LORD GEORGE MURRAY, BISHOP OF ST DAVID'S AND PROGENITOR OF THE INTERNET

The Right Reverend Lord George Murray was bishop of St David's from November 1800 to June 1803, one of the shortest tenures in the long history of the diocese. He died at the age of just forty-two, almost overwhelmed by the extent of the debts that he bequeathed to his young widow and his large, mainly infant, family. In most histories of the diocese, he is seen as the last of the alien, largely non-resident, eighteenth century bishops who looked on St David's merely as a stepping stone to greater things. His tenure has been regarded implicitly as the briefest of preludes before the episcopate of his immediate successor, Thomas Burgess, reformer, friend of *yr hen iaith Gymraeg,* founder of St David's University College, Lampeter, and one of the most memorable of all the bishops of St David's[1]. Murray himself has sometimes been presented as a man so excessively devout as to be one of the best proofs of a supposed streak of congenital insanity in his family[2]. Yet in many respects, Lord George Murray was one of the most remarkable men ever to serve as a bishop in Wales. A scion of one of the greatest ducal houses of Scotland, his main – if distinctly un-clerical – claim to fame is as the inventor of the Admiralty shutter telegraph system that carried messages to and from the English dockyards at the height of the Revolutionary and

Napoleonic wars: an invention now regarded almost universally as one of the great early landmarks in the history of telecommunications and data transference[3]. His personal letters from the time of his episcopate suggest that he was a man with a genuine sympathy for his adopted country, as well as providing a number of unique insights into life in Carmarthenshire and south west Wales at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He was bishop at the time of the controversial Carmarthenshire election of 1802, when William Paxton of Middleton Hall famously attempted to win over the county electorate by means of an exceptional (and unsuccessful) hospitality. Lord George Murray's letters from his episcopal palace at Abergwili, written to his close friend Sir Henry Hawley, before, during and after the election of 1802, provide sufficient, and previously unknown, evidence to suggest that in some respects, far from implementing a radically new policy for his diocese, Bishop Burgess continued along a path partly laid out by his predecessor. Indeed, given the significantly more substantial political connections than his successor that Murray possessed, there is a case for claiming that his premature death could have been a tragedy for his diocese, and one of the 'might have beens' of Welsh history in the nineteenth century[4]. At the very least, the bicentenary of his enthronement seems an appropriate moment to reassess his contributions to the histories of the Royal Navy, of data transference, and of south west Wales.

Beginnings

George Murray was born at Dunkeld House, on the banks of the Tay, on 30 January 1761, and christened in neighbouring Dunkeld Cathedral on 1 February[5]. This was barely three months after the grandfather whose name he took, once the commanding general of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie''s army in the 1745 rebellion, had died in attainted exile at Medemblik in Holland. His father, John Murray (1729-74), became the third duke of Atholl when young George was three, only to die eleven years later by accidentally drinking a cup of hartshorn and drowning himself in the Tay in the consequent delirium. George's mother, Charlotte Murray, Baroness Strange (1731-1805), was also her husband's first cousin, the daughter and heiress of the second duke. At Blair Castle, the chief seat of the dukes of Atholl, a painting of the third duke's family by Johan Zoffany still hangs in the drawing room and shows George as a small, happy boy, on the extreme right of the family group. The only other extant picture of him, a miniature, is preserved in the 'treasure room' at Blair, and shows him as a bewigged and rather unhealthy-looking young man in his teens or twenties. As the third surviving son, George Murray was destined for a career in the church, and matriculated at New College, Oxford, on 28 June 1779, graduating B.A. in 1782. His studies at Oxford were interrupted by his marriage at Farnborough on 18 December 1780 to Anne Charlotte Grant (1765-1844), the daughter of Lieutenant-general Francis Grant (1717-81). The young couple seem to have lived at Farnham in the mid-1780s, as both their

eldest sons were christened there. Thereafter, Murray's career took a reasonably conventional path. Thanks to the family connection, he became archdeacon of Man on 5 November 1787, and, as was common at a time when pluralism was still rife in the established church, he held the post concurrently with that of rector of Hunton, Kent. Hunton was a wealthy parish, and Murray's famous predecessor, the evangelist and abolitionist Beilby Porteus (1731-1809), appointed bishop of London in 1787, had retained it after becoming bishop of Chester in 1776[6]. Lord George and his family lived at Hunton for most of the period 1787-1801. Murray's family hoped that he would eventually become bishop of Sodor and Man, thereby restoring a direct Atholl link with what had been in effect their private kingdom until it was sold to the British crown in the 1765 Act of Revestment; the scheme was thwarted by the resolute refusal of the mediocre incumbent[7] to die conveniently.

The telegraph

The church may have been Lord George Murray's life, but in some ways, the sea seems to have been his true love. An eponymous uncle, the Hon. George Murray (1741-97), had become a captain in the navy in 1768, commanding HMS *Cleopatra* at the battle of the Dogger Bank in 1781[8], and Lord George corresponded frequently with him. In August 1790 he sent the then Captain Murray diagrams of a device that he had invented for moving ships in a calm,

in effect a rudimentary paddle wheel worked manually by a capstan[9]. This project got nowhere, but shortly afterwards, Murray made his most lasting contribution to the navy. He always had something of an obsession with the dangers of a French invasion (indeed, in 1798 he organised his own volunteer defence force in Kent), and most sources suggest that he had spent some time working on a way of speeding up communications between the coast and London. Finally, on 17 October 1794 he wrote to the Admiralty to propose the creation of a shutter telegraph system, based on lines of signal stations connecting the various royal dockyards to the Admiralty building in Whitehall[10]. Although another clergyman, the Reverend John Gamble, had also proposed a telegraph system to the Admiralty at much the same time, Murray's was far superior[11]. It consisted of two columns mounting six shutters in a vertical frame twenty feet high, giving sixty-three changes and, therefore, the flexibility to spell out any message, rather than relying on the fixed meanings of the balls and flags used until then[12]. When all shutters were open, the station was at rest; when all were closed, it was ready to transmit.

Murray's telegraph was tested successfully in August 1795, when two 'machines' placed six miles apart on Sydenham Common and Shooter's Hill were able, in Lord George's words, 'to hold any conversation with the greatest ease'[13]. Further trials took place on Wimbledon Common in September. The Admiralty was suitably impressed, and early in December a contract was agreed to build the first telegraph lines, 'agreeably to a sketch

made by Lord George Murray of the several Stations for the telegraph'. It was stated at the same time that Murray had already laid out £171 14s 6d 'for his journeys and paying such people as he has already found necessary to engage for the service of the telegraph'[14]. Murray was introduced to King George III on 18 December 1795, and had a long conversation with the scientifically inclined monarch. The actual construction of the telegraph lines was delegated to a professional surveyor, George Roebuck, who had been appointed on 25 September 1795 to select suitable stations linking London to Deal, Sheerness and Portsmouth. The London to Deal telegraph was completed by 27 January 1796[15], with the fastest messages taking seven minutes. There was a branch to Sheerness, and some evidence suggests that there was also a small branch to the dockyard at Chatham. In March, Lord George was given the direction of the entire Admiralty telegraph system. Two machines were erected on the roof of the Admiralty building itself, one facing east, the other south. Murray spent much of the spring and summer travelling through southern England, supervising the construction of the telegraph line to Portsmouth, arguably the most important of all, which had eight intermediate stations. His blue blood clearly proved beneficial when dealing with those who owned the land on which the stations were to be built: they included the second Earl Spencer (for the Putney Heath station) and Lord Stawell (for Portsdown), but Murray quickly got them to agree terms[16]. Although his correspondence suggests that he intended to go on to Plymouth, Torbay and Falmouth, no line was ever built to the last two and that to the

first was completed only in 1806, when Murray was long dead. The cancellation of the Plymouth line, at least, seems to have occurred in June 1796. On the tenth of that month Murray wrote from 20 Devonshire Street to Earl Spencer, then the first lord of the Admiralty:

> After the conversation which I had the honour of having with your lordship on Wednesday, and after my having acceded to your proposal of my offering to undertake the completion of all the telegraphs for the sum of sixteen thousand, five hundred pounds, it was with infinite surprise that I this day received a letter from the Board of Admiralty informing me that their lordships had determined not to proceed with the telegraphs to Plymouth, &c., and making no mention whatever of my claim of remuneration. What hope now remains for me to look forward to, is beyond my grip[17].

In the event, Murray had to be content with £2,000 granted to him by an order-in-council of 8 August 1796, which hardly satisfied his wife's hopes that the physical effort involved in choosing suitable sites and supervising the erection of the stations would be generously rewarded[18]. Perhaps out of pique, Murray then left the completion and day-to-day running of the telegraph to Roebuck, who was appointed superintendent of telegraphs on a salary of £300 a year.

The Admiralty telegraph – the first telegraph in Britain - quickly became an indispensable part of the Royal Navy. Ironically, perhaps its most famous use

was not for the purpose Murray feared, namely communicating news of an invasion from the coast to London, but for the transmission of one item of news in the opposite direction. At first light on 6 November 1805, the shutter devices on the roof of the Admiralty building were closed prior to the transmission of the news that Lieutenant Lapenotière of HMS *Pickle* had brought to the secretary of the Admiralty at one that morning, having ridden insanely from Falmouth in barely thirty-eight hours. Thus Murray's invention carried to Portsmouth the news that Vice-admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson, who had sailed from there on 15 September, had destroyed the Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, but had died at the moment of victory. Popular legend long held that the telegraph had sent the news of both Trafalgar and Waterloo to London. This was not so, but there seems to be slightly more substance to the story that a signal beginning 'Wellington defeated…', the rest of which could not be sent due to bad weather, caused panic and a stock market crash in London – although the complete message would have revealed that Wellington had defeated the French yet again in the Peninsular War[19]. In the latter stages of the Napoleonic wars, Murray's shutter telegraph was replaced by the more rapid semaphore system devised by Admiral Sir Home Popham, but its pioneering status in the development of telecommunications is beyond dispute.

Despite the undoubted kudos that he obtained from inventing the telegraph, it did little to alleviate the most pressing problem in George Murray's life. His

rapidly growing young family (his wife bore him ten children, nine of whom survived infancy), and his inability or unwillingness to live within his means, had meant that even by the late 1780s he was in serious financial difficulties, and constantly pressing for further (and more lucrative) offices in the church. In his wife's opinion, his appointment to the Manx archdeaconry was insufficient: after paying a deputy to do the actual work, she believed it would be worth barely £100 a year, far less than George or his brother John (the fourth duke[20]) expected. She hoped that George's influential uncle, Major-general James Murray (1734-94), MP for Perthshire, could persuade Pitt to grant him a position within the diocese of London.[21] Despite holding the reasonably wealthy living of Hunton, Murray's finances continued to be chaotic. In August 1791 he was requesting a loan of £100 from the duke, followed by another in May 1793.[22] In 1796 he tried unsuccessfully to secure one of the prebendaries of Westminster[23]; in April 1797, when he was at Bath with his uncle Vice-admiral Murray, he was pursuing a similar post at Rochester and a deanery valued at £1,500[24]. A month later, he was desperately seeking a further loan from the old admiral, who had already given him £500 interest-free but claimed he could do no more until he knew the outcome of various prize money cases. The uncle advised the nephew to reduce his expenses and retire to a place where he could live within his income, as well as disclosing the true situation to his wife[25]. Vice-admiral Murray wrote separately to the duke of Atholl, noting that George had debts of £6,000 and an income of only £750, and the duke's reply suggested that

they should discuss George's shambolic finances when they next met[26]. George soon obtained another £80 from the duke, but he knew all too well that the only answer was promotion, and he was pessimistic about the time it might take for Pitt's promises of preferment to be fulfilled[27]. In fact, it took a further three years. On 22 October 1800 Walter Stuart, bishop of St David's since 1793 and another Scot[28], kissed King George III's hands to mark his translation to the archbishopric of Armagh and the primacy of Ireland. On the same day, the king wrote to Pitt requesting the appointment of Lord George Murray to the vacant see[29]. He was officially nominated on 19 November, admitted a doctor of divinity by the convocation of the University of Oxford on the twenty-seventh, elected on 6 December, confirmed on the following day, and consecrated at Lambeth on 11 February 1801 as the one hundred and fourteenth successor of *Dewi Sant* himself[30].

Lord Bishop

At the start of the nineteenth century, the diocese of St David's was the second largest in England and Wales. Unfortunately for Lord George's finances, it was also the third poorest: even thirty years later, the net annual income was just under £1,900[31]. It had suffered from a rapid succession of bishops – eighteen in 95 years prior to Murray's election. No bishop had held the see for more than twelve years since 1699; none had held it for more than twenty since 1362. Many of the bishops, like Murray's predecessor Walter

Stuart, evidently looked on it simply as a stepping stone to more lucrative positions elsewhere, and had no real sympathy for the nature of the country and the Welsh people. Murray might have seemed to be merely the latest in this long line, derisively called the '*Esgyb Eingl*' by Ieuan Brydydd Hir[32]. One of his own clergymen, the Cardiganshire curate Lewis Evans, tried to get his brother in London to obtain information on the new bishop, but was openly cynical about his 'new Diocesan':

> Learn if you can whether he is led by the ears, the eyes or the nose, or taken by the hand – or by what handle to take him; or if by all the senses united – his own sound Judgement and Penetration…By the time his Clergy begin to have a little of him by exp[erience] he flies off to a warmer nest, and leaves many a black[bird] unfledged, like all his predecessors from time immemorial[33].

However, a number of private letters of Murray's from the period of his episcopate tell a somewhat different story. They were written to a close friend from his time in Kent, Sir Henry Hawley (1745-1826), first baronet of Leybourne Grange near Maidstone (the godfather of his seventh child, Amelia Matilda[34]), and are now preserved at the Lincolnshire Archives Office[35]. On 6 November 1800 Murray wrote briefly to Hawley:

> Knowing as well as I do the kind good wishes of yourself and Lady Hawley I trouble you with the copy of a note I have this morning received – 'Mr Rose presents his Compliments to Ld G M and has great pleasure in confirming to him, that he is to be Bishop of St Davids as he

> is authorised by Mr Pitt to make that communication to him'. The Prebend of Westminster is not as yet included but I do not think it very unlikely that it may be[36].

On 19 November, Murray wrote to tell Hawley that he had kissed the king's hand that morning[37], but it took him some time to adjust to his new status: two months later, he was still uncertain about the privileges that being a bishop (and, therefore, a member of the House of Lords) conferred, ending a letter with 'I venture to frank this as I believe I am now privileged, but am not quite certain but that you may have to pay for it'. Nevertheless, Murray was still concerned for the parishioners of Hunton, despite the fact he was about to leave them: he asked Hawley and his friends 'to direct distribution of soup and the purchase of a supply of corned herrings for the Parish of Hunton. If the latter are good of their sort and are retailed at about three for a penny, I am sure the people would eagerly purchase them and would find great benefit from them'.[38]

The next surviving letter in the correspondence, the longest of all, was dated from the bishop's palace at Abergwili on 31 August 1801[39]. Murray apologised for his failure to write before then, explaining that he had 'had so much employment since we came to this place that I have had very little leisure'[40], but then embarked on an extensive set of impressions of his new diocese, where he seems to have come into residence in the second part of July[41].

> We like this country extremely and have been most fortunate in our weather for making our first settlement. We have only one objection to it, which is that very contrary to our expectations we find most things were dearer than in England. Poultry, fish, and labour are still reasonable though much raised of late, but our butchers' meat is both dear and bad – beef 8s per lb – and so little meat in proportion to the bone, that I am sure it is equal to a shilling in London. Setting aside however that one grievance we are very comfortably situated and may do very well.

Hardly surprisingly in the light of his previous financial history, Murray was particularly interested in the moneymaking potential of the diocese.

> The income of the Bishopric is most sadly reduced from what it ought to be, by leases upon lives, but still it may be much mended, and I have reason to hope it will prove more productive than expected. Some pretty good estates are only upon leases of years, and may either be renewed to advantage, or suffered to run out, should I live long enough, to much greater advantage, but no bishop has for many years visited any part of the property or had any idea of the value except by guess[42]. I am going into Cardiganshire on Wednesday to see a lead mine which I think may turn to good account[43], and I have plenty of coal, iron stone and lime stone which may help to make things better. In short, take it altogether [and] I think myself very fortunately situated, and if I can succeed in getting some good appendage[44] I

> would not wish to change this Bishopric for any in his Majesty's gift – indeed, I think Government ought to give the means of staying here for the diocese has been most sadly neglected by being made only a stepping stone to better preferment, and the people are much pleased with our intention of residing amongst them.

Despite having 'some very pleasant neighbours who have been very kind to us', Murray claimed to miss his old friends in Kent, and then gave Hawley a long account of his son John's latest exploits at sea, in which he had cut out a vessel from a French harbour[45]. He ended with some more personal impressions of south-west Wales:

> George and Charles are spending their holidays with us, but must soon return to Harrow. They are delighted with the Corricles [*sic*] upon the Towy, and as there is now very little water, they do not run much risk of being drown'd. We spent a few days last week at Swansea, wishing to see an estate in that neighbourhood. It is said to be the most fashionable place in South Wales, but is far from being a pleasant one, as the smoke from the copper works is very disagreeable. Should the weather continue fine I believe we shall make a short trip to Tenby in the course of a fortnight.

'George' and 'Charles' were, respectively, Lord George's second and third sons. The younger George (1784-1860) was to become successively bishop of Sodor and Man (thereby belatedly fulfilling the family's ambition for his father), and of Rochester. Ultimately, his line would provide the tenth and

subsequent dukes of Atholl. Charles, a civil servant in the East India Company, died in Sumatra of a fever in January 1808, having survived the Malay attack on Fort Marlborough in the previous month that killed the English resident. He had been a school friend at Harrow of the future Sir Robert Peel. In 1843, Charles's sister Amelia sent the then incumbent prime minister a miniature of her late brother, whose 'career closed' at the age of twenty-two. Peel's reply stated that 'when at Hanover Street I lived in the same house and in the next room to your Brother and have a perfect recollection of him'[46].

Murray next wrote to Hawley on 4 November 1801 from his house in George Street, Hanover Square, having come to London for the session of parliament, and 'having left Lady George and all our family quite well four days before'[47]. As the junior bishop, he was serving as the parliamentary chaplain, but

> I did all I could to avoid the coming up, but though some of my brethren were very kind in their offers of assistance, I could not trust to them with sufficient certainty. How long I am to stay here is not easy to grasp, but as a dissolution of Parliament in the course of a fortnight is much talked of, I hope to return soon into Wales and with some prospect of a winter's repose; as I am endeavouring to prove that the Irish bishops who come into the next parliament [ie following the act of union of Britain and Ireland] must be my juniors in the Imperial house and ought to relieve me from the Chaplainship. The distance to

> Abergwilly is too great for very frequent trips. We have had a very long sitting this morning – the division at five o'clock was 114 for the peace [of Amiens] and 10 against it – among the latter the Marqs of Buckingham, the Bp of Rochester, and Lords Grenville, Spencer, Carnarvon, Gwydur, Radnor and Fitzwilliam. Politics seem to have got a complete jumble – Pitt is supposed to be certainly coming in again – his friend Canning said to be of the opposition.

Murray's prospects improved dramatically in 1802. The 'good appendage' that he had desired in his first letter to Hawley from Abergwili came his way that year, not with the cathedral prebendary that he had long hoped for, but with his appointment as dean of Bocking, Essex. Bocking was a prosperous living, with the sort of connections that suggested its incumbent was destined for greater things: Murray held the title of dean because the parish, with its great perpendicular church of St Mary's, was one of the very few surviving peculiars of Canterbury Cathedral[48]. Murray informed Hawley that 'I am likely to do very well with my Essex living but have found it necessary to take the tithes in kind this year in order to show that it can be done. The person I have employed is a very clever fellow, or I should be much afraid to become so great a farmer, particularly at this distance'[49].

The 'great election'

The next surviving letter from Murray to Hawley was dated from Abergwili on 4 September 1802[50]. This followed closely upon the controversial election for the Carmarthenshire county seat in July and its bitter aftermath, in which James Hamlyn Williams of Edwinsford, representing the 'reds' or tories, eventually and narrowly defeated William Paxton of Middleton Hall, the then mayor of Carmarthen, and his 'blues' or whigs amid a barrage of claims and counter-claims of corruption and skulduggery that lasted until Paxton abandoned his appeal nine months later. For instance, Paxton, who had made his fortune in India, allegedly spent £15,690 4s 2d (a figure that Murray implicitly confirms) in the contest that became known locally as '*lecsiwn fawr*', the 'great election': his generosity included the provision of 11,070 breakfasts, 36,901 dinners, 25,275 gallons of ale, and 20,916 bottles of spirits, porter, sherry, and cider[51]. Murray's letter gives a detailed insight into the election, and makes no attempt to hide where his own sympathies really lay. A firm tory, he had opposed what he saw as the disloyalty of the House of Keys on the Isle of Man in 1791[52], while in 1795 he told his uncle that 'our true liberty is far preferable to that democratic anarchy which has so desolated a great part of the world'[53]. Probably the clearest expression of Murray's political views is contained in his only published sermon, delivered at Hunton on 16

December 1792, at the moment that the French were trying King Louis XVI for his life[54]. Based on Isaiah, chapter 32, verses 17 and 18, Murray's exposition was an undisguised call to defend the existing constitution and social hierarchy, and to pay taxes towards national defence without complaint. He upheld institutions of civil government,

> …which, wherever they have been aided by religion, have checked the spirit of violence, have supported the weak, and have bound all mankind together by the strong ties of justice and benevolence…[he considers] the great necessity of a general chain of subordination, and of a reverence for all lawful authority, as being the only means of forming the stability and prosperity of any society.

Murray praised 'the excellence of the Constitution under which God has been graciously pleased so long to permit us to enjoy the blessings of peace and society', before extolling the country as a whole:

> In this happy country we do most literally live 'in peaceable habitations and sure dwellings'. We hear of no rumours of war but at a distance: our insular situation guards us from all its greatest horrors; from pillage, from desolation, from fire, the sword and the battle...Our climate is more temperate than that of any other part of the world, we reap the fruits of the earth in due season; our flocks and our herds feed with safety in our fields, and commerce pours her riches into all our ports.

If even partly a reflection of his true sentiments, Murray's sentimental vision of this British demi-paradise (shaped, no doubt, by the idyllic scenic pleasures and agricultural wealth of Hunton) might help to explain his passionate commitment to projects designed to prevent invasion. This would have been reinforced by his views on the 'horrible evils' then occurring in France:

> Humanity must shudder at the thought of the excesses which have been committed; must weep for the fate of those who have innocently become victims to brutality, and must wish to draw a veil over the remembrance of so great iniquity…Shall such a deluded people imagine that others are as easily led astray? Shall they for a moment suppose that we are mad enough to copy so dreadful an example; that we are so depraved as to follow their footsteps, or so foolish as to go to destruction with our eyes open?

Despite these clear Tory sympathies, Murray's letter to Sir Henry Hawley of 4 September 1802 displayed a fairly positive opinion of the Whig William Paxton, who became MP for Carmarthen borough in 1803 and finally for the county in 1806, despite being widely resented by the local gentry as an alien interloper. Aside from his lavish spending in the 1802 election, Paxton's most notable attempt to buy the loyalty of his adopted county was the tower that he erected above the Towy opposite Nantgaredig, ostensibly as a memorial to Nelson, and which is locally still known as 'Paxton's folly'[55]. However,

Murray began this letter to Hawley with an apology, and then a dig at the long-windedness of Welsh clergymen:

> I beg you ten thousand pardons for having so very long delayed thanking you for your very kind and entertaining letter…The enjoying the intervals of fine weather we have had, in various little excursions, and the receiving my clergy, who are rather apt in general to favour me with pretty long visits, [means that] I have most sadly neglected my correspondence with all my friends…[*He then comments on Hawley's news about the election in Kent*]…How strange it is that so many people can be found willing to throw away their money in such contests – though your candidates are less extravagant in their expense than they have been before, ours, who started with fuller purses and less experience, have supplied the public pretty freely. They have already spent full thirty thousand pounds, and as a petition is intended, will have to part with a good deal more before the business is concluded. Mr Williams, for whom you felt some interest, is at present the member and I think is likely to continue so, though his seat will have cost him more than we can suppose it to be worth. A Mr Paxton is his present antagonist though a Mr Mansel Phillips began the canvass. He having neither character nor money was obliged to give up – and then Mr P stepped forward in order "to preserve the peace of the country"[56]. It was as little my inclination as my duty to have any interference in the business – both candidates were respectable men and both our

> acquaintances, so that we felt no other difference in our wishes than what arose from our old habit of dislike to the light blue, which I believe is the democratic colour all over the kingdom. Mr Paxton I am sure would support the Government of the Country, but I would not say so much for his party, who have only made a fool of him to pick Mr Wms' pocket. The rancour of the people towards each other is very disgraceful to them and continues from generation to generation. As neutrals we have heard all the stories of both parties and were we to believe one half of them should be led to conclude that there is not one honest man in the Principality.

Having finally exhausted the squalid politics of Carmarthenshire, Murray moved on to more sociable topics.

> We have now been here nearly three months[57], and have had but very little dry weather; some days ago it was passing summer, but it now rains as hard as ever again and gives us but a melancholy prospect for the harvest. The corn is uncommonly abundant, but though some is safe there is a great deal yet to cut. One of the few fine days we have had, we took a charming excursion down to the mouth of the Towy, about twenty miles. We had an excellent boat and band of music, and dined under the rocks upon the sea shore. The river is very beautiful, and in strong tides we have deep water within half a mile of the house. We are still very busy making our place comfortable and hope we shall

> next year have good accommodation for you and as many of your family as you will do us the favour of bringing with you.

As this letter makes clear, Lord George had set about improving the principal apartments at Abergwili, but to little effect: when Burgess succeeded him, he admitted that his predecessor had 'much improved and beautified' the palace, 'but it was [still] substantially in great want of repair…'[58]. This was faint praise, for Murray was largely responsible for creating the palace that survived until the fire of 1903, more of which shapes the current Carmarthen County Museum than was once assumed. He added the east wing (now the archaeology gallery) and placed the main entrance in it to allow a superb vista of the river – an ambition that must have been stymied as the building work was in progress, for in 1802 the river suddenly moved to the other side of the valley. Murray also enclosed the quadrangle, built a canal to the Gwili, added the bay windows and the ha-ha, as well as landscaping the grounds, perhaps using John Nash and Humphrey Repton, who were both working in the area at the time[59].

Murray's letter of 4 September also makes no mention of any meeting between himself and Lord Nelson, who passed through Carmarthenshire in July and August 1802 on his way to and from inspecting the harbour at Milford Haven. Indeed, despite the stir that the national hero's journey caused throughout south Wales, Murray's letter makes no mention of Nelson

at all. The victor of the Nile and Copenhagen and Emma, Lady Hamilton, stayed at the Castle Hotel, Llandovery, on the night of 28 July, at the Ivy Bush in Carmarthen on the following night, and at the Three Tuns in Bridge Street, Carmarthen, on the night of 30 July. On their return journey, they stopped in Carmarthen on 13 August only long enough to change their coach's team of horses. On both occasions, there is no record of a meeting between the admiral and the bishop. It may be that the notoriously adulterous relationship would have precluded any meeting between the hero and the prelate, albeit a prelate who had also provided valuable service to the Royal Navy; or perhaps the sensibilities of the prelate's wife played a greater part in preventing what could have been a fascinating meeting. It was certainly the case that despite the lead given by their controversial mayor, Paxton, the civic dignitaries of Carmarthen had been divided over whether or not to receive Lady Hamilton, and when they failed to give the couple an official send-off on the morning of 31 July, Nelson remarked that 'there is not a gentleman in the place'[60].

Murray's next letter, dated from Abergwili on 15 December 1802, was concerned largely with the possibility that the 'very clever' steward he was employing in his Bocking living might have been swindling him. He then returned, as ever, to the vagaries of the Welsh weather:

> Our weather is still most delightfully pleasant. We lately spent some days with Lord and Lady Dinevor[61] at their very beautiful place and enjoyed an open carriage as much as if it had been summer. They are

> most excellent people and within the moderate distance of 12 miles, which in this country is near neighbourhood…The poor old bishop of Hereford[62] you will probably have heard died last Thursday. This may be of some consequence to myself, as I only wished to hold Bocking for a time[63]. The Archbishop promised in case of the event, to make an option of a very good living in Herefordshire now held by a very infirm incumbent. The situation would be much more eligible to me, and I should get out of much hot water with my present dissenting parishioners – but all this must depend on future circumstances and it is not the less necessary to secure what I can in the mean time.

Turns of fate

A fortnight later, Murray wrote what is now the final letter of his in the Hawley papers, a brief note dealing primarily with his relief that his steward in Bocking had been exonerated, and his expectation that the tithes from that parish would be worth £2,400 in the following year[64]. However, other evidence suggests that Murray was fast becoming an effective, sympathetic and well-liked bishop. He was corresponding with the prominent bard, poet and antiquary Walter Davies, 'Gwallter Mechain' (1761-1849) about Welsh translations of the Bible and literary works[65]. He had even won over his early critic, the Reverend Lewis Evans, though the latter's promotion to the living of Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn might have been not entirely unconnected with

the change of heart. When Evans went to Abergwili to mark his elevation, he reported to his brother in London that 'I spent a very cheerful day with a truly pleasant good humoured family the time I was "instituted" to the Living at his Lordship's Palace at Abergwilly – a fine group, his Lordship, Lady George, nine children…'[66]. Murray was also becoming a prominent figure in the House of Lords. He had taken his seat there on 2 March 1801, and was then in almost constant attendance until the prorogation on 2 July, after which he would have been free to take up residence at Abergwili. He was in regular attendance again from October 1801 to June 1802, then from March 1803 until his death. Although his attendance can be attributed in part to his position as parliamentary chaplain, referred to earlier, Murray was certainly no inactive member: throughout this period, he was appointed to far more committees than any other bishop. Most of these were concerned with road improvements or enclosures in many parts of the country, and few were concerned directly with his diocese; nevertheless, Murray did serve on committees concerned with bills for the improvement of roads in Carmarthenshire, and for the construction of the tramway from Llanelli to Castell-y-garreg. In May 1802 he moved a bill to enable him to sell or exchange some of the episcopal lands in order to consolidate them into more manageable and lucrative holdings, but this was stymied in committee after being referred to two judges for their opinion. He moved an identical bill on 18 May1803; as one of his diocesan officials explained, even if the bill did not pass,

> the agitating of the subject will be likely to produce some good effect, and induce government to assist the poorer and most illconditioned bishopricks, till their leases are run out and their income sufficient to support the dignity[67].

Murray's plans for the future, both for himself and for his diocese, were never to come to fruition. His bill was due for its second reading on 1 June 1803, but this was postponed because of events recounted by the *Gentleman's Magazine* in its obituaries for 3 June:

> In Cavendish square, in his 43rd year, the Right Hon. and Rev. George Murray, D.D., lord bishop of St David's, and brother to the duke of Atholl. His death was occasioned by coming down on a damp, cold night, in a state of perspiration, from a committee in the house of lords, and waiting some time at the door for his carriage: he felt an immediate chill, which brought on a violent fever in a few hours, that carried him off in three days, leaving a widow and ten [*sic*] children. He had nearly effected his object, that of raising his bishopric to the immediate produce of £3,500 p.a., and which see, in the course of 17 years, is expected to net £16,000 a year[68].

Lord George Murray was buried at Grosvenor Chapel, Audley Street, London, on 22 June[69]. Regardless of the magazine's optimistic assessment of the finances of the diocese, the bishop's death seemed to be a calamity for his family, to whom he bequeathed debts totalling £13,000[70]. To give her some

means of support, in 1809 Murray's widow was appointed a lady in waiting to the royal princesses Elizabeth (1770-1840) and Amelia (1783-1810), and lived on until April 1844. However, the sheer fertility of Lord and Lady George Murray was ultimately to save the ducal line of Atholl: by 1935 they had well over 400 living descendants, a number that would have been far greater but for the 'lost generation' of 1914-18[71]. When the senior male line, descended from Lord George's elder brother the fourth duke, died out in 1957, the title passed to Iain, tenth duke of Atholl, a direct descendant of Lord George. When, in turn, the tenth duke died unmarried in 1996, the title passed to his distant cousin, John, a land surveyor in South Africa and another direct descendant, whose male heirs ensure the continuation of the great ducal house[72]. Lord George might have found it deeply satisfying that he would not only indirectly save his family line (and with it the only private army in the Britain of the third millennium, the Atholl Highlanders), but that he would become best remembered as one of the earliest pioneers of the technologies that would eventually spawn the Internet, and in that respect, fate had one final trick to play on Lord George Murray: at some point in the 1830s or early 1840s his widow and third daughter, Lady Louisa Anne Frankland-Russell (1790-1871), invited a visit from Charles Babbage (1791-1871), the inventor of the mechanical computer, because they were very keen 'to see his ingenious portfolio'.[73]

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References

[1] W B Jones and E A Freeman, *The History and Antiquities of St David's* (London and Tenby, 1856), 334-6. For Burgess and the policies he followed at St David's, see J S Harford, *The Life of Thomas Burgess, D.D.* (1840); D T W Price, *Yr Esgob Burgess a Choleg Llanbedr / Bishop Burgess and Lampeter College* (Cardiff, 1987).

[2] B Masters, *The Dukes: The Origins, Ennoblement and History of Twenty-six Families* (2001 edn.), 250. This statement, again unattributed, also appears on the Internet, but I have not been able to trace the original. Murray's life and correspondence seem conclusively to disprove this judgement.

[3] Any search of the Internet for the terms 'shutter telegraph' or 'Murray shutter telegraph' serves to prove the point. Cf. G Holzmann and B Pehrson, *The Early History of Data Networks* (IEEE Computer Society Press, 1994); T Standage, *The Victorian Internet: the Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-*

line Pioneers (1998), 15. Murray also featured in a programme in the BBC series *Local Heroes*, first broadcast in May 2000.

[4] This is not to diminish Burgess's outstanding achievement in creating St David's College. However, the idea of such a college had been circulating in Carmarthenshire since at least 1797, as Burgess himself admitted: D T W Price, *A History of St David's University College, Lampeter* (Cardiff, 1977), i. 5-6.

[5] The account of Lord George Murray's early life is based primarily on the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, to be superseded in c.2004 by the present author's entry in the *New Dictionary of National Biography*; on J Balfour Paul, ed., *The Scots Peerage* (Edinburgh, 1904), s.v. 'Atholl'; and on John, seventh Duke of Atholl, *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families* (5 vols., privately printed, Edinburgh, 1908), iii and iv.

[6] For a contemporary description of the parish, see E Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (Canterbury, 1782), ii. 298-301.

[7] Dr Cornelius Crigan (1743-1813), bishop from 1784.

[8] For the *Cleopatra*'s part at this battle, see J D Davies, *Sufficient Gallantry: Admiral Sir Henry William Bayntun and the Trafalgar Log of HMS 'Leviathan'* (Portsmouth, forthcoming).

[9] [Blair Castle, Perthshire,] Atholl papers, [box] 65 / 126. Captain Murray eventually died on 17 October 1797 as vice-admiral of the white.

[10] P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], Kew, ADM 12 / 61.

[11] Murray's system was also superior to the French telegraph that had excited both his and Gamble's interest, the invention of yet another clergyman, Père Chappe.

[12] G Wilson, *The Old Telegraphs* (1976), 17-32; T W Holmes, *The Semaphore: the Story of the Admiralty-to-Portsmouth Shutter Telegraph and Semaphore Lines* (Ilfracombe, 1983),

29-36. Murray's original model of his shutter telegraph is now at the National Maritime Museum.

[13] Atholl papers, 59 / 216.

[14] PRO, Adm. 106/2220, p. 660.

[15] On the Deal line, see (in addition to Wilson and Hayes, cited above) A Borg, 'Telegraph House, West Square', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 73 (1987), 79-86.

[16] PRO, Adm. 106/2221, pp. 270-3.

[17] J S Corbett, ed., *Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer*, I (Navy Records Society, 1913), 261-2.

[18] Atholl papers, 59 / 51, 64; R Hudleston, 'The Coast Signal Stations and the Semaphore Telegraph', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 1 (1911), 161-6.

[19] Wilson, *Old Telegraphs*, 32.

[20] 1755-1830; acceded 1774.

[21] Atholl Papers, 65 / 57.

[22] Atholl papers, 65 / 62, 117.

[23] Atholl papers, 59 / 148, 151.

[24] Atholl papers, 59 / 146.

[25] Atholl papers, 59 / 233.

[26] Atholl papers, 59 / 240, 241. Vice-admiral Murray died at Lord George's rectory in Hunton on 17 October 1797, but bequeathed nothing directly to his nephew: PRO, Prob. 11/1298, fo. 179v.

[27] Atholl papers, 59 / 265.

[28] Fifth son of the third earl of Bute, George III's favourite in the 1760s, and great-great-uncle to the third marquess of Bute, the driving force behind the construction

or reconstruction late in the nineteenth century of Cardiff Castle, Castell Coch, and Cardiff docks.

[29] A Aspinall, ed., *The Later Correspondence of George III* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1967), III. 434.

[30] *D.N.B.*; W Stubbs, *Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum* (Oxford, 1858), 123. Aspinall, *Later Correspondence*, III. 494, hints that the consecration date of 11 Feb., given in *D.N.B.*, Stubbs and *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, ed. J Le Neve (Oxford, 1854), is wrong, and that the ceremony took place on 8 Feb. The episcopal register of St David's provides no confirmation, as it leaves Murray's consecration date blank: N[ational] L[ibrary of] W[ales], MS. SD/BR/5, p. 253.

[31] W T Morgan, 'The Diocese of St David's in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, 21 (1971), 9.

[32] Ibid., 21 (1971), 10; 23 (1973), 18.

[33] NLW, MS. 22,131, fo. 55.

[34] The Hon. Amelia Matilda Murray (1795-1884), the seventh and last surviving of Lord George's children, never married and was a pioneering female author, artist, botanist and traveller. A maid of honour to Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1856, she resigned in the latter year in order to publish an attack on slavery in the United States (which she had recently toured), an attack that she could not have made if she had remained a member of the Court. See the entry on her in *DNB*.

[35] [Lincolnshire Archives Office], Hawley [MSS], 6/3/37 – 44. Hawley's wife was Welsh, a daughter of William Humphreys of Llwyn, Montgomeryshire – hence Murray's stated hope in Hawley 6/3/41 that '[although] I know Lady Hawley does not often undertake such long journeys…I am sure she would feel herself the better

for a little Welch air, & I think she would like our part of the country [Carmarthenshire] as well as Montgomeryshire'.

[36] Hawley 6/3/37.

[37] Hawley 6/3/38.

[38] Hawley 6/3/39.

[39] Hawley 6/3/40.

[40] For examples of the weight and nature of business that came his way in the early months, see NLW, Lucas MSS. 1070, 2853, 2891-2, 2896, 2935-8, 3358.

[41] NLW, MS. SD/BR/5, p. 258.

[42] Tithes were often leased out to lay proprietors, usually either for twenty-one years or three lives, at rents which bore little resemblance to economic reality. Murray's proposed solutions anticipate almost exactly those implemented by his successor Thomas Burgess. For a detailed study of the leases question in St David's, and of Burgess's policies on this issue, see Morgan, 'Diocese of St David's', 21 (1971), 7-11.

[43] See also NLW, MS. 6,203, fo. 36.

[44] i.e. a lucrative post to supplement his income, such as that of prebendary of Westminster. One of the key reasons for Burgess's success was that he held a valuable deanery at Durham alongside St David's; Murray's subsequent appointment to Bocking in 1802 would have placed him in a similar position.

[45] Although such a career path had been first mooted in 1794, when he was eleven, John Murray first went to sea in 1796 with his great-uncle, then commanding on the North American station (Atholl papers, box 59). Commissioned lieutenant on 12 June 1801, John was recommended shortly after his father's death by John Jervis, Earl St. Vincent, to Admiral Duckworth (commander-in-chief, West Indies) because he was 'what will interest you more, as it does me, one of eight [*sic*] children left without

provision' (D Bonner-Smith, ed., *Letters of Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St Vincent whilst First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801-4,* Navy Records Society, 1927, II. 330. Cf. C Markham, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral John Markham*, Navy Records Society, 1904, 103, 104). Duckworth rapidly obliged by promoting Murray acting commander of HM Sloop *Port Mahon*, but to little avail: the young man outlived his father by barely six months, dying at Jamaica on 8 December 1803 and being buried there the next day (PRO, Adm. 51/4488, 52/3667).

[46] B[ritish] L[ibrary], Add[itional] MS 40,532, fos. 97-9.

[47] Hawley 6/3/42.

[48] A Hoffman, *Bocking Deanery, An Essex Peculiar* (1976), 93.

[49] Hawley 6/3/41.

[50] Hawley 6/3/41.

[51] A Mee, ed., *Carmarthenshire Notes*, I (Llanelli 1889; reprint, Carmarthen 1997), 124-5; R G Thorne, ed., *The Commons 1790-1820* (1986), I. 489-90.

[52] Atholl papers, 65 / 45.

[53] Atholl papers, 59 / 133.

[54] *A Sermon Preached on the 16th of December 1792 at a Country Church in the County of Kent* (Maidstone, 1793?).

[55] Thorne, *The Commons,* IV. 735-6. On 'Paxton's folly', see P K Crimmin, 'Samuel Pepys Cockerell: His Work in West Wales, 1793-1810', *The Carmarthenshire Historian*, iv (1967), 16-19; C Davis, 'Nelson's Tower in Image and Word', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, xxxiv (1998), 44-53.

[56] Thorne, I. 489-90.

[57] i.e. since returning from attendance on parliament in June.

[58] Harford, *Life of Burgess*, 211.

[59] C Delaney, 'The Bishop's Palace at Abergwili', *The Friend* (i.e. of Carmarthen County Museum), April 1998; T James, 'The Bishop's Palace and Collegiate Church, Abergwili', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary,* xvi (1980), 30-1.

[60] E Dale-Jones, 'Admiral Nelson Slept Here', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary,* xxxv (1999), 35-43.

[61] George Talbot Rice, third Baron Dynevor (1765-1852; acceded 1793), and his wife Frances, daughter of Thomas Townsend, first Viscount Sydney (1772-1854).

[62] John Butler (1717-1802).

[56] In the event, after Lord George's death Bocking passed to his younger brother, Lord Charles Murray-Aynsley (1771-1808), who had also succeeded him as archdeacon of Man in 1803. Lord Charles had added the surname of his wife, a wealthy Northumberland heiress and first cousin of the famous nineteenth century authoress and playwright Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855), in whose writings Lord and Lady Charles are vividly described. Lord Charles died – of a 'sudden chill', like his brother George,– on 5 May 1808: Hoffman, *Bocking,* 93-101; C Hill, *Mary Russell Mitford and Her Surroundings* (1920), 103-7, 111-18.

[64] Hawley 6/3/44.

[65] NLW, MS. 1807, fo. 948.

[66] NLW, MS. 22,131, fo. 95v.

[67] NLW, MS. 6,203, W H Barker to Rev. Isaac Williams, 29 Apr. 1803. For Murray's parliamentary career see *Journals of the House of Lords*, 43, passim, and 44. 113-219.

[68] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 73 (1803), 601.

[69] London Metropolitan Archives, registers of St George's, Hanover Square (microfilm). Grosvenor Street became a chapel-of-ease to St George's.

[70] *Chronicles of Atholl*, IV. 207.

[71] E Murray, Mrs F Drummond, and E F Oakeley, eds., *The Cousin Book* (printed privately, London, 1935: a genealogy of the descendants of the third duke of Atholl).

[72] Masters, *The Dukes*, 252-3.

[73] BL, Add. MS. 37,201, fo. 195.