



Sir Rice Mansell of Margam

The family of Rice Mansell originated from France and they arrived in Gower, west of Swansea in the latter part of the 13th Century. It was in the reign of Edward I, that the knight, Sir Hugh Mansell one of Rice's ancestors, married Isabel, the heiress of Sir John Penres of Penrice Castle.

The family were then lucky throughout their marriage to acquire land at Oxwich, the manorial lordship next to Penrice, right on the South Western coast of the Gower peninsular.

The Mansell family were now truly an established family in Gower and more importantly that of Glamorganshire.

In 1510, Rice Mansell inherits the family estates and starts construction of his new project that of Oxwich Castle. This was interrupted by the wars in France, Scotland and Ireland.

He was a veteran soldier and saw service as a sailor in the Navy. This was quite common at the time, as ships were used to move the army. It was therefore common that army commanders were also commanders in the navy.

Rice Mansell was then knighted for service to the crown and country. Sir Rice then took his new position in life to heart and excelled in politics and government, both locally and nationally. Always supporting King Henry VIII, who had knighted him of course!

Sir Rice Mansell loyalty to the king was rewarded when the king appointed Sir Rice as Chamberlain of Chester and was a member of the Council of Wales and the Marches, which met in Ludlow but governed Wales for the King.

This was the period when king Henry VIII decided that the idea of the "Dissolution of the Monasteries act" would bring him the power he needed to run the Church of England and the rest is history as one could say!

In 1535 when the dissolution began, Margam Abbey alone was valued at £181.7.4 without its land. This was a bargain as the town now known as Neath, just north west of Margam was valued at £182.

In 1537, The Cistercian monks of Margam abbey were thrown out and the abbey had had its roofs stripped of lead and other valuable artefacts were sold and the proceeds were given to the exchequer.

The Cistercian monks had been established there since 1147 when Robert of Gloucester (Son of King Henry I) the Lord of Glamorgan, granted the land at Margam, over 18,000 acres, to St Bernard's Abbey, Clairvaux, Normandy in France They then came over and soon after their first colony of monks had established themselves at Margam Robert of Gloucester died.

In 1552, Sir Rice Mansell then buys the abbey and the estate, after leasing it from the crown for some time. He buys the abbey and all its land for £2,494 -13s -5p. The 18,000 acres alone was a bargain but with now a family home, that was later to be established from the abbey in Margam, which was truly a bargain.



Sir Rice was now a very powerful knight in Glamorganshire, his family were gentry rather than noble and were no longer soldiers and sailors. He was not satisfied with owning three family homes (Oxwich Castle, Penrice Castle and now Margam) he also bought Beaupre Castle, in the Vale of Glamorgan from the Basset Family. He held the title “Lord of the manor” stretching from the furthest point at Gower right up to and beyond the Vale of Glamorgan. He then had his coat of arms displayed on the gate houses of his castle.

Oxwich Castle



Beaupre Castle



Penrice Castle



After he had acquired all this land he would often argue with his neighbours particularly the Herbert's and Crane families, in the Vale who were extremely jealous of Sir Rice and his ways. This was his way of aggravating them as every time they went to see him at the any of his castles they were always greeted by his coat of arms.



As he grew older and his family were spread around his various estates, in Glamorganshire, he mellowed and at the time of his death, he had married three times with several daughters and two sons to succeed him. In his will dated 1558, he left £5 to the parish church at Margam and asked his sons to set up a school in the village for his grandchildren, of whom there were nineteen (19) and for the promising of the local children.

His tomb lies in Margam Abbey, which is less than a stones throw from where the Sir Rice Mansell of Margam Chapel in the Commemoration Order of St. Thomas of Acon was consecrated and we are all proud to be associated to Margam Abbey and its history, even though it has had some difficult spells in its long history.

