

Manuscript of the Month
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Coloured drawing of Neath Abbey by Sir Richard Colt Hoare Bt, 1802



In the summer of 1802, Sir Richard Colt Hoare 2nd Bt spent seven weeks travelling from one end of Wales to the other. His aim was to recreate a journey undertaken over 600 years earlier by two medieval churchmen, Giraldus de Barri, also known as Gerald of Wales, and Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury. By the end of his tour Richard had amassed over 140 drawings, some of which he used to illustrate an ambitious two volume work, *The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin Through Wales, AD MCLXXXVIII* by

Giraldus de Barri; translated into English, and illustrated with views, annotations and a life of Giraldus, first published in 1806. The full set of original drawings has lately been acquired by Hoare's Bank, along with a first edition of *The Itinerary*. But when and why did they leave the Hoare family's possession? And what journey did they have to undertake before finally arriving at Fleet Street?

Richard Colt Hoare, eldest son of bank partner Richard Hoare (later 1st Bt), was born at Barn Elms, Surrey, in 1758. After a private education which stopped short of university – deemed unnecessary for a career as a banker – he entered the family banking house on Fleet Street in the late 1770s. But while his days were spent learning the business of banking, Richard's evenings were devoted to studying the Classics with his tutor, Rev Joseph Eyre.

By 1783 Richard was married and his future as a prosperous London banker seemed assured. Within two years, however, his world had been turned upside down. First his grandfather, Henry Hoare (Magnificent), suddenly relinquished his estates at Stourhead, Wiltshire, in favour of Richard, a move which, although acknowledged by the latter as 'an instance of uncommon liberality', signalled the end of his fledging banking career. Then, soon after the handover was completed, Richard suffered a triple tragedy. His wife's death in August 1785, along with their new-born son, was followed a fortnight later by that of his grandfather. Plunged into grief, Richard had just one thing on his mind: escape. Within weeks he had quit England for the Continent and much of the next six years were spent criss-crossing France, Switzerland and above all Italy. His return to England in mid 1791 was intended to be no more than a brief stopover before setting out to explore Spain and Portugal. But the Peninsula War instead forced Richard to seek distractions closer to home. He later recalled: 'Wales, which I had never seen satisfactorily, was fixed upon as the object of my pursuit; and I had two objects in view: the first, to make a series of views in Monmouthshire for my friend Mr Coxe's history of that fine country – the second to follow the iter [itinerary] of Giraldus through the Principality'. Coxe's *Historical Tour of Monmouthshire*, illustrated by Richard, duly appeared in 1800. That same year Richard published his own first (modest) work, a description of the house and garden at Stourhead. But he had not lost sight of his more ambitious project, an annotated translation of Giraldus's *Itinerary*.

As every Welsh schoolchild knows, Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury and his chaplain Giraldus de Barri set out in Lent 1188 on an arduous preaching tour of Wales. Their aim was to garner support for a new Crusade against Saladin, a cause both men had personally committed themselves to and which ultimately would cost Baldwin his life. From Hereford, the two clerics and their retinue of about 300 entered Wales at New Radnor and spent seven weeks travelling around the country, from Pembroke in the south to Anglesey in the north, before crossing back into England near Chester. Copies of Giraldus's vivid account of their tour, along with the people, the folklore and the hazards they encountered along the way – steep mountains, fast-flowing rivers, quicksand-bedevelled beaches – were circulating by 1191, and it remains one of the most celebrated of all medieval travelogues.

It was this journey that Richard Colt Hoare and William Coxe set out to replicate in May 1802. As Richard wrote in his journal: 'The object of this Summer's tour is to follow the interesting and highly curious Itinerary of Giraldus Cambrensis through North and South Wales in the year 1188 and to make a collection of drawings to illustrate it'. (*The Journeys of Sir Richard Colt Hoare through Wales and England 1793-1810*, ed M W Thompson, 1983). Like Giraldus, the two friends crossed into Wales at New Radnor. And for seven weeks they pursued a similar course, stopping off to study and sketch innumerable churches, ruins, views and Roman remains along the way. To Richard's eye, some places seemed unchanged since Giraldus's day. At Tenby, for example, he observed: 'The lake...fishponds etc as described by Giraldus are easily to be traced'. But on other occasions, notably at Neath Abbey, modern life intruded rather too much for his liking: 'The dingey (sic) and sombre appearance of these ruins (caused by the neighbouring copper and iron works) at first sight prejudiced me much against them, but on closer inspection I found a good subject for my pencil in each separate front'.

Not that Richard dwelled entirely in the past. Like most travellers of his time, he was unable to resist a picturesque view. 'Pembroke', he wrote, 'may be considered as a rich treat to the artist and antiquarian. The ruins are grand and truly picturesque'. Nor was he averse to making a detour if it afforded him the opportunity to study modern agricultural methods. Shortly after leaving Hereford, therefore, 'we diverted a little...in order to see the farm and stock of Mr S Tulley, famous for having the finest breed of cattle in Herefordshire'.

By the end of his tour Richard had produced a total of 144 drawings. Two years later, in 1804, he published an edited version (in Latin) of Giraldus's *Itinerary*. But the earliest hint of anything more ambitious came in late 1805, when *The Universal Magazine* announced: 'We are happy to learn, that a very splendid edition, in English, of that ancient and invaluable work, Giraldus Cambrensis, edited by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, is now in the press, and will be published in the course of the ensuing spring'. *The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin Through Wales, AD MCLXXXVIII by Giraldus de Barri; translated into English, and illustrated with views, annotations and a life of Giraldus* duly appeared in May 1806. Published in two volumes and priced at 8 or 11 guineas, depending on size, it featured nearly sixty of Richard's drawings as well as several hand-coloured maps. And it received favourable notices. The *Edinburgh Review* called *The Itinerary* 'a splendid present to Wales', while the *Monthly Review* judged that 'Men of taste, and lovers of curious information...will feel very sensible gratitude to the accomplished editor of the collections now before us'. Purchasers would include historian Sir Francis Palgrave, novelist Sir Walter Scott and the Kingston upon Hull Subscription Library.

Richard went on to publish several other works, mostly relating to travel, antiquities, genealogy and topography. He also became a keen archaeologist, conducting nearly 400 excavations on Salisbury Plain and participating in one of the first recorded digs at Stonehenge. Wales, though, continued to

fascinate him and he visited it regularly for many years. In 1814, Richard had the 144 drawings from his 1802 tour handsomely bound in red morocco edged, appropriately enough, with Welsh dragons picked out in gold. For the next seventy years this volume lay undisturbed in the library at Stourhead, before the agricultural depression of the 1870s-80s forced Richard's great-nephew, Sir Henry Ainslie Hoare 5th Bt, into selling many of Stourhead's treasures. In the summer of 1883, some 1,971 items from the library went under the hammer at Sotheby's, among them Lot 791, described as a 'Series of 144 Original Drawings, in Sepia, of Views in Wales to illustrate Giraldus' Itinerary'. Its price, £75 (about £6K today), was one of the highest achieved in the entire sale, although the purchaser was identified in the auctioneer's notes only as 'Lord D'.

Sometime during the next decade, the drawings became the property of another keen antiquarian, Edward Fisher (d 1895) of Newton Abbot, Devon. Then in 1897 Fisher's widow bequeathed his extensive library to the Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, on condition that it would be housed in the Museum's reference library, referred to as the 'Fisher Library' and never sold, exchanged or otherwise broken up. Bookplates at the front of the volume show that the drawings did indeed enter the Museum's collections as part of the Fisher Library. But earlier this year certain items from the Museum, including Richard's drawings, were de-accessioned and sold at auction. Although contrary to Mrs Fisher's wishes, Exeter's decision has allowed this invaluable piece of history to complete its own journey and return home to the Hoare family.