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Lydney, Gloucestershire. Presidential address

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LYDNEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Presidential address

by the RT. HON. LORD BLEDISLOE, P.C., K.B.E.

ALTHOUGH during the thirty-six years that have passed since this Society visited Lydney, I have been active in speeding the plough of the agriculturist rather than the spade of the archaeologist (under the possibly mistaken notion that national welfare might thereby be advanced), it implies no lack of interest on my part in the activities of the antiquary or in the archaeological treasures of my family estate at Lydney, over which my forefathers displayed such well-informed enthusiasm, and which, although sadly neglected by previous generations, they took such pains to preserve for posterity.

When recently proposing to His Majesty's Government that the Forest of Dean and its surroundings should be utilized as England's first National Park I suggested that there is no area in the whole of Britain of greater or more varied scenic attractions. I might without exaggeration have added that there is none of greater archaeological interest, if the term 'archaeology' be given its fullest significance as regards both time and subject-matter. In selecting therefore a subject for my presidential address I am sorely tempted to take the area which will be co-terminous with your itinerary. But I am going sternly to resist the temptation and confine myself, with perhaps narrow prejudice or possibly territorial arrogance, to the ecclesiastical parish of Lydney, and to consider with you this evening its not uninteresting, but yet only partly discovered past history in the light of its surviving structures and its once buried treasures; from the earliest

times of which we have any records, documentary or by excavation, down to 1723 when the Manor of Lydney was purchased from the Wintour family by my ancestor Mr Benjamin Bathurst, who like his elder brother the first Earl Bathurst was a son of Sir Benjamin Bathurst, Cofferer to Queen Anne.

The parish of Lydney (formerly *Lidney*) lies in the ancient hundred of Bledisloe (formerly *Blitislau*) which extends along the banks of the Severn estuary and includes, besides Lydney, the civil parishes of Aylburton, Alvington, Blakeney and Awre. It would appear that at the time of Domesday Book Lydney gave its name to a separate hundred which, however, had disappeared by the reign of Edward I. The origin of the name has been much discussed and is by no means certain. Some derive it from *Uydan*, an old Celtic word signifying 'broad', and the termination *ey* which was said to denote water, the combination having reference to the river. In this connexion it is noteworthy that both the width and the actual location of the Severn estuary opposite Lydney has varied considerably during the centuries. It is now about a mile across, but if written public records are to be trusted it was in 1777 between two and three miles in breadth, and in 1620 so narrow that persons harvesting on each bank were able to converse together. Certain it is that in comparatively recent times the river flowed close up to Lydney church and in times of flood up to the entrance of the old manor house.

I am assured however by Professor Mawer (the authority on English place-names), that the second element of Lydney is undoubtedly Old English 'eg' (Norse: 'ey') signifying 'island', and this accords with the old local proverb 'Happy the Eye (or island) betwixt Severn and Wye', which is generally deemed to have reference to Lydney. Professor Mawer admits the greater obscurity of the first element but suggests the possibility of its being *Lida*, a personal name indicating, in Old English, 'traveller'.

I venture to suggest that an equally plausible and more alluring derivation of the first syllable may be found in the old Celtic solar deity Nudd or Llud, the god of the Fairies or Goblins, to whom in his Latinized form the temple in Lydney's earliest township was dedicated, and whom her former inhabitants worshipped. Lydney would thus mean 'the island of Nudd or Nudens'. It is interesting in this connexion to note that Camp Hill was formerly known as 'Dwarf's Hill' and the temple of Nudd or Llud as 'the Dwarf's Chapel'. To this I will refer in more detail.

What Lydney and its neighbourhood were like in the far distant past before the Romans came must be a matter largely of conjecture, aided by such fragmentary relics of organic life as the geologist and palaeontologist have been able to disclose in the course of local exploration. There are superficial evidences in Lydney parish of an old-world glacier with a characteristic mineral legacy from its moraine. In the rare Rhaetic deposits at Beachley, at Westbury on Severn and across the river at Aust, have been found the remains of *Ichthyosaurus* and *Plesiosaurus*, the shark *Hybodus* and labyrinthodont amphibians that frequented this area perhaps a hundred thousand years ago. King Arthur's and Merlin's caves near Symonds Yat have yielded the remains of the first human beings that lived in the district perhaps 15,000 years ago, and these may be pictured as hunting the mammoth, the bison, the great Irish deer and reindeer, the cave bear and the long-haired rhinoceros, the bones of which have been found in these caves mixed with those of their human contemporaries. Old stone and flint implements used by the latter have been found in the locality and other evidences of primitive industry and primitive art.

There are however but few traces in and near Lydney of men of the Palaeolithic, Neolithic or Bronze Age periods. It was not indeed until the Celts arrived in this country and neighbourhood, apparently about 400 B.C.,

and the most stubborn and indomitable of all their tribes, partly of Celtic and partly of Iberian origin, established itself along the western bank of the Severn estuary and the Bristol Channel, that we may be said to possess the first glimmerings of a local history. In the Forest of Dean, which in those days and for long after comprised the whole of the area lying between Chepstow, Gloucester, Ross and Monmouth (including the district subsequently included in Bledisloe hundred), our Silurian predecessors followed their avocations of hunters, fishermen and farmers, men apparently of dark complexion, hair and eyes, slim and of no great stature but wiry and strong, and obstinate defenders of their rights. Probably there is no district throughout the whole of this island where there has been so little displacement of its prehistoric inhabitants, and there are without doubt in our midst today many who are descendants of Silurian forbears. The Forest was not then wholly covered with trees; cereal cultivation, as well as animal husbandry, was carried on within it, as is evidenced by the recent discovery in the lower strata of the encircling rampart on the Roman camp at Lydney of a prehistoric quern of the beehive type, and of numerous bones and horns of *Bos longifrons*, a long-faced curly-horned bovine (smaller than any of our existing breeds of cattle), reproductions of which both in bronze and in iron are to be seen among the Lydney Park relics. A prehistoric ox goad made of bone was also found on the camp last year. It is certain that they mined iron-ore and smelted iron, which throughout the centuries has attracted greedy adventurers to the district and has more markedly affected its sometimes turbulent history than any other one factor. In it indeed is to be found the most westerly development of the iron industry in prehistoric times that has yet been discovered. The local Silurians were moreover by no means deficient in the domestic arts, as is shown by the discovery of spindle whorls with which they spun yarn for cloth weaving. In addition to the long-faced ox they had

among other domestic animals a strangely diminutive horse and an athletic wolf-hound (of which a beautiful reproduction in bronze has been found at Lydney), and among wild animals the wolf, the red deer and the wild boar. Interesting though the discoveries of Roman buildings and relics may be, the main justification for the excavations now in progress under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries would appear to be the prospect of throwing more light (in the absence of written records) upon this prehistoric period before the Romans came, and the so-called 'Dark Ages' after they left.

The arrival of the Romans in the district, probably about the middle of the first century A.D., was no doubt stubbornly resisted, but ultimately acquiesced in, by the native Britons. The settlement on 'the camp' at Lydney, whether military, civil, industrial or religious, or a combination of all four, seems to demonstrate a progressive tendency on the part of the original inhabitants and the Roman invaders towards compromise and merger in respect of their domestic life, habits, and religion. During the 350 years or more that a Romano-British community existed at Lydney there appears to have been a great leap forward in civilization, industry, art and religion, as richly indicated by the temple of their god, by their elaborate scheme of luxurious baths, by the size and adornment of their largest residence, by the beauty and originality of design of their mosaic pavements, and by the large scale developments of iron mining of which the 'Scowles'* in my woods is the most conspicuous and picturesque example in the country. As to what happened after the Romans quitted the locality at the beginning of the 5th century we know little, but that the inhabitants of Lydney and its district reverted rapidly to a condition of semi-barbarism, far exceeding their pre-Roman state, appears to be certain.

* A corruption of 'Crowlls', an old British word meaning 'caves'.

Let us endeavour, in the light of the re-excavations now in progress on Camp Hill, to form a rough picture of Lydney's early inhabitants, their industrial occupation, and their economic development. On the hill-promontory with a good water supply from springs in their rear, there sprung up apparently in prehistoric times a small Silurian township of perhaps some three hundred inhabitants, at first no doubt farmers, hunters, and fishermen (all of whom were at the same time soldiers), prepared with the help of Nature's steep declivities and their own modest earthworks and weapons to defend themselves against tribal aggression. Then came the discovery—long before the Roman occupation—of iron-mines and the economic value of smelted ironstone. These iron-mines were opened at the outcrop in the Millstone Grit, not only in the Scowles and elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but within the township itself on the hill plateau. The community became predominantly, if not exclusively, iron miners, who lived in wattle-and-daub huts, with dry-built sleeper-walls and stone-flagged floors. Then came the Roman occupation, following which, with the consciousness that Caerleon with its Second Legion, and Caerwent with its efficient administrative control, were not far distant, the industry of iron mining peaceably developed, and alongside it other minor industries such as bronze working,† with a consequent increase of the population by perhaps another two hundred, the new recruits being accommodated with huts on the flattened tops of the old pre-Roman rampart.

Their life was simple, and their personal adornments—brooches, bracelets, and the like—modest and inexpensive. Thus two hundred years or more passed, when a period of greater luxury and more ambitious development supervened. About A.D. 300 a great mansion was built

† A bronze-worker's shop has been found under the foundation of the Roman mansion.

on Camp Hill (containing 26 rooms surrounding a large courtyard) erected possibly by the great iron-master of those days—the prototype of the Lydney Talbots of the 14th, the Wynters of the 17th, and the Crawshays of the 19th century—or possibly by some affluent Roman nobleman holding high administrative office in the district. As prosperity increased so did the embellishment of the mansion with mosaic pavements and other structural improvements. At the same time the standard of personal adornment and personal comfort was materially raised. The old iron-mines scattered over the plateau appear to have been filled in and many of the workmen's huts removed. In their place were constructed first an elaborate bath system with hypocausts, hot and cool chambers and dressing-rooms, with adjacent refreshment saloon and surrounding solarium or verandah, and subsequently a large temple dedicated to a Romanized Celtic deity surrounded by a spacious ambulatory and several chapels to which lay worshippers were allowed access. The Deity, whether originally a Sun-god, a River-god, or possibly a god of the Goblins, was evidently credited with powers of healing, and the quondam mansion became a 'Hospitium' or lodging house for hundreds of pilgrims who resorted to Camp Hill (as to the modern Lourdes) to be healed of their ailments or to give thanks for their recovery therefrom, or perhaps many to worship a Deity of immense temporary popularity. About the same time were constructed to the northwest and close to the temple, what may have been shops or may have been dream or meditation chambers for the more inspired devotees. The unique plan of the temple, with its wide ambulatory, its sedilia (or benches) and its six side chapels, has suggested that it may have been the tranquil resort of one or more mystery cults of the Mithraic type, seeking there a sanctuary or rendezvous in face of the onward march of Christianity and inviting increased popularity by adopting, in part at least, the

less exclusive and more communal user of Christian places of worship.

Whatever may be the origin of the name of the pagan—the pagan god Nudens or Nodens—I am one of those who prefer to think of him as pre-eminently a Theos Anodunos—a pain-destroying or healing god—the equivalent of the Roman Aesculapius. That this at least was one of his aspects gains some support from the finding of bronze dogs and a bronze cock on the floor of his shrine and winged serpents in mosaic on its chief pavement, all of which are emblems of that deity; also from the bronze limbs and other like relics found in or near his temple which appear to be thank offerings for recovery from sickness or disablement. Perhaps an indication in the same direction is the eye-salve prescription found with an apothecary's balance in one of the adjoining shops or 'meditation chambers'. He may perhaps have been also a god of the estuary or abyss, or even perhaps a hunting god, but assuredly his main rôle and justification were those of a god of healing, and as such possibly afford a clue to the main purpose of the Lydney settlement during at least the last decades of the Roman occupation.

The date of the temple of this Deity is put by the present excavators at A.D. 364, a date much later than that formerly ascribed to it, and they adduce as proof (difficult to refute) the fact that they have found beneath its flagged floors in ground not previously disturbed many coins of as late but no later date. By the same method of deduction they date the adjoining group of baths at approximately A.D. 300, a coin of Tetricus having been found embedded in the plaster beneath the mosaic floor of the frigidarium. The largest building (the dwelling house or hospitium) is found by similar clues to be about the same date as the baths. The row of 12 shops or 'meditation chambers' on the northwest side of the temple was probably cotemporaneous with it. The high earthwork bounding the plateau on its northeast and southeast sides was

outside all these periods, the lower one-third being of prehistoric construction and the upper two-thirds being added in post-Roman times. This rampart, which has never before been excavated, gives promise of many further and interesting finds. Over 7000 coins, covering the whole period of the Roman occupation from Augustus to Honorius (and Arcadius) found on the site prior to the re-excavations of last year and this were preserved and are in my possession. Most of these are said to have been found in the temple and were deemed to be offerings to the god, contributed perhaps in part to defray the 'stipes' of its erection or subsequent restoration referred to in the now obliterated inscription on its chief pavement. During the present excavations about another 2,500, mostly of the 4th century, have been found in different parts.

The terminal statues, popularly known as 'Adam and Eve', and the old altar, on the southeast escarpment overlooking the Severn, deserve some passing mention. The former have stood where they now are for over 180 years—long before the systematic excavations of the surface of the hill by my great-grandfather, the Right Hon. Charles Bathurst, in 1805. They are said to have been used previously for pressing flax, which then grew in the valley below. They have always been regarded by my family as representing the god Pan and the Empress Faustina respectively (the latter on account of her characteristic head-dress as represented on her coins), and as having stood at one time at the entrance to the temple. Fifty years ago the genuineness of these figures was much contested by certain German critics but subsequently appeared to be generally admitted. Recently doubt has again been thrown upon them, and also upon the old altar, which from the days of my childhood I have heard described (and have indeed myself described) as an 'ancient British altar', through the hole in which passed blood—possibly sometimes of a human victim—into the trough below, the sacrificial officer being a Druid priest.

I am reluctant to abandon too suddenly and finally these plausible and picturesque beliefs. If they are false, one is justified in asking what may be deemed to have induced some former owner of the property to bring spurious pseudo-antiques upon a site rich in genuine Roman and Celtic relics, also what *in fact* are they and where did they come from?

Apart from the Romano-British god, Nudens or Nodens, to whom it was dedicated, the temple is, in the opinion of my friend Dr Mortimer Wheeler, unique amongst the well-known religious buildings of Europe as the earliest example of the systematic use of side-chapels. He says ' A somewhat similar system in a Christian church appears to be hinted at by St. Paulinus, bishop of Nola about A.D. 400, who describes the church built by him as having four cubicula in the aisles. In the case of the Lydney temple there are, in addition to the three central shrines, no less than six of these cubicula or chapels opening out of the ambulatory surrounding the central cella. The remains of small stone benches are visible in the ambulatory. The occurrence of the cubicula, a generation earlier than the church of Paulinus, in the pagan temple at Lydney appears to indicate that some of the pagan cults may have anticipated the Christian usage of this new feature of ecclesiastical buildings, and it is noteworthy in this connexion that in the 4th century there were many points of similarity between certain of the more mystical pagan cults and Christianity. Although Christianity necessarily dominates our own outlook, it was in the 4th century at most " *primus inter pares* ", especially on the outside fringes of the Roman Empire. Hardly unique, though certainly remarkable, is the basilical design of the Lydney temple, a type characterized by the insertion of internal colonnades into the cellae of Greek and Roman temples where the span of the building demanded additional support for the roof. A similar basilical temple to that of Lydney is the so-called temple of Nemausus or Diana at

Nîmes in Provence, where the plan includes a nave with aisles and a triple shrine. There the whole building was roofed in one span without a clerestory, and the heavy outer angle-buttresses at Lydney suggest that a similar roof system was adopted there also'. Dr Wheeler finds in the small basilica at Pesch, near Munstereifel in the Rhineland (which is not earlier than A.D. 330), the nearest parallel in the northwest provinces to the Lydney temple. This, it is supposed, was devoted to the cult of Magna Mater, one of the cults of Mithras, associated with a communal ritual of a semi-mystical kind, and helps to strengthen the impression which Dr Wheeler has formed that the Lydney building, with its nave and aisles, its benches, its piscina and its chapels, all reviewed in relation to its relatively late date, was the consecrated rendezvous of a college or brotherhood subdivided into various grades and devoted to one of the many mystery-cults which enjoyed widespread popularity under the later Empire, and influenced the adaptation of sacred buildings (pagan and Christian alike) for communal worship rather than for priestly ceremonial. He considers that Lydney temple, with its partially transmuted pagan forms, represents the ultimate achievement of one of the lost rivals of Christianity, and as such is a structure of genuine originality evolved during a critical period in the religious history of Europe.

The baths are of normal Roman type, good and large, but comparable with many others at Silchester (Hampshire) and elsewhere. Their most interesting feature at present is the evidence of a late and rough patching of one of the floors which had been badly damaged in ancient times. This floor apparently dates from the original construction of the bath-building (late 3rd century); but subsequently its mosaic pavement was seriously injured, and the opportunity was taken by someone at some moment of crisis (? an Irish barge along the coast, or a gang of Welshmen) to push a bagful of money beneath the

broken floor. The bag was never reclaimed until the end of last month, when it was found to have contained a hoard of bronze coins. These included 14 segments of late 4th century coins (the Constantine family and Valens), deliberately cut ; about 40 chipped barbarous imitations of similar coins ; and vast numbers of minute bronze coins in three distinct denominations, the smallest and most numerous being little larger than a pin's head. These are clearly the product of a local barbarous mint and may with fair certainty be ascribed to the period immediately following the Roman Evacuation.

The largest building on Camp Hill, which was formerly regarded and described as a praetorium, but which is possibly more accurately named a hospitium, is a large square building with a central courtyard of a type not uncommon in the northern provinces of the Empire. Its size is exceptional for Britain, and the number of its tessellated pavements indicates considerable wealth and prosperity. Its exact date has not yet been ascertained, but it is probably earlier than either the baths or the temple. The date of the former is deemed, from a careful examination of coins found beneath its foundations, to have been about A.D. 280, and of the latter, from similar data, to have been about 364.

When, early in the 5th century, Rome, harassed by enemies at her gates renounced her responsibility for the defence of this remote province (after first withdrawing the Second Legion to Richborough to resist the Saxon invaders in the southeast), the luxurious buildings on the hill, including the temple, were doubtless pillaged and fell into decay, the local inhabitants relapsed into barbarism and poverty, their tastes and craftsmanship became degraded—as is evidenced by a remarkable 5th century fibula (or brooch) now in my possession—and their prehistoric earth rampart was raised as a protection against marauders in a land no longer under Roman discipline. The impoverished residue of a rapidly decadent population

then reverted to their early occupations, using mutilated Roman coinage or the spurious output of a barbaric Lydney mint for their monetary requirements. Who knows but what King Arthur a century later may have brought enlightenment, chivalry and romance into this darkened environment, and perhaps have fought on the spot in A.D. 540 the battle of 'Mons Badonicus', in which he himself is said to have been slain ?

The lack of any recorded Roman name for the evidently important Roman settlement in Lydney Park (in the civil parish of Aylburton), unless the latter is the 'Abonae' mentioned in the Itinerary of Antoninus, has been for many years a subject of well-founded comment on the part of archaeologists. Personally I have never been wholly convinced by the reasons adduced by Camden for identifying it with Alvington, which possesses no trace whatever of Roman occupation, in preference to Aylburton, which is only a mile away—based as his theory is, upon the relative distances between the Roman Abonae, Caerwent, Oldbury (deemed by antiquaries to be the Roman 'Trajectus') and Silchester respectively—distances which as stated are in any case erroneous.

From the time of the decisive victory in A.D. 577 of the West Saxons at Dyrham, to that of the Norman Conquest, there is but little to record. The local inhabitants appear to have acquiesced without a struggle in the ruthless Saxon domination, or perhaps the invaders, interrupted in their progress by the Severn sea, left the Forest area undisturbed. It is more than likely that, as in the case of Woodchester (as disclosed by Ethelbald's charter of A.D. 740), the site of Lydney's former centre of Roman culture and luxury was absorbed in the natural growth of Forest scrub.

Judging by place-names the Danes did not leave their mark in Gloucestershire west of the Severn. But they left us our oldest surviving local institution in the Ancient Court of Verderers, of whom I have the honour now to

be one, elected according to immemorial custom by the Freeholders of the County of Gloucester. This Court was established by King Canute in 1016 for the protection of vert and venison in the Forest of Dean (which then included Lydney) and the trial and punishment of those who interfered with either. It is said to have possessed the power, if the offender were a serf, to strip him of his skin and nail it to the wall of the Court House as a warning to others. For 900 years down to the present time the Court has been summoned—or else adjourned for lack of business—every 40 days, to meet at the Speech House. Under Edward the Confessor three thanes held land in 'Dene' free from geld by the service of guarding the Forest. Even in those days the iron forges had begun to deplete the Forest of its timber. Every week at least two oaks were required for each forge, and the value of the timber granted by the Crown was found on inquisition to cancel the profits and issues. The district was the favourite hunting ground of the Norman kings, Lydney Parva (which was formerly in the parish of Lydney and which was subsequently named *St. Briavels* by King William II, after his favourite Norman saint on the erection of his castle there) being the headquarters both for sport and also for forest administration. The Constable of *St. Briavels* castle was also Warden of the Forest. William the Conqueror was hunting in the neighbourhood when, in 1069, news reached him of the great rising in the North of England.

Except for the turbulent period of the Civil War—rendered more turbulent by the activities (industrial and military) of my predecessor in title Sir John Wynter—Lydney and its neighbourhood, separated by the Severn Sea (which we all now want to bridge) from the rest of the county, has been from the time of the Early Roman Empire until now a relatively peaceful sanctuary where the inhabitants pursued their industrial avocations or their domestic arts, not seriously disturbed by the Irish hordes

on the one side or by Britain's successive invaders, Picts, Saxons, Danes and Normans on the other. Yet, within the extensive and beautiful panorama which the present Lydney manor house commands are objects which cannot fail to stimulate the antiquary's imagination and the historian's interest: Oldbury, the Roman 'Trajectus'; Aust Cliff, where St Augustine held his epoch making conference with the Celtic bishops in A.D. 603; Beachley, with its remains of Offa's Dyke, strengthened later by Sir John Wynter; Thornbury castle, where Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn partook of the princely hospitality of the then Lord Stafford; Nibley, and its associations with William Tyndale, translator of the Bible and Gloucestershire's greatest son; Berkeley castle, where Edward II was brutally done to death at the instigation of his queen; Lydney Pill, where warships for the king's fleet were constructed in the 17th century; the graceful spire of Lydney's 13th century church; the 14th century crosses of Lydney and Aylburton, the Elizabethan manor house of Nass, the home of William Jones haberdasher and benefactor of the Haberdashers Company of London; the simpler manorial home (close to the ancient cross) of the great Sir William Wynter of Armada fame; and the site of the more stately mansion, White Cross, which Sir William built and his grandson burnt to the ground rather than relinquish to his enemies.

Within this wide prospect may be seen many fair and fertile lands, once partly Forest, which, comprised in the manor of Lydney and associated with the Talbots, earls of Shrewsbury, and Beauchamps, earls of Warwick, had many illustrious owners. Among them were Warwick the Kingmaker, George Duke of Clarence, Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth. Henry VII procured an Act at the beginning of his reign reinstating Anne, Duchess of Warwick in the family estates, and then artfully prevailed with her to settle her great inheritance on him and his heirs, to the disinheritance of her own

daughters. Queen Elizabeth granted the estates to her gallant Admiral Wynter, for his services against the Spaniards, and in his family they remained until they were conveyed in 1723 to my ancestor, Mr Benjamin Bathurst, among whose 36 children was Henry Bathurst, born in 1752, the eminent Bishop of Norwich, the intimate friend of Coke of Norfolk, England's most illustrious country squire, and with him the parliamentary champion of Catholic emancipation.

Included in the above scene and far away over the outliers of the Cotswold Hills is the country around Dyrham, the scene in 577 of the great battle in which Cuthwin and Ceaulin defeated the Britons and established the definite ascendancy of the West Saxons in the West. Within the same purview, and on the old Lydney manorial estate, is the site of one of the many great forges of medieval times, voracious alike of local timber and local iron. Even the modern tinsplate works, whose chimneys enter somewhat aggressively into the vista, may appeal to the imagination of the archaeologist as being instrumental in coating sheets of one metal (iron), the existence of which probably occasioned the Roman settlement at Lydney, with that other metal (tin) which caused Britain in ancient times to be named the Cassiterides, or Tin Islands, and which tempted greedy foreigners from the Early Phoenicians onwards to brave (in their flimsy coracles) the choppy English Channel in search of the mineral treasures of the Cornish coast. Lydney tinsplate is indeed a microcosm and reminder of the early history of our race, the sources of its industrial prosperity and, incidentally, of its civilization.

A name which will always loom prominently in the later history of Lydney is that of Sir John Wynter, secretary to Queen Henrietta Maria, a zealous Papist, a great and prosperous iron-master, a most unpopular land-owner, a devoted adherent of Charles I and an intrepid and resourceful military Commander who was the worst thorn in Cromwell's side in the West of England.

The oft-told story of this versatile Lydney hero can only be summarized on the present occasion. His family was a local one connected (as church registers show) with both Lydney and St. Briavels (formerly known as Lydney Parva) from the 13th century. His grandfather was Sir William Wynter, vice-admiral of the fleet and cousin of Thomas Wynter and of Catesby, co-conspirators with Guy Fawkes in the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. In recognition of Sir William's valorous attack upon the Spanish Armada off Dunkirk Queen Elizabeth granted him the manor of Lydney and no doubt with it the simple old manor house containing a fine old oak staircase still standing near Lydney cross. In 1588 he built a commodious and stately mansion (probably in style and appearance resembling that erected shortly before at Nass) which in view of his appointment as 'Admiral of the White' he called White Cross House. Its cellars still exist and its site can still be clearly identified in a field with high retaining walls between the new public swimming bath and the cross. This neighbourhood so appropriately selected for the Wynter domain was in Tudor times the chief source of timber for the English navy and, as recounted by Evelyn in his *Sylva*, the Spanish Armada was strictly enjoined, whatever else they succeeded in doing, not to leave a tree standing in the Forest of Dean. Alternatively a Spanish Ambassador was to 'get this done by private practices and cunning contrivances'. Wynter's son Sir Edward succeeded to the manor and his father's seat in Parliament as knight of the shire. He served as high sheriff in 1588 and also (until 1605) as controller of St. Briavels castle and warden of the forest. He was a pioneer in the improved manufacture of iron, establishing his furnaces alongside the river Lyd (or Cannop brook) in order to utilize water power for working the bellows. His own coppices proving insufficient, in 1610 he petitioned Sir Julius Caesar, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the leave of the Crown to cut timber in the Forest—a petition

which was ultimately granted. On his death about 1627 the more celebrated Sir John Wynter became owner of the manor and, following great success in the manufacture of iron, obtained from the Crown in 1640 (owing to his influence at Court as the queen's secretary and to his being a ward of the king and his creditor) practically the whole of the Forest with its timber, iron mines, coal mines, quarries and cinders in consideration of a capital sum of £10,000 down, £16,000 to be paid annually for six years and a perpetual fee farm rent of £1,950 12s 8d. No royal grant was ever more unpopular or more unproductive. The local population became mutinous, threw down his enclosure fences and, from being preponderantly royalist, went over to the parliament party. Sir John secretly strengthened White Cross House with arms and ammunition. According to Corbet, the Puritan chronicler, 'He maintained his Den as the plague of the Forest and as a goad in the sides of the garrison'. When in September 1643 the siege of Gloucester was raised he openly declared himself and thenceforward became Colonel Massey's most troublesome opponent. After checking for a time the latter's advance in the Spring of 1644 successively at Huntley, Littledean, Westbury and Newnham (the church being the scene of the conflict in the last two places) Sir John Wynter retired to his military headquarters at Coleford. In the meantime Massey, rapidly recovering these positions, marched to White Cross—this and Berkeley castle were the last strongholds of the royalists in Gloucestershire—and demanded its surrender from Lady Wynter under pain of fire and sword on non-compliance. The defiant reply of the fair Chatelaine was as follows:—

Sir,

Mr Wynter's unalterable allegiance to his King and Sovereign and his particular interest to this place hath by his Majesty's commission put it into this condition, which cannot be pernicious to any but to such as oppose

the one and invade the other. Therefore rest assured that in these relations we are by God's assistance resolved to maintain it, all extremities notwithstanding. This much in Mr Wynter's absence you shall receive from

Mary Wynter.

Colonel Massey was too gallant to execute his threat and retired over the hills, on the chance of meeting and defeating his homecoming opponent, after first setting fire to his mills and furnaces. Sir John subsequently assisted Prince Rupert in his two attempts (in September and again in October 1644) to establish and fortify a military station on Beachley promontory—attempts which were effectively frustrated by the watchful Massey. Wynter on the second occasion only effected his escape by hard riding and making a desperate descent of 200 feet upon the river Wye down the cliffs at Llancaut at a place known as 'Wynters Leap', which enabled him to reach the Prince's ships lying at the river's mouth. Lydney House was then invested by Massey, but was relieved by the arrival in April 1645 of Prince Maurice with 2000 cavalry and 1500 infantry. The royalists having again to retire in the following year Sir John Wynter burnt his house to the ground, saying it should never harbour his enemies. He retired with 300 men to Chepstow, of which he was for a time Governor. Thence he made his way to Charles at Oxford and was sent by him to Queen Henrietta Maria at St. Germain's. In the ruins of his house was found his sword, now in my possession at Lydney Park. Sir John's estate was in September 1645 assigned to Massey (now a Major General) by the House of Commons. Eventually however Sir John recovered his property, after a chequered period spent partly as a prisoner in the Tower of London. He achieved some fame about this time (according to Evelyn) by inventing a new process of 'Charring Sea-coal to burn out the sulphur and render it sweet'. In 1661 Charles II granted him a licence for carrying on this process

in the Forest, and restored his old far-reaching patent comprising the timber and iron of the Forest of Dean which had been annulled by the Commonwealth. Wynter commenced in face of much local opposition to repair his enclosures. Ultimately, by way of compromise, he surrendered his patent and received as compensation £30,000 and the woods of Snead and Kidnalls (the latter of which is at Lydney and still forms part of the estate), together with such trees in the Forest as were not fit for shipping. The agreement embodying these terms is referred to thus by Mr Pepys in his diary under date 20 June 1662. 'Up by 4 or 5 o'clock and to the office and there drew up the Agreement between the King and Sir John Wynter about the Forrest of Deane; and having done it, he came himself . . . I observed him to be a man of fine parts; and we read it, and both liked it well. That done, I turned to the Forrest of Deane in Speede's Mapps and there he showed me how it lies; and the Lea-bayly, with the great charge of carrying it to Lydney, and many other things worth knowing'. Mr Pepys records how in the month of August following they again met at the Mitre in Fenchurch Street 'to a venison pasty', whither he travelled in Sir John Wynter's coach, 'where I found him a very worthy man; and good discourse. Most of which was concerning the Forest of Dean, and the timber there, and ironworkes with their great antiquity, and the vast heaps of cinders which they find, and are now of great value, being necessary for the making of iron at this day; and without which they cannot work'.

Even under his more limited timber concession Sir John appears to have threatened to denude the Forest of timber, and local dissatisfaction was rife. Complaints having reached the House of Commons he was recommended to be moderate in his fellings—a caution which apparently had but little effect, as on a new survey made in 1667 it was reported to the Government that out of 30,233 trees sold to him only about 200 remained standing, and that from 7000 to 8000 tons of timber fit for His Majesty's navy

were found wanting. In spite of this report and local resentment he retained the benefit of his timber patent, probably owing to the influence of the queen dowager. He appears to have died about 1680. This versatile man enjoyed some reputation as a patron of literature, for John Tatham, in dedicating to him his *Fancies Theater* in 1640, describes him as 'the most worthy Maecenas'.

His crest was a plume of feathers, of which the Feathers hotel at Lydney still serves as a reminder. The Romanist zeal of his family and the strong reaction against Romanism at the end of the seventeenth century are alike evidenced by the discovery by my father, when finally demolishing the Park House at Lydney (which was erected in 1677), of a fine Florentine chalice and several Roman Catholic missals walled up in my old nursery there. They are now in my possession.

I have already referred to Lydney's warships. It is worthy of mention that on 3 September 1657, after Sir John Wynter had ceased to trouble Cromwell, the first frigate (named *Forester*) was launched from Lydney Pill, where she had been laid down a year previously. She was constructed of Forest oak but her masts and rigging came from Chatham. Her guns were said to have been cast at Lydney furnace, no doubt that adjoining Sir John Wynter's ruined mansion on the site of what are now called 'Old Furnace Cottages'. Her tonnage was 306 gross and she carried 22 guns, four more culverins of 12 cwt. apiece being subsequently demanded by her captain. She carried a crew of 90 men. On her maiden voyage she convoyed 20 ships to Lisbon and Virginia. On the 29 August 1660, another frigate, the *Princess*, was launched from Lydney Pill, nearly two years after her keel was laid. She carried 52 guns and a crew of 209 men. In 1666 during a great sea battle against the Dutch lasting four days, the Lydney warship fought well but her captain was killed. The following year she was engaged single-handed for over 4 hours with two Danish battleships of

40 guns each, and under the command of her gunner (the captain and pilot both having been killed and the lieutenant wounded) she forced the Danes to retreat for safety. In 1664 the master shipwright Daniel Furser, who had built these ships, writes to Pepys that 'Lydney is not so fit a place now for building a ship as formerly, on account of the growing of the sands, not known in man's memory before'. He recommends Cone Pill three miles below as being clear of sand. A month later Sir John Wynter claimed Lydney Pill as his, because it was 'fastened to freeholt', and he received £10 as damages for previous user. Subsequently (in March 1667) another frigate named *St. David*, of 638 tons with 54 guns and a crew of 280 men, was launched from Cone Pill, and in 1672 under the command of Captain William Poole rendered brilliant service in compelling the capitulation of Tobago.

In case any of you should feel an interest in, or anxiety about, the future of Lydney's Roman settlement I will conclude my address by an endeavour to throw some light upon it.

In these days of economic stress and high taxation the disruption of landed estates is prevalent and represents a trend which is not likely to abate. It may indeed prove to be to the ultimate advantage of this country that the process should continue, and that out of the resulting new system of land tenure may be evolved a much needed Renaissance of Britain's oldest industry and of her presently impoverished rural population. But such stress often involves the abandonment (with decay or demolition) of old country mansions and the trans-shipment abroad of many treasures of antiquarian and historic value. Although according to the past traditions of our British landed class there is a deep-rooted consciousness of 'trusteeship' rather than 'ownership' of such treasures, the temptation to restore the family fortunes by their profitable realization is often nowadays very great and

sometimes irresistible. Moreover the efficient maintenance of ancient monuments and objects of national importance in private ownership may involve a continuous or constantly recurring expenditure beyond the owners' financial resources. Under these circumstances and in view of their unique character I have, after prolonged consideration of various alternatives, decided to present to the Nation and place in the custody of H.M. Office of Works that part of the Deer Park at Lydney (a not unattractive spot) which contains the remains of the old Roman buildings, and at the same time the relics found there 124 years ago and since preserved at Lydney Park, as well as those more recently discovered, but on three conditions which I trust may be deemed not unreasonable :—(1) that nothing shall be done by removal of timber or otherwise to impair the exceptional beauty of the site, except with the permission of myself or some other owner who is a member of my family, (2) that the public shall have access to the Camp by an agreed route which shall not be in view from my house, and (3) that the objects of interest or value which have at different times been found on the Camp shall be hereafter kept on it or in its immediate neighbourhood and preserved in a museum erected for the purpose.

If I were allowed to choose a motto to place over the entrance of such a museum it would be *Laborare est orare* (To labour is to pray), for however much we may boast of our own modern civilization we must, perhaps with some humility, recognize not only the refinement and artistic sense of our Romano-British forerunners, but also their amazing energy and their deep-rooted piety, whether evoked and stimulated by Pagan or by Christian doctrines or ritual. The chequered history of our own country, like that of Rome, appears to teach us that the surest foundation of a Nation's greatness is Industry inspired and perfected by simple faith in a Supreme Being. As long as this combination of Industry and Religious Faith is

characteristic of the people of this Nation and Empire, so long assuredly will they continue to hold the proud position which they occupy among the Nations of the world. If it ceases, national decadence is inevitable. *Laborare est orare.*