

April 5th 1855

I sit at my desk looking over the great mountain of Dowlais and the fiery furnaces of the ironworks, reflecting that this is the last time I will write my diary as Lady Charlotte Guest as I embark on a new chapter in my life.

When I arrived in South Wales, twenty years ago, a bookish young girl of 21, my friends were appalled that I was leaving London society to marry the ironmaster, John Guest, 'a man of trade' – moving from Uffington House in Lincolnshire to Dowlais, a town known as the Cinder Hole, due to the plumes of smoke billowing from its furnaces.

But I have had not one moment's regret, knowing that my efforts have helped create one of the greatest enterprises on earth. My twenty years with John have been the happiest of my life, a time of industry, social reform, of scientific and cultural discovery.

From my first day here, I fell in love with the Welsh hills and valleys, and the passionate nature of its people. I devoted myself to John's business – the Dowlais Iron Company – engaging with scientists on the new technology and translating pamphlets from French to English on the latest blasting techniques.

The Company has now become the greatest ironworks in the world, employing 7000 workers; sending rails to Russia for the great St Petersburg to Moscow railway; exporting to France, Holland and Germany and to the United States of America.

My prime concern throughout has been to ensure the welfare and education of our

workers. The provision in Dowlais was meagre and I have dedicated myself to the establishment of an education system which is said to be the most important and progressive, not only in Wales, but in the whole of Britain.

We now provide training for boys and girls from infancy, furnishing the Schools with modern apparatus, a laboratory, and books which I myself purchase in London. I have ensured that there are night schools and libraries for adults, together with schemes for clean water and sanitation.

But I myself have benefited from my years in Wales, learning Welsh within days of my arrival and discovering a treasure trove of mediaeval literature with the help of my cultured friends at Cylch Cymreigyddion y Fenni - the Abergavenny Society of Welsh Scholars.

My translation of the Welsh legends, known as *The Mabinogion*, has been a thrilling journey of discovery. After eight years of study and research, my work has been published in three sumptuous volumes, bringing the Princes, giants and sorcerers of Welsh legend to the attention of readers in Britain and beyond. Indeed, it is said that I inspired Tennyson to write his great Arthurian poem, *The Idylls of the King*.

The past three years have been arduous, following the death of my beloved John. I have run the Dowlais Iron Company alone, facing strikes, uprisings and much resistance from the other Iron Masters, who cannot conceive of a woman being at the helm.

I have been fortunate to find love again. On Sunday, I will marry Charles Schreiber, and must relinquish my responsibilities to the Iron Company.

My friends are, once again, dismayed that I am to wed my son's tutor, a man fourteen years my junior, but I care nothing for their opinions.

I will be true to my own judgement, knowing that my decision to marry a Welsh ironmaster brought me nothing but joy; blessing me with ten children, opening my eyes to a rich and ancient culture and setting me on a journey of discovery which has placed me at the great industrial heart of Britain.

Charlotte Guest

Catrin Gerallt