

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM EMMANUEL alias Wil Manny



Shepherd, Herdsman, Tinker, Labourer, Sheep Stealer,
Cattle Thief, Wife Beater, Footpad, Murderer.

By
D Howell Rees
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A Bônau Cabbage Patch

This is an account of the life and times of William Emmanuel, alias Wil Manny, shepherd, herdsman, tinker, labourer, sheep stealer, cattle thief, wife beater, footpad, murderer.



William Emmanuel, better known as Wil Manny, was born in 1751 in a cottage on Pembrey Mountain. His parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Emmanuel were persons of good character. Thomas was employed as an agricultural labourer in the Pembrey mountain area. A number of children were born to this couple but unfortunately Elizabeth Emmanuel died whilst the children were still young. To raise his family it was necessary for Thomas Emmanuel to work on the various farms on the mountain and in so doing was obliged to be absent from the family from early in the morning until late in the evening time. The care and the custody of the motherless children was given to the eldest daughter, she being only 12 years old.

The lack of parental control allowed the children to wander over the mountain all-day and everyday. But despite their impoverished circumstances and poor upbringing the children survived. Wil Manny grew up as one of the strongest men in the parish of Pembrey. At an early age, regrettably, he took easily to crime and soon gained a great

notoriety for his criminal activities. As a sheep stealer and highway robber he was without equal. His daring and cruelty made him a terror in the parish and surrounding districts.

The area of Pembrey Mountain during this time was common land – all farmers of the locality having the right to send their sheep and cattle to graze there. To safeguard the animals during their time on the mountain it was necessary to engage, as shepherds, young boys, who lived close to the common land. Wil Manny was one of those so employed. He soon became known for his cruel ways both to other children and the animals.



Before Wil Manny's time as a shepherd, it was a fact that no sheep or cattle were lost. All were accounted for. But soon after Wil appeared on the scene, the occasional sheep was being

missed and as time went by so it became a regular event for each farmer, in turn, to lose a sheep as well as the occasional heifer.

As Wil grew to full manhood he developed a strong dislike to follow in his father's footsteps to become an agricultural labourer, but was quite content to remain with his shepherd duties on the mountain. He elected to follow this occupation, no doubt, as it gave him more opportunities to pursue his criminal activities. He was, however, known to be such a dangerous character that the local farmers would not engage him for shepherding duties – except the farmer who lived at Cwrt Farm. He was shrewder than his neighbours though. He obviously had come to the conclusion that by employing Wil Manny to watch over his sheep and cattle he would lose none. His neighbours however, kept loosing their stock regularly. Wil of course was the prime suspect, but such was Wil Manny's violent nature no farmer would dare approach him about it.



Their fears were well founded, and certain incidents which occurred after a few farmers had been discussing, at a local tavern in Trimsaran, their stock

losses during which Wil Manny's name was mentioned in the conversation, and it became quite evident that he was regarded as the culprit, illustrates this communal fear quite clearly. Whether Wil Manny came to hear of these tavern deliberations is not certain. But what is certain is that within a week, one of those farmers has lost a valuable horse, a second had some of his cattle maimed and the third had his hayrick set on fire. No one doubted for a moment the identity of the perpetrator of these deeds, but it would have been difficult to prove in a court of law.

Another incident which demonstrates the fear local farmers had of Wil Manny occurred when a farmer returning home from Llanelli happened to meet Wil Manny driving his donkey cart, which contained the carcasses of two sheep. He asked Wil whose sheep they were, half suspecting that they were his, for he to had suffered losses from his flock. Wil Manny immediately attacked him, struck him to the ground and threatened to repeat the assault should the terrified farmer dare doubt ever again on his, Wil Manny's, ownership of the sheep.

Wil Manny did not restrict his activities to sheep stealing. He would take advantage of any opportunity to steal from the young and old alike. He was known to have stolen tuppence from a young servant girl who was en-route across the mountain on an errand for her employer, when she was unfortunate enough to meet Wil Manny on his prowls. In the same way he robbed a young boy of one penny. No sum was too little to steal, no pity

shown to anyone by this scourge of the area. He had no respect for any one, be they young or old, man or woman. He was merciless and cunning too.

The notorious ship looters of Pembrey, "Gwyr y Bwelli Bach", the men of the little hatchets, were active at this time. Where there was any profitable illegality Wil Manny would not be far away. He would have benefited from those wrecked vessels, stranded on Cefn Sidan sands – of that we can be sure!



Despite his reputation Wil Manny managed to persuade a decent young servant girl from Ty Newydd Farm, Pembrey Mountain to marry him. The marriage took place at Pembrey Parish Church in September 1776. The young wife tried her best to influence and reform Wil Manny from his evil ways. All and sundry hoped fervently that she would succeed. They hoped in vain. He eventually gave up his position as herdsman at Cwrt Farm to enable him no doubt, to give his undivided attention to crime.

Now he was in his element. He rowled the mountain and its vicinity, particularly at night when the darkness helped to conceal his movements and also aided him to surprise the unwary traveller. The list of offences grew longer. Theft and attacks on individuals proliferated. The incidents of his crimes, which have been highlighted in this account of his criminal activities, are merely the tip of the iceberg.



A neighbour of Wil Manny was Margaret David, a widow better known as Pegi Dafydd. She was a close friend of Wil Manny's wife and was well aware that Wil Manny was not only violent to members of the public on the

lonely lanes and by-ways of Pembrey Mountain, but that he was equally violent to his wife, who, with the passing years had suffered many beatings from him, and had confided in Pegi Dafydd her fear of Wil Manny. Wil Manny knew of the friendship between his wife and Pegi and probably suspected that Pegi was waiting for an opportunity to report him to the authorities.

After a particularly vicious assault by him on his wife, Mrs Emanuel fled to Pegi Dafydd's home for shelter. Shortly afterwards, Wil Manny followed his wife to Pegi's cottage and demanded that she give up his wife. Pegi refused and threatened to report him to the

authorities, and in particular to Mr Rees, Cilymaenllwyd for his misdeeds. Mr Rees was the one person in the locality of whom Wil Manny was afraid, for he was a Justice of the Peace with power and influence. Wil Manny knew that unless he was able, by persuasion or other means, to prevent Pegi Dafydd from informing Mr Rees the JP of his ill treatment of his wife, there was every likelihood that other people would follow Pegi's brave example, and come forward to make formal complaints against him. If only a few of those complaints were to be proved he could, at the very least, be dealt with by being banished to Botany Bay for life. Australia was not a 'fair' country to reside in, in those days. Transportation was not a happy prospect. His vile temper and cruel physical assaults on his wife had led him into a desperate situation.

Just a few days later, his wife now having returned home, Wil Manny was seen by two local women, Mary Dunn and Ann Bowen, going in the direction of Pegi Dafydd's cottage on the evening of the 17th May. In all probability Wil's visit to Pegi's cottage was to persuade her from informing Mr John Rees J.P. of his conduct towards his wife. Whatever the sequence of events in Pegi's cottage that fateful evening only the conclusion is certain.



On the following morning, a John Hugh called at Pegi's cottage. The scene that greeted him there was one that he would never forget. He found Pegi lying on the floor. She was dead and

from the visible injuries had obviously been attacked and killed. The news quickly spread throughout the neighbourhood and a shocked, stunned crowd gathered in the vicinity of the cottage.

Suspicion immediately fell on Wil Manny - such was his reputation. It appears that Mr John Rees J.P. of Cilymaenllwyd had been to Carmarthen on a visit for a few days and by chance was now returning home when his coachman drew his attention to the crowd of people gathered near where Pegi lived. It was a lonely place for such a gathering and Mr Rees ordered his coachman to drive up to the crowd, where he alighted to inquire as to the cause of the gathering. On being told that Pegi Dafydd had been found dead and to all appearances had been murdered, Mr Rees immediately entered the cottage, where he found the victim. The cottage showed signs of a violent struggle having taken place, the little furniture that was there was scattered, and Mr Rees noticed that Pegi held tightly in her hand, a piece of cloth. Pegi had sustained severe injuries to her head, and close by was a small bloodstained stool. With assistance from others present, Mr Rees extracted the piece of cloth carefully from Pegi's hand, whereupon it was seen that it appeared to be part of a coat cuff. Mr Rees took possession of the piece of cloth and also ordered that the bloodstained stool be placed in his carriage, for conveying to Cilymaenllwyd. He then instructed eight men from among those present at the scene to proceed to Llanelli where he arranged to meet them later, and instructed others

present at the scene to keep a close watch on the cottage, and allow no person to enter until he had returned. Mr Rees later met the eight men previously ordered to Llanelli, where he swore them in as Special Constables.

During the absence of Mr Rees and the others from the scene, a visitor to the scene was Wil Manny. He made to enter the cottage, saying he wished to have a last look at Pegi, promising vengeance on the person responsible for the dreadful deed. However, he was informed that Mr Rees, Cilymaenllwyd had given instructions that no one was allowed to enter the cottage. Wil Manny became abusive and questioned the right of Mr Rees to prevent him paying his last respects to Pegi. His tirade of abuse was of no avail, for those placed in charge of the cottage, being of the view that it was of the utmost importance to carry out the instructions of the magistrate to the very last letter, were determined that there would be no breach of duty on their part.



Meanwhile, Mr Rees drew up his plans for the arrest of the culprit. One of the Special Constables named William Jones was appointed Sergeant. From the piece of cloth recovered at the scene, there was little doubt in Mr Rees' mind of the identity of the killer. He knew that Wil Manny had a coat of

similar material to that cloth. He therefore directed William Jones and the other Special Constables to visit the abode of Wil Manny at five o'clock the following morning and arrest him on suspicion of murdering Pegi Dafydd, and to bring him forthwith to Cilymaenllwyd.

They carried out their instructions, meeting Wil Manny just as he was about to leave his home, very probably



to make himself scarce from the district, which he was want to do, from time to time, when matters became too hot for him near home. He did not come quietly and struck William Jones to the ground when told by the Sergeant he was being arrested on suspicion of Pegi's murder. Fortunately Mr Rees had chosen his Special Constables with care, all being sturdily built and strong. Together, they soon quelled the struggling and resisting Wil Manny, loud though he protested his innocence. He was taken to Cilymaenllwyd, where a special court was held and he was remanded in custody. A search of Wil Manny's home had been made and a coat with part of the cuff missing was found.

The post mortem on the deceased was performed by a Doctor Morgan who reported that the injuries that Pegi has

sustained on her body indicated that she had been savagely kicked, there were signs of strangulation, and her head had received very serious injury. The subsequent inquest is believed to have been held at Penrhyn Farm, which was not far from Pegi Dafydd's cottage.

In September 1788, at the Great Sessions held at Carmarthen, William Emmanuel, aged 37 years, occupation tinker and labourer of Pembrey Mountain appeared before Chief Justice Beard and Justice Macdonald, charged with the murder of Margaret David on 17th May 1788.

In a packed courtroom, with hundreds of people milling outside the court, he pleaded not guilty. Giving evidence for the prosecution, John Rogers, a tailor, stated that he had made a coat and waistcoat for Wil Manny from cloth similar to the pattern of the piece of cloth shown to him in the court, and which had been recovered from the hand of the deceased, and that the cloth produced in the court fitted exactly in the missing portion of the coat, also produced in court, being the coat recovered from Wil Manny's home. John Rogers further stated that the coat was the one that he had made for the accused. John Rogers added that he was able to prove beyond any doubt that the coat produced as evidence was the one that he had made for Wil Manny. He stated that the cuff on the coat's right sleeve had been sewn with worsted instead of thread, although the remainder of the coat had been sewn with thread. The reason for this was that just as he was about to finish the coat, he ran out of thread, and rather than go to Llanelli for more

thread, he sewed and completed the task by using worsted instead of thread. The court examined the coat and the torn cuff, and found that what John Rogers had stated with regard to the use of worsted was correct.

Another witness, a Mary Rogers, told the court that whilst in Wil Manny's home on the 13th May, just prior to Pegi Dafydd's death, she heard Wil Manny telling his wife that he would kill Pegi Dafydd in the near future.

The jury took less than half an hour to find him guilty. Chief Justice Beard sentenced him to death.

On the morning of the execution Wil Manny was brought out from his cell, pinioned, placed in a cart and taken to Pensarn in Carmarthen, the designated location for the execution, in public, by hanging. En-route to the scaffold, which was not far from where he had been kept in custody, Wil Manny shouted obscenities at the jeering crowd lining the way. On arrival at the scaffold, where a great multitude had gathered to witness the gruesome proceedings, he continued to shout obscenities and was reported as behaving like a madman. He then refused the ministrations of the chaplain who had attended him during his period of incarceration in Carmarthen



prison waiting his trial. When on the scaffold he was asked if he had anything to say before the hood was placed over his head, he replied that he did have something to say. He then proceeded to shout derogatory remarks relative to Mr John Rees, Cilymaenllwyd. He did not repent his sins, but cursed Mr Rees and his descendants, and he continued to do so as the hood was slipped over his head. Then the ladder upon which he stood was turned and William Emmanuel – alias Wil Manny departed this life, as the vast throng of spectators jeered their derision and threw stones and various missiles at his hanging body.

After some hours his body was cut down and carted away to be hung on a gibbet, exposed, so that all could see it, at a prepared place on Pembrey Mountain at the junction of the road leading to the main road at Five Roads, being the nearest crossroads to the dwelling of the victim, as directed by Chief Justice Beard at the conclusion of the trial. The body remained gibbeted for several days.

Whilst Wil Manny deserves no sympathy in the manner of his demise, his many foul deeds during his short lifetime, culminating in the brutal murder of Pegi Dafydd excludes him from any feeling of pity. He died as he lived, violently. Yet the dreadful scene during his execution and the gibbeting on Pembrey Mountain reflects the harsh and sometimes barbaric behaviour and tendencies of those times.

There was much satisfaction in Pembrey Parish, particularly in the

mountain area at the conviction and execution of Wil Manny. A certain Mr W M Evans of Spudders Bridge, Trimsaran who had suffered grievously from Wil Manny's criminal activities over the years, was so delighted at the demise of Wil Manny that he held a large banquet at one of the local hostelrys to celebrate his departure. The evening went well, with the many present enjoying the celebrations immensely.



After many years of fear, suffering and economic loss as the result of Wil Manny's terrorising activities, peace and normality returned to the Pembrey Mountain area and surrounding districts as the local inhabitants settled down to their everyday lives and tasks. Wil Manny's reign of terror was ended, the long dark nightmare over, and safer, quieter and hopefully, happier days beckoned.

Access to material in relation to William Emmanuel held at the Llanelli Reference Library archives was readily given by the staff and I gratefully acknowledge their co-operation. I am also deeply indebted to Mr Roy Davies, Penbre for his contribution with background information, which greatly assisted the compiling of this account.

D Howell Rees © 2010

(The photographs and sketches depicted in this supplement are representational and do not necessarily reflect the true likeness of any individual or location mentioned in the body of the text).