

THE BLACK BOY or BUOY Inn Caernarfon

The question that requires an answer to is when was the name Black Boy first used?

Although records called The Ale House recognisances go as far back as 1764, only the names of the victuallers appeared with that of their guarantors up to the years preceding 1820. It was only in that year that the names of their licensed premises also appeared and, in this particular case, we find that there were two adjacent taverns on this site. The Black Boy was No.7 in the street and the four Shillings and Six Pence was No.9, a Mr.

Thomas Parry being the licensee of the former, and a Mr. Thomas Williams licensee of the latter.

Going further back to the turn of the century we find on a map dated circa 1800 that the official name of the street at that time was The Black Boy Street and the same is true of a Census of 1794. The latter was not a proper Census as those which family historians are accustomed. It was more of a head count giving only the name of the head of the family and recording where appropriate (and wife), then the number of children and of servants and finally a total of the number of people in the house. We find that 48 people in all lived in Black Boy Street in 1794.

Further research in the Archives at Caernarfon showed that a dwelling house was sold by Mr. Thomas Wynne the squire of Glynllifon to a Mr Henry Robyn's in 1717 and on the deed it states that the name of the street was Street Y Black Boy.

Now if we could go back another 60 years we would be in the middle of the period of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell and this is where a well known journalist and author, who died last year, Mr. Ivor Wynne Jones, claimed to have seen documents that were found when the renovations which included extension were made to this building some 50 years ago by the then landlord Mr. Norman Underhill.

He maintained that it was here that the supporters of the monarchy met regularly and drank a loyal toast "To the Black Boy". They were referring to the heir to the throne who later became Charles II, but dare not mention his name lest they were overheard by some of Cromwell's spies.

Black Boy was in fact a pet name given to the heir to the throne by his mother Henrietta Maria, French by birth but with some Spanish blood in her veins. When Charles was born he is said to have had a swarthy complexion and his mother used to refer to him as "My Beautiful Black Boy! Now it is understood that there are Black Boy's in other towns and that this explanation is regarded as being the true version for the origin of the name.

It is not therefore; absolutely certain when the name Black Boy was first used in Caernarfon, but Ivor Wynne Jones' contribution to the debate cannot be faulted.

The next question that needs to be addressed is how it was that the "Black Boy Street" or "Street Y Black Boy" became to be called "Northgate Street" in English and "Stryd Pedwar a Chwech" in Welsh.

To commence with, let us take the English name "Northgate Street", Along the centuries since the completion of the town walls in 1290 it should be noted that there was no such entrance in the town wall and it was circa 1820's that the opening was created at the bottom of the street to allow access to the walled town. The entrance at the bottom of Church Street was the first to be created shortly after renovations were carried out to the St. Mary Church in Church Street 1810 - 1814. This it is believed occurred c. 1817, and was followed by the other two streets running parallel viz. Market Street and Northgate Street. In 1610, John Spede's Map shows that Palace Street was the official name of the street from Castle Ditch right down to where the town wall was breached and from then on that entrance was called "North Gate". Previously there existed only "The East Gate" 'Y Porth Mawr' and "The West Gate" 'Porth yr Aur'.

The answer as to why the Welsh name "Stryd Pedwar a Chwech" was adopted is quite apparent. As was first stated the present Black Boy is made up of two taverns No.7 and No.9 in the street and in 1820 when the new entrance became known as "Northgate" the name of the tavern at No.9 was "The Four and Six Pence" which translates as "Pedwar a Chwech". Hence the English version of the street name became "Northgate Street" and the Welsh version after a tavern in the street "Stryd Pedwar a Chwech".

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