

The Front Panel of Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd's Cupboard

Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd (Griffith) was Blanche Parry's great-grandfather (see '*Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante*', pages 11-17, 29).

Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd was an adherent of the Herberts of Raglan Castle. He married his son, Miles ap Harry, to Joan Stradling, daughter of Sir Harri Stradling of St. Donat's Castle, niece of Sir William Herbert 1st Earl of Pembroke (1st Creation) of Raglan Castle (pages 17-19) and descendant of the Davy Gam in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

Harri Ddu was a close associate of the Duke of York and of his son who became King Edward IV. He fought in France and Ireland, attended the Duke in England and served on law commissions. He was also Lord of Bacton, Steward of Usk, Caerleon and Ewyas (Euas) Lacy, and (probably the first) Steward of nearby (Cistercian) Dore Abbey.

It is now clear that it was Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd who built Newcourt (Cwrtnewydd) in 1452, the house where Blanche Parry would be born fifty-five years later. Harri Ddu's choice of name was because his grandfather had lived at Oldcourt (see pages 8-9) and he embellished his new prestigious house with timber from the nearby oak woods. It was recorded as having a chapel and a bakehouse, and Harri Ddu's son added the deer park, enhancing its status to that of a manor.

Harri Ddu was a patron of the bard Guto'r Glyn
who composed five poems in his honour ([available here](#)).

It is very exciting to discover a piece of furniture that commemorates Harri Ddu and demonstrates how much his fame endured especially within his own family. In the following Paper Richard Bebb describes his research into the origins of the front panel of a cupboard that bears the name of Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd. As it is of oak it is possible, perhaps probable, that it was made from the local oaks that had already embellished Newcourt. The panel can now be seen in the Tudor manor house of Cotehele in Cornwall (National Trust) and most of the comparative examples mentioned may also be easily visited, including the Bacton choir stalls (or reading desks) with Harri Ddu's coat-of-arms ([Bacton Church Guidebook](#)).

THE NEWCOURT CUPBOARD

An important cupboard of estate bearing a prominent inscription to
Harri ap Gruffudd
is described by Richard Bebb
in '*Welsh Furniture 1250-1950 : A Cultural History of Craftsmanship and Design*',
Saer Books in association with
The National Museum Wales and The National Library of Wales, 2007 :
www.welshfurniture.com

The following pages are the relevant section from volume 1 of this book.

Richard Bebb, an honorary Research Fellow at The National Museum of Wales, is conducting further research into Harri ap Gruffudd and the cupboard and would welcome any thoughts or information you may have.

Please write to Richard via the [contact page](#)
or send to him at: info@welshfurniture.com