

Thomas Jacks Jerman (1824 – 1891) and Anne Jerman (1829-1865)

1. A farming family – Montgomeryshire. September 1852

In the middle of remote mid-Wales, the Severn ceases to be a bloated English river, and runs narrow and fast through a wide farming vale. It is vibrant and near to its source. This is Welsh speaking Montgomeryshire and part of the ancient principality of Powys. It is close to the centre and the heart of Wales. Straddling the river is the small town of Llanidloes, and just four miles away lies Llandinam, a village on the east bank of the Severn. Lower House was a small farm of 40 acres, and Thomas Jacks Jerman needed only one man beside himself to work the farm. It was a small outpost in the great swathe of Jerman owned farms, which speckled the countryside between here and Trefeglwys and down to Llanidloes itself.

Thomas Jerman was just returning to the house from the meadow down by the Severn. He could have walked out of a novel by Thomas Hardy, except they barely used the English language in this area. In one hand was a great wooden scythe, and his shirt was stuck to his back with the exertions of cutting hay for winter feed. On his head was a wide brimmed felt hat, and his dark, cotton trousers were caught at the knees by old laces revealing heavy brown boots. He was slim for a farmer, with dark auburn hair, and penetrating brown eyes. He looked up at the door of the house, and saw that an old trap was drawn up by the door.

His father, Edward, had come calling with his new wife Sarah. She was talking at the door to his own wife, Ann. And Ann and Sarah were sisters. This confusing turn of events had come about because Edward's first wife, and Thomas's mother, had been dead these seven years. Edward had re-married a younger wife in March 1848, and his son Thomas had married her sister in the July of that year. To confuse and tie the family even more closely together, Ann and Sarah were also Jermans, and distant cousins of Edward and Thomas. To be precise, the women were members of the Coedmawr Jermans and the men came from the Dolgwenith branch of the family. All claimed descent from the Jermans of the Van, or in Welsh, Y Fan. There the Jermans had been yeoman farmers since at least 1500, farming such places as Pencllyn and Cae Iago.

“Well, Tom” said his father in Welsh, “how goes the harvesting? We are just on our way back from market at Llanidloes and thought that we might make a detour this way.”

“Well the harvest is good enough but we have just lost two cows, and we could have done without that. With sheep prices where they are, the smaller farmers like us are struggling. The way things are going, I might have to run the place on my own soon.”

“If I could afford to help you get a bigger place I would, but with the two youngsters by Sarah, I am a bit short myself. But I agree, it is all about scale. At forty acres you will always struggle.”

The two men turned together and walked towards their wives. They were remarkably similar, with dark auburn hair pulled back into generous buns. There was six years between them but Sarah, the elder, was vivacious and fun.

“So Thomas” she said, “how does it feel to be the father of three? And who knows maybe more on the way?”

“Just here a second, and already your sister is telling you all our secrets!” he complained. But then laughed and gave his sister a hug.

“Time for tea, I fancy.....”

## Notes

1. I am indebted to Gareth Jones who has put together the Jerman Project website. It is a fine centre for the study of the history of the Jermans of Powys.
2. The 1851 census records the young family of Thomas and Ann Jerman at Lower House, Llandinam. Their oldest son, Thomas, aged two is staying with his maternal grand-parents at Coedmawr Farm, and this possibly indicates a financial struggle which was to blight Thomas’s whole life. They had one baby with them – Mary at the time of the census. Ann was born in 1851, but after the census had been taken. The farm is only 40 acres with one employee. Coedmawr for example is over 200 acres.
3. This was the Britain of Free Trade, when the Corn Laws had been swept aside and protectionism was a thing of the past. All over the country, small farmers were being forced off their farms.
4. The Jermans were of solid farming yeoman stock who had traditionally been tenants of the Williams Wynn family.
5. Edward’s younger son and Thomas’s brother was the Rev Edward Jacks Jerman. He was the Presbyterian Minister in Wrexham from 1861-1893, and then in Breeze Hill, Liverpool from 1893 until his death in 1913. The family were always nonconformist and many had been Quakers.

Fig 1: Extracts from the census returns of 1851 and 1861 for Thomas Jacks Jerman and his family in Montgomeryshire. In 1851 he was at Lower House, Llandinam, and in 1861 farming at Bontnewydd Fach between Llanidloes and Llandinam.

Jerman emigrés to Scotland have so far proved very rare - this is the only one I have so far discovered. Others in this particular family also moved quite long distances - and this is one of the best far come across. It all seems to stem from a move - possibly as a result of agricultural failure - from the early death of the mother of the family.

Sarah Jerman was born on 16 April 1859, to parents Thomas Jacks Jerman and Ann Jerman. Th July 1848. Ann came from the large family at **Coedmawr** and her husband was actually her second the Dolgenwith branch of the Jermans.

In 1851, the young family were resident at Lower House, Llandinam:

1851 Census: Lower House, Llandinam

Thomas Jerman, Head, 26, Farmer 40acres, employing 1 labourer

Ann Jerman, 23, Farmer's Wife

Mary Jerman, daughter, no age given (probably born 1850)

10 years later, they had moved, but not yet far. The family is also appreciably larger:

1861 Census: "Bontnewith Fach" (as copied from the original image)

Thomas Jerman, Head, 35, Farmer of 16 acres of land

Ann Jerman, 32, Farmer's Wife

Mary Jerman, daughter, 11

Ann Jerman, 9

Edward Jerman, 7

Martha Jerman, 4

<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/jermanweb/edinburgh.htm>

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**Sarah Jerman, 2**

Bridget Jerman, 1 mth (is known to have died, 1862)

On the enumerator's round, this property is between the big farm at Dolwen (c Hamer family - this is probably now the large abattoir site of Hamer Internati Berthddu. This is consistent with a location on the southern side of the Severn way between Llanidloes and Llandinam. The spelling should probably be "B meaning Newbridge. I can find no reference on the modern map

2. A farm sale -- Bontnewydd Farm, Llanidloes, Montgomeryshire. October 1864.

There was an edge to the autumn breeze, which told of a hard winter coming. In front of a trestle table, next to the ancient stone barn, a rag-tag collection of farm implements lay on the ground. On the table, were positioned smaller items. Each was neatly labelled and numbered. About thirty farmers and their kindred stood in a semi-circle, and as an item came up for sale they flicked a hand quickly or nodded imperceptibly. These were men used to auctions whether it be sheep, cattle or farm implements. The auctioneer stood behind the table with a clerk to one side. He wore a black frock coat, and a tall stove hat. He spoke rapidly in Welsh; his eyes always seeking, coaxing, another bid.

The upper valley of the Severn was a golden brown colour as the harvested fields merged in the distance with the autumn tints of woods and hedgerows. The small fields proclaimed their ancient nature. There had been no need for Enclosure Acts here. Families had created the farms, and laid down a field system, which was a thousand years old when the English language was first heard in this vale. The families were still here. Now, however, they had to compete with grain from Russia, and it would not be long before beef would be arriving from Argentina and lamb from New Zealand. If there were to be the same families here in a hundred years, then the farms must merge and the smaller holdings disappear. What was viable in the eighteenth century would not survive in the nineteenth. Small farms would disappear; it was inevitable as the sun rising tomorrow. Bontnewydd Farm was only sixteen acres. It had been sold to the Hamers, in the much larger adjacent farm of Dolwen. It lay half way between Llanidloes and Llandinam on the south bank of the Severn.

To one side stood the family. They were remarkably quiet. Thomas Jerman was nearing forty, with the tanned skin of a man who had not spent much time inside. His wife was few years younger, and already beginning to show the signs of another pregnancy. Six children stood in front of them. They were rooted to the spot by the spectacle in front of them, which was coming to an end. Off to one side, an older son, in the uniform of the Cambrian Railway Company was talking to his uncle. The uncle was a young man, and dressed as a Minister. Just then the auction came to an end, and the auctioneer called across to the Minister.

“Mr Jerman, we would be grateful if you would say a few words.”

The Minister advanced a couple of paces and then began speaking in Welsh. He had no bible in his hand, and recited from heart. It was the first verses of the St John's Gospel. Suddenly there was not a hat on a head in the farmyard. He began, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

After ten minutes he stopped, and turned looking at his brother. He raised his hand and called for a blessing on him and his family. Then, from the rear of the small gathering a voice began with “Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi.....” In no time, a harmony was found and the song gained strength, swelled and then died. One by one, the farmers lined up to say good-bye to Thomas Jacks Jerman, his family, and his brother, now a Minister in Wrexham.

One man said to him, “Thomas, it is a long way over the mountains to Lampeter. Will you come back and see us?”

“Of course I will Owen. What point is there in going to work for a railway company, if you cannot make use of the transport?”

“And will it be the same company as young Tom?”

“Not at all. I am to start on Monday at Lampeter with the Manchester and Milford Railway Company. Money paid weekly and no more worrying about stock prices or the weather.”

“Good luck to you Thomas.”

## Notes

1. Gareth Jones, a German cousin, has re-produced on his website, the German Project, the 1861 census return for Thomas and Anne. It shows Thomas, 35, as a farmer at Bontnewith Fach farm. This is only 16 acres, and he would have struggled to feed his growing family. In 1861, this consisted of Mary (11), Anne (9), Edward (7), Martha (4), Sarah (2) and Bridget (1 month), living on the farm. In addition, Thomas, junior, was absent and probably still living with his grand parents. Bridget died in 1862, but Daniel was born in 1863 at Bontnewydd, Llanidloes. The family then moved the forty or so miles to Lampeter. This is southeast of Llanidloes, over the hills, and into rural Cardiganshire. The last child, Richard, was born in Lampeter in April 1865, but he died on November 14 of that year.
2. On December 21 1865, disaster struck the family. Anne died at the age of thirty-six.
3. By 1871, Thomas and three of his children (Mary, Martha and Daniel) were living in a boarding house in Lampeter. The others were scattered. Thomas junior stayed with the railways and ended up marrying and settling in Oxford where his descendants still live. Edward moved to the USA, settling first in Illinois and then moving to Oregon. Anne, junior, married Ben Jenkins, in 1873, a saddler, and they settled in Lampeter, having a large family. Sarah moved in the 1870's to Scotland as a lady's maid to the wife of the House-master of Moredun House, Fettes College, when he moved from Lampeter to Edinburgh.
4. By 1881, Mary had left home, presumably to get married and old Thomas is still a railway porter. Martha is keeping house for him in a small cottage, and Daniel is still at school (aged 17). They are still together in March 1891, when the 1891 census was conducted.
5. The Cambrian Railway operated a line from Caersws to Builth Wells via Llanidloes and Rhayader. It opened in 1862, and closed a hundred years later in 1962. The large farm of Dolwen had its own railway halt, next to Bontnewydd.
6. Lampeter was on the Manchester and Milford Railway Company line from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen. The first train steamed into Lampeter Station on June 1 1866. It seems likely that Thomas was the first porter in the station, and had worked for the company prior to that, as the new line extended north from Carmarthen. The station closed in 1965 to passengers.

7. Edward Jacks Jerman was born in 1838. He was a younger brother of Thomas Jacks Jerman, and trained as a Presbyterian Minister, taking his first Charge in Wrexham in 1861. He remained there for thirty years. My grandfather recalled attending services in Lampeter around 1910, which sometimes lasted a couple of hours. They were in Welsh. The Jermans were staunch non-conformists.

Fig 1: Extracts from the census returns of Lampeter, Cardiganshire. These concern Thomas Jacks Jerman and family for the year 1881. Also reference to 1891 census return.

In 1881, at Bridge Street, Lampeter Pont Stephen, father Thomas Jerman is recorded, interestingly still a railway porter. Also resident are daughter Martha (19) and son Daniel (17). By this time, d marry Benjamin Jenkins, a saddler, in 1873 and by 1881 they and their five children were also livi

0	As	1	Wm Jerman	Widow	51	Handy Porter	AB
1	As	1	Martha Jerman	Daughter	19	Handy Porter	
			Daniel Jerman	Son	17	Handy Porter	Ca

**1881 census, Lampeter**

This family unit remained in Lampeter until the 1891 census, when the three above are again reco weeks after this recording (on 5 April 1891), Thomas Jacks Jerman is known to have died in a rail after that when son Daniel decided to emigrate to Oregon and Martha decided to also make the jo Sarah. Martha is recorded as single at the time of her death in 1920. Sarah herself died in Decem

3. On being deaf – Lampeter railway station, Cardiganshire. 18 April 1891.

Three times a day, in each direction, a train ran through Lampeter station. That is, except on Sundays, when the god-fearing folk of the small town were in chapel, or

reading their Bibles. There was talk of a branch line to the coast at Aberaeron, but this was just talk in the new council chambers, though it was said that the local squire, Mr Harford of Falcondale Hall, was supportive. The trains went down the line to Carmarthen, and then on to Milford Haven, Pembroke and Fishguard. From Lampeter northwards the line ran to Aberystwyth, and then into north Wales or eastwards to Shrewsbury. Thomas Jacks Jerman met every train, and had done so since the station opened in 1866. He had worked for the Manchester and Milford Railway Company even before the grand opening of the station, and had been installed as the porter at that time. Station Masters may have come and gone, but the porter was constant. If he did not come from the town, then he had come to know everyone within it; and if his Welsh was not quite accented with the clear tones of Ceredigion, but the flatter accent of Montgomeryshire, then they forgave him on account of his cheery wave and ready greeting.

The passengers of the 2 o'clock train from Milford Haven were just clearing the platform and Thomas had already helped two passengers to their waiting conveyances, complete with baggage and new purchases. There remained on the platform, a couple in their early middle age. The woman carried a baby, well wrapped, in her arms and the man was just thanking Jerman for his assistance in taking a consignment of leather to a nearby cart. He was a saddler, Ben Jenkins, and leather was his stock in trade. He was also the son in law of the old porter who was now well into this sixties.

“So Ben,” the old man said, “what do you think of the quality of this order? Is it up to the mark?” His voice had the slightly too loud intonation of the nearly deaf.

“Well, better than anything that I can get in Wales. The Irish seem to have a knack for good quality leather and I’m lucky to be able to get it straight off the ship. Business is going well, and I’ve a lot of orders to get done in the next month or two. Dan is doing well too, and we might expand further. He is talking about a shop in Carmarthen next, but I’m not too sure about that.”

Thomas Jerman concentrated hard on Ben’s face, for now he lip-read as much as heard what was said to him

“It never rains but it pours, Mary,” the old porter said, “I got two letters this morning, one from Sarah in Edinburgh and one from Edward in Chicago. Both in English too. Sarah has had another daughter, and called her Laura. I think she was born a couple of weeks back. Edward says all is well in America and he is doing well.”

“I’m pleased to hear that. Could I read them later possibly? We’ve got to get back to the shop. How has Martha been coping?”

“She was saying that all was quiet whilst you were away. The older girls have been keeping the rest pretty much in line. Martha’s even managed to do some washing for you. You’ve just missed her. She brought some food up for me not long ago. Anyway, I’ve got to go and get a couple of cattle wagons attached to the train. See you this evening then.”

With that, Thomas turned and walked towards the end of the platform where a small incline led down to a siding. There were two cattle trucks there, waiting to be attached and taken up to Aberystwyth. The train ran forward about a hundred yards out of the station and then reversed back into the siding where Thomas coupled the front wagon onto the rear of the train, as he had done hundreds of times before. There was a belch of steam, and a sharp whistle but instead of moving forwards and on its way to the coast, the train continued to reverse, and Thomas was walking back down the track towards the platform.

Mary shouted to her father, and waved her arm to get him off the track. He waved back. Ben Jenkins began to run, but it was too late. The cattle wagon kept on coming and the old man could not hear it. It smashed into his back. He went down, not to get up again.

## Notes

1. Thomas Jacks Jerman died as a result of a railway accident in Lampeter on April 18 1891. He was sixty-six.
2. Two weeks previously Thomas had returned his census forms showing him resident with his daughter Martha, and son Daniel. Martha acted as his housekeeper and was a single. She moved to Scotland after the death, and lived with her sister Sarah, and her family. She never married and died in 1920 at the age of sixty-four. Daniel emigrated to Oregon, and became Dan B Jerman. He made a fortune by creating a retail chain and then eventually selling out. He married and had four daughters – one of whom he called Martha. He died, a millionaire, in 1949.
3. Sarah married David Thomson in Edinburgh in 1885. Sarah returned for holidays, and always stayed with her sister Mary and her husband Ben Jenkins. Jenkins the Saddler was a well-known Lampeter shop for generations. Mary died in 1911, and Ben in 1926. They had nine children.
4. The town of Lampeter got a Council in 1884, when it became a municipal borough. The population has never much exceeded 2000, and is still overwhelmingly Welsh speaking. It is notable for St David's College, part of the University of Wales. It was founded in 1820 as a theological college.
5. The Manchester and Milford Railway Company struggled from the start to make money. It was sued for unpaid bills after steam locomotive No 7 "Carmarthen" exploded in 1890. The Great Western Railway Company eventually bought the line in 1906. Passengers ceased to be carried in 1965, after flooding damaged the line. It ceased altogether in 1973. Lampeter Station no longer exists.
6. John Harford of Falcondale sponsored the opening of a branch line from Lampeter to Aberaeron, about ten miles. This did not open until 1911, and only operated until nationalisation of the railways, just after World War II.

Fig 1: The family of Thomas Jacks Jerman and Anne Jerman.

*Descendants of Thomas Jacks Jerman*

