

HALL, AUGUSTA, Lady Llanover ('Gwenynen Gwent') (1802-1896), patron of Welsh culture and inventor of the Welsh national costume

Name: Augusta Hall
Pseudonym: Gwenynen Gwent
Date of birth: 1802
Date of death: 1896
Spouse: Benjamin Hall
Child: Augusta Charlotte Elizabeth Jones (née Hall)
Parent: Georgina Mary Ann Waddington (née Port)
Parent: Benjamin Waddington
Gender: Female
Occupation: patron of Welsh culture and inventor of the Welsh national costume
Area of activity: History and Culture
Author: Marion Löffler

Lady Llanover was born on 21 March 1802, the youngest of six daughters of Benjamin Waddington (1749-1828) of Ty Uchaf, Llanover in Monmouthshire, and his wife Georgina (née Port, 1771-1850; a great-niece of Mary Delaney, 1700-1788). Like her surviving sisters Frances and Emelia, Augusta Waddington enjoyed a wide education which included the classics, modern languages, history, geography, art and music, but also subjects such as house keeping and economy. She married the politician and reformer **Benjamin Hall** in 1823, uniting their neighbouring estates of Llanover and Aber-carn. By that time the family had travelled widely in Great Britain and Europe, and her sister Frances had married Baron Christian Charles Josiah von Bunsen, historian, Prussian envoy to the court of Queen Victoria 1838-1852, and Celtophile.

Lady Llanover's interest in the Welsh language and Welsh traditions was furthered early by her mother's friend, Lady Elizabeth Coffin Greenly (1771-1839) of Titley Court, Herefordshire, a fluent Welsh speaker, patron of **Edward Williams** (Iolo Morganwg), and founder member of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society. It is not certain how fluent Lady Llanover's spoken Welsh was, but this did not prevent her from favouring Welsh-speakers as servants, insisting on Welsh-language services in Llanover church and having Welsh taught in the two schools in Llanover. In order to further Welsh education she patronised the Welsh Collegiate Institution at Llandoverly from its foundation in 1847, she assisted **Evan Jones** (Ieuan Gwynedd) in establishing the women's journal *Y Gymraes*, and she financially supported **Daniel Silvan Evans** when he was preparing his multi-volume dictionary. Combining ardent Protestantism with a love of Welsh, she endowed two Calvinist Methodist churches, Capel Rhyd-y-meirch and Aber-carn, where services were to be conducted in Welsh, but with a liturgy based upon the *Book of Common Prayer*. Her belief in temperance led her to convert inns and pubs in the area into temperance hotels. Llys Llanover, the new Tudor-style family mansion, became a centre of Welsh culture in Gwent and beyond, attracting foreigners interested in the Celtic languages like the Bretons Alex François Rio, and Theodore de la Villemarqué, and the German Friedrich Carl Meyer, as well as Welsh collectors and scholars like **Thomas Price** (Carnhuanawc), **Maria Jane Williams**, **Lady Charlotte Guest**, **John Jones** (Tegid) and **John Williams** (ab Ithel). Traffic increased after 1857, when Lady Llanover purchased the manuscript collection of **Edward Williams** (Iolo Morganwg) from his son **Taliesin Williams** (Taliesin ab Iolo) in order to preserve it for the nation.

Lady Llanover's most lasting contributions are connected with the series of Abergavenny Cymreigyddion eisteddfodau held between 1834 and 1853. Influenced by founder members Lady Coffin Greenly and **Thomas Price** (Carnhuanawc), whom she has known since 1826, she joined the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society in 1834, within three months of its foundation. She co-organized and sponsored a series of ten eisteddfodau, whose proceedings were reported in the *Illustrated London News* and in Welsh newspapers, and patronised competitions at these, especially in the fields of triple harp playing and Welsh textiles. Influenced by her, other members of her circle patronised literary and philological competitions that attracted international participation, mainly from Germany and France, and were judged by scholars of the calibre of James Cowles Prichard and **Thomas Price** (Carnhuanawc). The Abergavenny Cymreigyddion eisteddfodau thus developed a national tradition which had been revived in the 1790s, providing continuity into the 1850s; their competitions boosted Welsh scholarship in history, literature and philology; they promoted the playing of the Welsh triple harp, the collection and performance of native Welsh music, and the native Welsh textile industry; and they constituted the beginnings of the Pan-Celtic movement in Wales. Abergavenny Cymreigyddion members, among them Lady Llanover, also founded and patronised the Welsh Manuscripts Society in 1836.

Lady Llanover was one of the main advocates of the triple harp as a national instrument in nineteenth-century Wales. An accomplished harp player herself, she revived the tradition of the family harpist by employing **John Wood Jones** (1800-1844) from shortly after 1826, his pupil **Thomas Gruffydd** (1815-1887), said to have trained eighteen harpists, from 1844, and afterwards his daughter, Susannah Berrington Gruffydd Richards (1854-1952), who was paid a monthly salary as a harp teacher and continued to be employed by the family after Lady Llanover's death. Over the decades, numbers of pupils were granted scholarships to be taught the triple harp at Llanover. Lady Llanover declared the triple or Welsh harp the official instrument of the Abergavenny eisteddfodau, and continued to hold Welsh harp competitions at Llanover in 1863 and 1869, in Swansea in 1883, and at the 'protest eisteddfod' of Caerwys in 1886. To the end of her life, she patronised almost every eisteddfod competition in triple harp playing, awarding valuable instruments or money for training as prizes, corresponding, and working with men like **Henry Brinley Richards** and **Dr Joseph Parry**. She commissioned harps to be gifted to deserving harpists, but also to gentry families and even the young Prince Albert, who was presented with a Welsh harp and a performance on it at Buckingham Palace in July 1843.

Lady Llanover's advocacy of the triple harp was part of her concern for the continuation of Welsh folk traditions as part of Welsh national life. She maintained the Mari Lwyd and Plygain traditions at Llanover, her choir, the Llanover Cantorion, competed at eisteddfodau and performed folk songs in concerts at home and in London, and the dances held for servants and others at Llanover helped preserve a Welsh folk dance tradition that had almost been annihilated by Welsh Nonconformism. The 'Llanover Reel' in particular is still performed today. Lady Coffin Greenly and Lady Llanover furthered, patronised and gave direction to the work of **Maria Jane Williams**, Aberpergwm, whose collections of Welsh folk tunes won Abergavenny Cymreigyddion eisteddfod competitions in 1837 and 1844. When they were published as *Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morgannwg* in 1844, it is due to Lady Llanover's influence over her as well as over **Taliesin Williams** and **John Jones** (Tegid) that the tunes were accompanied by Welsh lyrics, not English as had been intended by the young collector.

Lady Llanover's bardic name 'Gwenynen Gwent' (The Bee of Gwent) and her lasting influence over the design of the Welsh national costume stem from the Gwent and Dyfed Royal Eisteddfod and Musical Festival held at Cardiff in August 1834, at which she won the essay on 'The Advantages resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales'. Together with the bound album *National Costumes of Wales* at the National Library of Wales, which is ascribed to her by some authors, the essay became the basis of the Welsh national costume for girls and women worn at national celebrations, such as St David's Day. Lady Llanover wore Welsh costume herself on Sundays and public occasions, her servants had to wear it, and she even attempted to popularise it among her gentry friends, mostly unsuccessfully. In subsequent eisteddfodau, Lady Llanover patronised competitions for the best Welsh flannels or woollens woven or dyed 'in any of the national checks or stripes', thus introducing an element of Welsh home industries to the eisteddfod. Her, *Good Cookery ... and Recipes communicated by the Hermit of the Cell of St. Gover, of 1867*, a volume of Welsh tales and recipes structured around the conversation between a traveller to Llanover and the hermit of Llanover, includes her illustrations of the food, but also coloured plates showing Welsh female costume. Aware of her mother's debt of upbringing to Mary Delaney, she edited the *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delaney* in six volumes, which appeared in 1861 and 1862.

Shaken by the sudden death of her husband **Benjamin Hall** in 1867 and increasingly repelled by the Anglicized character of the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales, Lady Llanover became a less public figure in later life. She died at Llanover on 17 January 1896 and was interred in the family tomb at St. Bartholomew's cemetery, Llanover. Her funeral procession of several hundred was described and depicted with a focus on the fact that the ceremony was conducted in Welsh and had a pointedly Welsh character.

Lady Llanover's only surviving child, Augusta Charlotte Elizabeth Herbert (1824-1912) married Arthur Jones of Llanarth (Monmouthshire), of an old Roman Catholic family which assumed the name of Herbert in 1848, on 12 November 1846. Following in her mother's footsteps she was also a patron of Welsh culture. A fluent Welsh speaker, she assumed the bardic name 'Gwenynen Gwent yr Ail' (The Second Bee of Gwent), and welcomed poets and scholars to Llanover in the 1890s, among them the Breton nationalists, poets and Pan-Celts François Jaffrennou, Emile Hamonic and Theodore Botrel. She continued the tradition of advocating the Welsh harp. In 1902, she financed the posthumous publication of the *Manual of Methods of Instruction for playing the Welsh Harp* by Ellis Roberts (Eos Meirion, 1819-1873), the first manual for triple harp instruction. Her 'Choir of Triple Harps' performed at eisteddfodau around 1900 and at the Pan-Celtic Congress of Caernarfon, 1904. Her son, Major-General Sir Ivor Herbert (1851-1934), baron Treowen from 1917, presented Lady Llanover's extensive collection, the Llanover MSS, to the National Library of Wales in 1916, where it remains a valuable source.

Author

Marion Löffler

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NLW Archives: [NLW MS 16075E: Welsh folk songs in the hand of Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover, etc.](#)

VIAF: [46249973](#)

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