the village square and buildings remain in the village from later Norman times.

Most of the village was created during the 18th and 19th century coal mining boom, when Pembrey was a port. Pembrey Mountain (in the Welsh language, Mynydd Penbre) was thoroughly mined by both Welsh and English companies for about 100 years and some reserves are said to remain underground. Pembrey's harbour was prone to silting and was abandoned in favour of Pembrey New Harbour - soon renamed Burry Port Harbour, just a mile further upstream on the Burry Estuary. The original harbour is now known as Pembrey Old Harbour.

Pembrey's mountain and beach Cefn Sidan are reputed to have provided some villagers with careers as wreckers, known locally as Gwyr-y-Bwelli Bach (translated as People with Little Hatchets) - attracting sailing ships with fires purporting to be beacons, then raiding them when they foundered. However, no firm evidence of wrong-doing such as booty has ever been discovered. Nevertheless, a number of vessels were certainly lost around Pembrey, including "La Jeune Emma" bound from the West Indies to France and blown badly off course in 1828. 13 of the 19 on board drowned, including Adeline Coquine, the 12 year-old niece of Napoleon

Bonaparte's divorced wife Josephine de Beauharnais. She is buried at St. Illtyds Church, Pembrey.

Caldicott Farm: This farm is at the top of Pembrey Forest on the coast line which occupies the greater part of (or 'Towyn') Burrows, an area of sand hills of comparatively recent origin. The Burrows developed at the mouth of the River Gwendraeth over a long period. Alongside this a series of reclamations occurred around an initial nucleus formed by a tongue of dry land at the foot of Mynydd (Mountain Penbre) partly represented by the Medieval Manor of Caldicot. The Manor of Caldicot had been merged with the Manor of Pembrey (under the Ashburnhams) and by the early 19th-century, when the coastline had extended almost to its present line and most of this area appears already to have been occupied by sand hills, called 'Great Outlet' on the Pembrey tithe map of 1841.

Caldicott is believed to mean "a cold inhospitable place" which is understandable in view of its exposed location to the ocean.

Pen-y-bedd: On the low coastal plain between Pembrey village and the estuary of Gwendraeth Fawr, and about 1 ¼ miles north-west of old Cwrt Penbre mansion. This small village was a superior farmstead, home of yeomen and gentry. It formed part of the Cwrt Penbre estate in the days of the when the Vaughan's and Ashburnham's owned a large amount of land in the area. It was held by lease in the 18th, century by the Daltons who acted as agents to the Cwrt estate. Source: Carms. PO.

Charles Dalton, a son of James Dalton leased a farm in Pen-y-bedd.

Next lets tell about what we know about the others of Walter III family. There are two other small villages or farms that our Dalton's lived on; one was Clog-y-Fran, St. Clears.

Clog-y-Fran: in St. Clears, a few miles above Kidwelly, is on a scarp above the river Fenni. A gentry residence from medieval times, it eventually became a farmstead in the late 18th century. John Dalton the oldest son of James, and grandson of Walter III leased this farm after his marriage to Mary Powell and a daughter, Hanna married Zacharias Beven, who also lived at this farm. Another son of James, Rev. Thomas Dalton is listed as dying in St. Clears in 1739.

Llether-y-Chan: Another area of Pembrey was that of a farm named Llether-y-Chan, on high ground above Pembrey. In the 16th, century it was the home of the gentry of Vaughan. In the next century it changed ownership and let to farmers. The Mansel family owned it for awhile and in 1690 leased it to John Bonvill, yeoman for thirty one years. This John Bonvill's daughter, Mary married James Dalton, the father of Thomas Dalton who came to America in 1759. James Dalton is listed as dying on his farm 'Llether-y-Chan' in 1766.

This Thomas Dalton was only known to us by the genealogy notes of John Luther Dalton, of Utah, USA, his great grandson who went to England on a mission for his Church in 1866. In about 1886 he later went back to England and Wales for future research on his Dalton family history. We Dalton's in America was not sure that Thomas Dalton was one of our ancestors until two events happened; The first was finding the record of the christening of Thomas Dalton listed

in the Bishops Transcripts records of the St. Illtyd Parish Church of Pembrey that proved his being the son of James Dalton of Lleth-y-Chen. Here is that record;

‘Thomas terre-fil Jacobi Dalton de Lettyvychan septum dir memsis Mai’

This transcript reads; 7th, May 1732 Thomas, illegitimate son of James Dalton of the adobi of Llettyrvychan.

The final proof that myself and the Utah Dalton's as being descendants of this Dalton family in Pembrey was when I took a DNA test in April of 2003. The results was a 100% match with Mr. Michael Neale Dalton, President and founder of the Dalton Genealogical Society in England who took the test also in April of 2003, and who was a descendant of John Dalton, first son of James Dalton, son of Walter III. This proved we both were ancestors to this Dalton family in Pembrey.

Back to the Vaughan family:

One of the last Vaughan's to live at Pembrey court had a daughter named Bridget Vaughan. (read above) This Bridget married Earl John Ashburnham of Sussex, in 1677 in Westminster Abbey. They lived at the Ashburnham Sussex seat with occasional visits to their Welsh estates. John Ashburnham never lived in the manor of Pembrey Court and by this marriage the future of Pembrey Court was insured for 250 years. The Ashburnham Estates including Pembrey were sold by auction in 1922.

Lord Ashburnham was a visitor and once wrote that Pembrey Court was an interesting stone house, very large and kept in reasonably good repair. Another of the Ashburnham's homes was a big mansion in Pembrey known as Pembrey House.

Lord Ashburnham, who visited Carmarthenshire again in 1687 to survey his estates in the neighborhood of Pembrey, complains very bitterly in his diary of the disgraceful state of the roads which he was obliged to traverse. "

"The state of the Carmarthenshire roads in the 17th century was undoubtedly atrocious. There is an account of one of them from the pen of John Taylor, the "Water Poet", who undertook a few weeks' journey on horseback in 1652. He was fortunate enough to meet a Welshman who guided him to Carmarthen.

Bridget, sole heiress of Pembrey Court lands become widowed in 1702 and during the years 1711-14 the Dowager had trouble with several tenants in Pembrey, so she went to her local agents to help out. These agents helped to administer her Welsh estates. The Dalton family, living in Pembrey since 1656, provided several agents; The first in 1675 was Charles Dalton, oldest son of Walter Dalton III, was in charge when the Vaughan's owned it, and in 1721-24, John and James Dalton the agents who were responsible for sale of coal from Lord Ashburnham's coal works, some being exported in local vessels. It is also noted that my own James Dalton was also an agent for this estate. This makes sense because of his marrying Joyce Vaughan. I believe that these later Dalton agents had leased rooms or an office in the manor of

Pembrey Court. We can't as yet prove that these Dalton's actually lived at Pembrey Court, but all our records tells us that these Dalton were 'of Pembrey Court' and may be proved by the next statement;

A excerpt from a survey and valuation of the manor of Pembrey, a estate belonging to Lord Ashburnham states; "Part of the Court House and buildings, heretofore generally used by the agents; a part has been keep for the accommodation of the Agents to the Estate."

About 1700 Pembrey Court drew the notice of a distinguished antiquary, Edward Llyud, whose observations containing some interesting facts about the locality and was quoted in a later article is as follows; "Penbre Court, ye seat formerly of the Butlers and afterwards of the Vaughan's and now belonging (in right of his lady) to William Ball, Esqr, whence it descends to my Lord Ashburnham's lady..... Here are two lakes close together called Swan Pool where there are plenty of Eels, and in the Winter store of Fowls such as Ducks and Teal, sometimes wild Swans, Elk and wild geese. This pool is called Swan Pool because the Lord of the manor has thereon about 40 swans. Before the hard frost there were about 80, which all died down to 6. There is a irrigation ditch extending from the area of the farms of Towyn Mawr to the burrows marked nowadays on maps as "Swan Pool drain" a far cry from the days when the pool harbored elegant swans of the masters of Pembrey Court".

The Estate continued to be owned by the Ashburnham family until 1922 when it was advertised for sale, and with the death of the 6th and last Earl of Ashburnham in 1924, the Ashburnham connection was over. Although the latter-day Vaughan's and the Lords Ashburnham never resided in the old manor-house it was by no means neglected, and was lived in by a series of the estate agents and yeomen who kept the building in good trim.

This very large Manor house was then bought by a series of farmers, but during the 1950's it became ruinous, and is now empty and wholly ruinous, and sadly not really capable of being preserved as one of Carmarthenshire's few surviving examples of Elizabethan architecture.

The below article is copied from the BBC Wales home page. It tells about one of three old ruins that are being considered for restoration.

"Pembrey Court Manor House (Cwrt Pembre), later known as Court Farm, is today little more than a ruin. It is, however, an important and unique reminder of the world that existed before the Industrial Revolution reshaped the Carmarthenshire countryside.

The site of the house may have been settled as early as 1361. Though much of what remains is Elizabethan in origin, the house also comprised a medieval tower house, core and a barn with a castellated frontage. The most distinctive remaining feature of the property, the only Elizabethan manor left in Carmarthenshire, are its seven distinctive rubble stone chimney stacks. These days shrouded beneath rampant ivy the chimney stacks would once upon a time have proved a valuable navigation tool for ships negotiating the treacherous Burry Estuary.

The house would have been the most important property within the local parish and it is said that Oliver Cromwell once stayed there. In the early 1700's, however, the house underwent drastic alterations to convert the single dwelling for use by two separate families. Substantial remodeling of the interiors led to walls windows and doors being removed and further openings and divisions being introduced. Subsequently the two homes would be leased to a succession of different owners.

The house has remained unoccupied since 1948 and is today very dilapidated. However a wealth of original architectural features including the property's haphazard irregular quadrangle plan and massive stone walls, some magnificent paneling, and those landmark chimney stacks still invest the property with enormous character. The presence of so many original features, including portions of the roof, which though very badly deteriorated present clues as to the original design, make sensitive restoration of this unique property a viable proposition.

It is hoped that a restored and revitalized Pembrey Court could provide the local community with a valuable resource, which could fulfill any one of a variety of roles. Suggestions considered so far include developing the property as a themed hotel, an arts center and an Elizabethan interpretive center for schools and other visitors to the area.”

Another source of information on Court Pembrey is The Friends of Cwrt Farm or Ffrindian ‘r Cwrt in Welsh.

The Friends of Cwrt Farm are a group of local people dedicated to saving Carmarthenshire's last ancient manor house, Cwrt Farm in Pembrey. This is a magnificent Tudor mansion with a long and interesting history. This group have been so successful with their campaign that Cwrt Farm is going to be featured on the BBC TV program Restoration, as one of three Welsh buildings worthy of restoration.

Cwrt Farm has been an integral part of the cultural, political and social framework of Pembrey since early in the 14th century. Today, though apparently derelict, structural surveys show the remaining structure to be viable for sensitive restoration.

“As the Norman conquerors advanced through South Wales, they left in their wake a string of castles, the nearest one being Kidwelly. One of the Norman lords, a certain Le Boteler, was granted lands in the Lordship of Kidwelly, at Pembrey. Le Boteler was later anglicised to Butler. The Butlers needed a manor house as a residence, but also to act as their manorial court, ie sorting out rents etc. So Cwrt came into being.

The Butlers had obligations to their Kidwelly overlords; for instance, in times of war they had to provide 5 archers to the Lord of Kidwelly. The Butlers also had to provide one knight to attend 'At the Court of Foreignry of Kidwelly'. There were other duties, which the humbler inhabitants of Pembrey had to perform; for example, the men of the parish had to give a day's ploughing and help with the hay. The manor of Penbre was granted to Sir Arnold Butler by Maurice de Londres, lord of Kidwelly, in about 1128. The last known reference to the Pembrey Butlers was in c.1500. Ann Butler, heiress of estates at Pembrey and Dunraven, married Sir Richard Vaughan of Bredwardine in Herefordshire, High Sheriff of that county in 1530. During the Civil War

period, Cwrt was the home of Sir George Vaughan, an ardent Royalist. This crippling fine led him to return to live at Cwrt, and to sell off his estates at Dunraven and Fallersdon.

John Ashburnham wrote of Cwrt in 1677: ' I saw Pembrey House (Court), an old stone house, large enough and kept in good repair', 10 years after he had married Bridget Vaughan and had moved to Ashburnham Place in Sussex.

So Cwrt now became Cwrt Farm, the home of estate stewards and tenant farmers. In 1823, the Ashburnham's built themselves an elegant villa, Pembrey House, as an occasional residence, the center of their 8,000-acre Carmarthenshire estate. Cwrt Farm was later sold to the Bonnell family.

Friends of Cwrt Farm are committed to the sensitive restoration of Cwrt Farm for use by the local community.

A feasibility study carried out for Cadw Sir Gaerfyrddin (The Trust of Wales) states:-

“... whilst the building looks a lost cause, there is still significant merit in a complete restoration of the building, with so many good features still surviving. However, decay is still progressing, and this may be the last opportunity to save the building before a substantial collapse occurs and renders the situation totally irretrievable.”

The Building its self:

The first impression of Cwrt now is of a large, rambling building of local stone, heavily shrouded in ivy, with many tall chimneys still poking up through the rampant growth. It is clearly ruinous and neglected, as the roofs and internal floors have virtually all collapsed.

But the shell of the building, the walls and chimneys are remarkably intact, as they are of such robust construction. Some of the stone walls are up to four feet in width.

Cwrt Farm is obviously an ancient house, with massive stone walls and a haphazard plan. A clue to its quality is the pair of great, diagonal chimneys on the West side of the house, a Tudor architectural feature of important houses. Every fashionable Elizabethan gentleman's house would sport at least a pair of great chimneys like this - they are an important clue to the architectural quality of Cwrt. They are decorative as well as supremely functional.

Other Tudor details we can spot are the surviving three light mullioned windows, some with hood moulds, so the rain drips safely away; some of them are stone, others of wood. They are so reminiscent of the windows of Oxford colleges, and again, are clues to the quality of this building. The windows at Cwrt are very interesting - there is evidence that at times in the past they have been blocked, possibly to avoid paying the window tax. Some of the larger windows in the hall, the most important room in the house, must have been very fine.

Inside the former hall in the South-East wing, you can see two Sutton stone fireplaces on the wall, one on top of the other. They are elegant, simple, but high quality designs, showing that in the past Cwrt was an important gentry house, with fireplaces brought in from outside. The Sutton stone quarry was near Southerndown, on the Glamorgan coast, and it is quite possible that the fireplaces arrived by sea.

In the roof space of the former hall, which later became a barn is a collapsing ornate beam, of great significance. It may date back to the 13th Century. It is one of the few roof timbers to survive.

The plan of Cwrt is an irregular three sides of a quadrangle; there are many rooms of different shapes and sizes, and little coherent planning, due largely to the various uses that Cwrt has been put to over the centuries. Many clues to its former use and function are no doubt lying in the collapsed rubble of roofs and upper floors.

In front of Cwrt stands the barn, also in decay, with a collapsed roof and ominous cracks on the pine end walls. Just under the parapet, corbelling can be seen, projections of stone jutting out from the wall to support its weight. This local building feature is to be found on some old Carmarthenshire buildings. Corbelling can be found on the South wall of Cwrt - (hidden under the ivy) and on the tower of Pembrey church. Another good feature is the pointed arch of the doorway, suggesting an ancient construction, which along with the castellated parapet, gives it a military air.”

And so ends my story of a historical mansion that I hope can be restored to its former glory.
Rodney Dalton, Dec. 2007.

Sources: Pembrey Court: An old Carmarthenshire Manor House; by Frances Jones;
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Kidwelly Town Council;