

'JACK AND NANCY' AT GOUGH'S CAVE, CHEDDAR

by

D. J. IRWIN

N.G.R. ST 46685388

ABSTRACT

Legend states that Jack and Nancy Beauchamp showed Gough's Old Cave to the public in the 19th century and then went into partnership with R. C. Gough. Other evidence shows that a John Weeks managed the cave at that time. It is shown here, from primary sources, that 'Jack and Nancy' were in fact John and Ann Weeks, and some account of their activity is given.

INTRODUCTION

A local legend at Cheddar tells of a couple who showed The Great Stalactite Cavern (now known as Gough's Old Cave) to the public. They were a certain Jack and Nancy Beauchamp who lived in a small cottage against the cliff face (FIG. 1), the entrance to the cave being in their garden. After Gough arrived at Cheddar he is said to have gone into partnership with the couple, eventually gaining control of the cave himself in 1877. It was in that year that he extended the cave by the discovery of the Concert Chamber and re-named it The New Great Stalactite Cavern (Gough, 1879).



FIG. 1—A PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING JACK AND NANCY OUTSIDE THEIR COTTAGE IN 1860. THE PATH LEADS TO THE ENTRANCE OF GOUGH'S OLD CAVE, THE SIGNBOARD AND GATE OF WHICH CAN ALSO BE SEEN

Another legend circulating verbally in Cheddar is that Jack's mother originated from Banwell Abbey. She disgraced herself by marrying beneath her station and was thrown out of her home. She fled to Cheddar and is said to have lived in a cave and borne her child there.

The first legend was documented by Balch (1935), though an earlier mention '. . . of a certain "Jack and Nancy," and their donkey . . .' had been made by Snell (1907). Irwin (1986) established that a man called Weeks appeared to be running the cave at the same time and leased the plot of ground in front of it in the later 1860s and early 1870s. Since then further research has attempted to find out more about these people.

FACTS AND DEDUCTIONS

Contemporary and other 19th century evidence indicates that:

- (a) In 1869 the cave was run by a man called Weekes (Hensler, 1968).
- (b) The photograph of Jack and Nancy was taken in 1860 (Collard, c. 1905).
- (c) In 1870 the guide was almost deaf (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 2 July 1870).
- (d) In 1872 John Weeks was the lessee of the plot of ground that contained a 'garden with hut and cavern' (Longleat, 1872).
- (e) In 1873 Kilvert described his guide as '. . . a ghastly old man . . .' who was '. . . almost entirely deaf . . .' (North, 1968).
- (f) In 1879 Gough reprinted from a contemporary Isle of Wight newspaper* that:

. . . A Widow and her Son occupied the *outside* Chamber as a dwelling for 26 years from 1813 to 1839; their fireplace is still there. After the death of the Mother, the Son married and built a small room against the rock at the foot of the Cave, and lived there with his Wife 37 years. He died January, 1877.

From these facts a number of deductions and comments can be made:

- (a) The photograph of the couple show them to be in their 50s in 1860. If this is so, their birth dates would be about 1810.
- (b) The names by which they are known are in the familiar form; their actual names would be John and Ann. Inspection of the church records at Cheddar shows that the use of familiar names such as Nancy at baptisms was uncommon before the mid 19th century.
- (c) By 1870 the guide was 'almost deaf'. This would not be surprising if he were in his 60s.
- (d) The dates quoted in the Isle of Wight newspaper account are quite specific: the man married about 1840 and died in January 1877. (This assumes that occupation of the cave came to an end when his mother died. She was still living in the cave about 1838 (Thompson, 1838). No record of her death has been found.)

*Gough (1879) cites this as appearing in the *Rhyde Ventilator* for 23 August but no copy of this issue can be traced. This is perhaps not surprising as the *Ryde Ventilator* was sufficiently unimportant not to be listed at all in the *Newspaper Press Directory* of the 1870s although copies from 1871 to 1875 are held in the Isle of Wight Record Office. The British Library at Colindale has very few issues. The account does not appear in the *Ryde News* around that date.

The official records have been searched for Weeks/Weekes and Beauchamp/Beacham. These records include parish registers at Cheddar and the census returns for the years 1841 to 1881 held at the Somerset Record Office at Taunton. Various spellings of each surname were found but that is not important as they would depend on who was recording the name.

The census records for people with either of the possible surnames living in the Cliff Road between 1841 and 1881 are given in TABLE I. Earlier census returns do not list individual names but simply state the number of persons living in each particular area. No other record has been found of a Beacham (or Beauchamp) living in the Cliff Road, though there were other such families elsewhere in Cheddar.

TABLE I—*Census records for Cliff Road, Cheddar (1841–1881)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>
1841	John Weeks	30	agricultural labourer	Somerset
	Ann Weeks	30	wife	Somerset
1851	John Beacham	40	agricultural labourer	Somerset
	Ann Beacham	39	wife	Somerset
	William	7	scholar	Somerset
1861	John Weeks	53	agricultural labourer	Cheddar
	Ann Weeks	52	seamstress	Cheddar
1871	John Weeks	62	agricultural labourer	Cheddar
	Ann Weeks	61	wife	Cheddar
1881	[no entry for either Weeks or Beacham]			

DISCUSSION

The only photographic evidence that has survived (FIG. 1) is that of an unknown photographer of about 1860 whose initials are perhaps those that appear on the photograph (A.Y.R. arranged in the form of a triangle towards the bottom left of the picture). The fact that there is a photograph at all of such a couple suggests that they were well-known at the time and consequently long remembered by the inhabitants of Cheddar. What made them 'public figures' was possibly their livelihood—The Great Stalactite Cavern. If they were called Beauchamp (or Beacham) in what way were they associated with John Weeks, the lessee of the land?

The possible relationship between the Beachams and the Weeks has been discussed previously (Irwin, 1986) but it was then believed that John Beacham and John Weeks were two separate individuals. Further, it was assumed that one employed the other. As Weeks was the leaseholder of the land in the period when Gough was living at Cheddar (after 1865), how then could Gough have entered into partnership with the Beachams who were not the lessees?

The 1841 census states that the Weeks were living at the site, were already married, and were both 30 years old. This places their birth dates at about 1810. If the Isle of Wight newspaper account is correct then they must be the couple that married in May 1840 (TABLE II). According to the baptismal records a John Weeks, whose father is named as William Weeks, was christened in 1809. The father of the John Weeks who married in 1840 was named John but, there being no record of John the father's baptism, it is possible that he was not baptized at all. It is known from church records that individuals often changed their christian names—a practice still common today. It is possible that the younger John's father changed his, or perhaps he had two and used either.

The entry in the 1851 census is curious. The 1861 and 1871 censuses are consistent with that of 1841, though there are small discrepancies with ages which would depend on the date of collection of the census information. The 1851 census (alone) gives the name of the couple as John and Ann Beacham. Furthermore, they have a 7 year old son, William. The age difference between the Weeks being 30 years old in 1841 and the Beachams 40 and 39 respectively in 1851 is consistent with them being the same couple. The age of the couple remains consistent in the later censuses. The age of the son William is also consistent. William Henry Weeks was baptized on 5 May 1844. This boy was the same age as William Beacham who was 7 in 1851. A William Weeks died in 1860, aged 16. The fact that no child was listed for John and Ann Weeks in 1861 and 1871 is therefore not significant.

TABLE II—*Extracts from records held at St. Andrew's Church, Cheddar*
(all entries listed below are for residents of Cheddar unless otherwise stated)

BAPTISMS (searched 1800–1845)					
<i>Year</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of Birth</i>	<i>Parents</i>		<i>Date of Baptism</i>
1809	John	April 18th	William and Mary Weeks		May 2nd, 1809
1820	William	Feb. 2nd, 1820	John and Sarah Beacham		Mar. 9th, 1828
1823	John	Jan. 18th	John and Sarah Beacham		Mar. 9th, 1828
1844	William Henry		John and Ann Weeks		May 5th, 1844
MARRIAGES (searched 1839–1860)					
<i>Year</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Father</i>
1840	May 13th	John Weeks	full age	labourer	John Weeks
		Ann Coles	full age	labourer	Jeremiah Coles
1843	Apr. 25th	James Beacham	full age	labourer	Edward Beacham
		Pheobe Morgan	full age	servant	William Morgan
1846	Apr. 23rd	John Weeks*	full age	labourer	William Weeks
		Anne Weeks*	full age	widow	George Cuff
1848		John Weeks	full age	labourer	John Weeks
		Elizabeth Grant	full age		Edward Grant
BURIALS (searched 1800–1880)					
<i>Year</i>	<i>Name</i>		<i>Date</i>		<i>Age</i>
1858	William Beacham		Oct. 30th		38
1860	William Weeks		May 1st		16
1865	John Beachamp		Apr. 17th		77
1876	Ann Weeks		Mar. 28th		67
1877	John Weeks		Jan. 9th		71
1877	John Weeks		Jan. 25th		55

*of Draycott

John Lawrenson, the Cheddar surgeon, was in charge of the collection of the census information in 1851 and he, in turn, would have employed a number of clerks. They too would have been local people. Since John and Ann were illiterate and their marriage record is signed with their mark; they would not themselves have written down any details for the census officials. It is possible that the Beacham entry was a mistake. Alternatively, and more probably, the Weeks were known locally as Beacham—perhaps their ancestors came originally from one of the Beauchamp villages—and were recorded as such.

The month January 1877, given in the Isle of Wight newspaper for the death of the man, is correct. The burial records show that two John Weeks died that month. No Beachams were buried in that month or at any time in 1877. It seems likely that it was the elder John Weeks, buried on 6 January 1877, who had been the cave lessee. His age does not exactly tally with the census, but an error is possible as few people knew their own ages precisely at that time, let alone that of someone else.

Ann Weeks (née Coles) does not appear in the baptismal records but this would be not unusual, for not all children were baptized and she might have been born in another parish. An Ann Weeks was buried on 28 March 1876. No record of either John or Ann Weeks/Beacham is found in the 1881 census.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Great Stalactite Cavern was open to the public by 1840 (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 2 July 1870) and possibly earlier, as Skinner (1816) had visited an inhabited cave at Cheddar. The advertising handbills of Cox's Cavern, c. 1880–1890, also imply that the Great Stalactite Cavern was open long before 1840 and it was '... one of the original Cheddar Caves shown to the public before Cox's Stalactite Cavern was accidentally discovered 1837–38.'

Jack was living in the cave when his mother (Mary?) died about 1839, and in the following year he married Ann (Nancy) Coles at St Andrew's Church, Cheddar. About this time he built the small one-roomed cottage at the foot of the cliff between what is now Gough's Cave and Gough's Old Cave, at the level of the top of the scree slope. Jack and Nancy had a son, William, baptized in 1844 but who died in 1860. Though Jack was unskilled and recorded in official documents as an agricultural labourer, part of his income would have been the money from visitors to his cave in the cottage garden. In 1870 each visitor was charged sixpence (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 2 July 1870).

By 1871 Gough was living at Lion Rock House, immediately opposite Jack and Nancy's cottage, and he could not have failed to know them as friends or acquaintances. The success of his tea garden, started at Lion Rock House in 1872, would have depended on the number of people who came to see the Gorge and would also have drawn custom from Jack and Nancy's business. There is no direct evidence that Gough went into partnership with Jack and Nancy as Balch (1935) states, but it would have made sense.

Jack died in January 1877 and his wife, Nancy, almost a year earlier, in March 1876. The way then lay open for Gough to lease the land and take control of the cave, which he did in May 1877.

Was their name really Weeks or Beacham? The evidence makes it virtually certain that they were John and Ann Weeks, perhaps known locally as Beacham, but proof is not possible unless further documentary evidence is found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express his thanks to the Reverend Victor Daly, Vicar of Cheddar, Miss Kate Harris, Librarian to the Marquess of Bath, and David Bromwich of the Somerset Local History Library at Taunton, for access to archives in their charge.

REFERENCES

- BALCH, H. E. 1935. *Mendip—Cheddar, its gorge and caves*. Wells, Clare 1st edn. (pp. 37-38) (2nd edn., 1947).
- COLLARD, C. H. (pub.) [c. 1905]. Jackie & Nancy at Cheddar in 1860. [photographic postcard]
- GOUGH, R. C. [1879]. See *Gough's New Great Stalactite Cavern*. Cheddar, Gough. [leaflet]
- HENSLER, E. 1968. "Ninety-nine years ago". An extract from the diary of Mr. R. R. Green. *Wessex Cave Club J.*, 10 (118), 102.
- IRWIN, D. J. 1986. Gough's Old Cave—its history. *Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc.*, 17 (3), 250-266.
- LONGLEAT, 1872. Particulars of premises situated at Rock-End, within the village and parish of Cheddar, in the county of Somerset (surveyed by T. Cruse, 1872). Longleat House Library, West Muniment Room, Box 24, 2.II.
- NORTH, C. 1968. Cheddar Caves—some early impressions. *Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeol. Soc. Newsletter*, Aug., p. 68.
- SKINNER, J. 1816. British Library MS. ADD. 33648. (ff. 151a-152b, 163a, 164a).
- SNELL, F. J. 1907. *Cheddar, Somerset, with its surroundings*. London, The Homeland Association. [Homeland Handy Guides] (p. 10).
- THOMPSON, H. 1838. *The Life of Hannah More*. London, Cadell. (p. 85).

D. J. IRWIN, Townsend Cottage, Priddy, Wells,
Somerset BA5 3BP, U.K.

THE DILLWYN DIARIES 1817-1852, BUCKLAND, AND CAVES OF GOWER (SOUTH WALES)

by

C. J. HOWES

ABSTRACT

Between October 13 1817 and July 12 1852, Lewis Weston Dillwyn of Swansea kept a detailed diary of his life. A wealthy landowner and naturalist with an interest in geology, Dillwyn was in contact with other prominent men such as William Buckland of Oxford. In particular, entries in his diary give greater details and accurate dates of the first examinations of Paviland Cave, and correctly identify other people that were involved including Mary Theresa Talbot of Penrice.

LEWIS WESTON DILLWYN

Lewis Weston Dillwyn (FIG. 1) was born on 21st August 1778 and, whilst Morris (1980) suggests a later date on a 'corrected' calendar, Dillwyn's diary entries support the 21st August date. Jackson (1888) and others (Anon, 1959; North, 1934) gives his place of birth as Ipswich, but Morris (1980) states it is in St. Thomas Square, Hackney, London. This is substantiated by a document written by Dillwyn, in the family archives (Morris, pers. comm). A sister of Dillwyn married a man from Ipswich, but no other link with the town is known.



FIG. 1—LEWIS WESTON DILLWYN IN 1841.

DILLWYN'S DIARY FOR SEPT. 18TH OF THAT YEAR RECORDS THAT, WHILST IN CHELTENHAM, 'MISS MARY & I HAD OUR LIKENESSES TAKEN AT A NEW PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTITUTION WHICH WITHIN THESE FEW DAYS HAS BEEN OPENED.' A STUDIO ON THE PROMENADE HAD OPENED ON 13TH SEPT., OPERATED BY RICHARD LOW UNDER BEARD'S BRITISH DAGUERREOTYPE LICENCE, AND HE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

Photograph courtesy of Swansea Museum

Dillwyn became a botanist and natural historian following his education in Tottenham. In 1800 he became a member of the British Mineralogical Society (Woodward, 1907), a forerunner of the Geological Society. After the purchase by his father of the Cambrian Pottery, Dillwyn moved to Swansea in 1803 to take charge of the business. In 1817 he left the pottery in favour of public life, becoming high sheriff of Swansea in 1818 (Anon, 1959). His published scientific works were concerned with botany and conchology. Further biographical details may be found in the Dictionaries of National and Welsh Biography.

Dillwyn married Mary Llewelyn in 1807, thereby ensuring his son John's future wealth upon John's inheritance of his grandmother's estate. John had a younger brother, Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn, and two sisters—Fanny, older than himself, and Mary. Two other children died at an early age. Dillwyn's relationships with other prominent men of the time, the early production of cave photographs by Dillwyn's son, and Swansea's association with the inventor of photography, Henry Fox Talbot, are discussed in a separate paper (Howes, in press). A branch of the Talbot family lived at Penrice Castle on Gower, where Dillwyn often stayed.

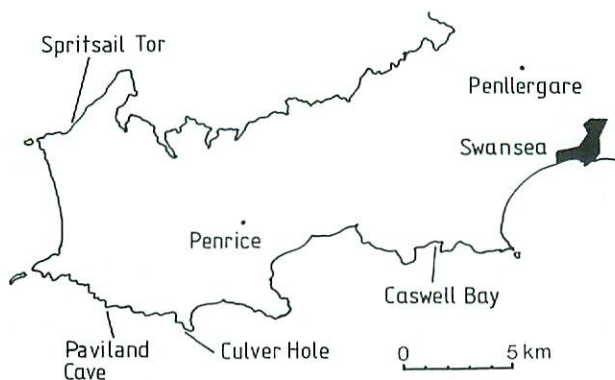


FIG. 2—THE GOWER PENINSULAR

Dillwyn lived just outside Swansea at Penllergare (FIG. 2) at a mansion set in its own grounds. Although the building is now gone, the area still carries the name as Penllergaer. From here Dillwyn could visit Swansea and his friends on Gower with ease, normally on foot or using a horse-drawn carriage. He knew most of the local dignitaries and, as magistrate, mayor of the town, and first president of the Royal Institution of South Wales, he was deeply involved in local affairs.

Dillwyn's father lived at Higham Lodge, Walthamstow, London, causing many visits either by boat to Bristol before continuing by mail coach, or more often by using the Gloucester route and stopping at Oxford. Here, his mother-in-law lived and his son John was at University from 1828. This situation aided his relationships with other geologists and natural historians of the time, such as Buckland, with whom he spent a great deal of time. The men had much in common, and Dillwyn's frequency of travel through the town must have proved both convenient and pleasurable to both.

Between October 13 1817 and July 12 1852, Dillwyn kept a diary of his travels and interests, in 36 volumes. Much of it is of his personal life or business activities, but entries concerning Buckland and various cave excavations are invaluable in adding detail to what is already known. Previously