

Lady Charlotte Guest

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Lady Charlotte Guest



Portrait of Lady Charlotte Guest

Born: May 19, 1812
Uffington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Died: January 15, 1895 (age 82)

Occupation: Translator, businesswoman

Nationality: British

Lady Charlotte Elizabeth Guest, (née Bertie) (May 19, 1812 – January 15, 1895), was a British translator and businesswoman. An important figure in the study of Welsh literature and the Welsh language, she is best known for her pioneering

translation of the major medieval work, the *Mabinogion*.

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Biography

Guest was born at Uffington House in Uffington, Lincolnshire, the daughter of Albemarle Bertie, 9th Earl of Lindsey and his second wife Charlotte Susanna Elizabeth Layard. Her father died when she was six, and her mother remarried to Reverend Peter Pegasus, whom Charlotte disliked. She showed a great talent for study and taught herself Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian.

After what may have been a brief flirtation with the future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, she escaped her unhappy home life through marriage in 1833, which was, however, not a conventional one for her age. Her husband, John Josiah Guest,

was an industrialist in Wales, the owner of the Dowlais Iron Company and rather older than her; he was 49 while she was 21. They moved to Dowlais in Merthyr Tydfil after he was elected Member of Parliament for the constituency in 1832. Charlotte was very happy in her marriage, which produced ten children. She took an enthusiastic interest in her husband's philanthropic activities on behalf of the local community and also became involved in the business of the iron works, translating technical documents into French. John Guest eventually obtained a baronetcy in 1838.

The decline of her husband's health meant that Charlotte spent more time administering the business and took over completely following his death in 1852. She stood up to both her workers and other foundry owners until she relinquished her position to G. T. Clark in 1855^[1] upon her marriage to Charles Schreiber. Schreiber was a classical scholar and a Member of Parliament for Cheltenham and later Poole. They left Wales and spent many years travelling in Europe collecting ceramics which she bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum. She also collected fans, board games and playing cards, which she donated to the British Museum.

Guest's eldest son Ivor eventually became First Baron Wimborne and married Lady Cornelia Spencer-Churchill, eldest daughter of the Seventh Duke of Marlborough and thus aunt to Winston Churchill. They were parents of the First Viscount Wimborne. Among her other descendants are the American Guests (the late socialite C. Z. Guest was wife of one of these), the Earls of Bessborough, the Viscounts Chelmsford, and others.

Translations

During her time in Wales, Guest learned Welsh and associated with literary scholars, including Thomas Price, Villemarqué, Judge Bosanquet, and Gwallter Mechain, who encouraged her in her work. She translated several medieval songs and poems, and eventually the *Mabinogion*, which was an immediate success. The name *Mabinogion* for these stories begins with Guest; the word *Mabinogi* technically applies to only the first four tales, known as the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. One manuscript contains the word *mabynnogyon*, which she took for a plural and applied to the collection as a whole.

The tales of the *Mabinogion* had been summarized in William Owen Pughe's *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, and Pughe had completed a translation of the tales which was left unpublished at his death in 1835. Guest did not rely on Pughe's translations, though she did use a Welsh dictionary Pughe had completed in 1803. Her *Mabinogion* became the first translation of the material to be published. It was printed in several volumes between 1838 and 1849, with the first volumes dedicated to the Arthurian material; volume I contained the Welsh Romances *Owain*, *Peredur*, and *Geraint and Enid*, while volume two contained *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*. *Geraint and Enid* served as the basis for Alfred, Lord Tennyson's two poems about Geraint in the *Idylls of the King*.

Legacy

Lady Charlotte Guest was a "foreigner" (non-Welsh person) who helped revive Welsh culture. She is remembered, along with her near-contemporary Lady Llanover, as a great patron of the arts in Wales. A public house, built as part of the regeneration of Dowlais in the 1980s, was named the Lady Charlotte in her honour.

References

1. ^ James, B. Ll. (2004) "Clark, George Thomas (1809–1898)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, accessed 21 Aug 2007 (subscription required)

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- March, Katherine. "Lady Charlotte (Elizabeth) Guest". From The Camelot Project at the University of Rochester. [1] Retrieved April 3, 2007.
- *Schreiber, Lady Charlotte Guest*. Biography from British Authors of the 19th Century; H. W. Wilson Company. 1936.

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