

THE PICTURE by Rik Edwards

At Pantclyd Farm



Richard Edwards b. Llanuwchllyn, Merionethshire, 27 Feb 1885. d. Llanuwchllyn, Merionethshire, 24 Jun 1905.

Family trees can be cold, dry things. But look, there he is, a pale, sensitive lad of perhaps eighteen years, with wavy hair and full lips. He was my great uncle, although I never knew him, of course. Nor did my father, born fourteen years after Richard died.

He stands against the farm wall, a pensive expression persistent through the long camera exposure, among a group of stocky, bearded and weather-beaten farmers, and their wives, plump ruddy-cheeked women, arms strong from manual labour.

Cambrian News, Thursday 29th June 1905: INQUEST AT LLANUWCHLLYN

Ellen Edwards, Pantclyd, was called to give evidence. She said she was the mother of deceased, a joiner by trade. She saw him last alive about 5.30 p.m. on Saturday. He was starting from the house and said "I am going for a bathe." He did not say where he was going, but she guessed he had gone to the lake behind the house. He was in the habit of going there. Seeing him late returning, she sent his brother, thirteen years old, to search for him. He returned and said that his brother's clothes were a tidy heap by the side of the lake, but no trace of him could be found. His father then went, followed by the whole family. He

was found in the lake and his body was dragged out. The pool where the body was found was over seven feet deep.

Richard found an old towel and muttered something to his mother about a bathe as he went past her in the kitchen, and he emerged into the farmyard, still hot in the midsummer evening sun. A footpath across a field took him to another field with a large pond at the edge. He smelled the camomile pressed under his bare feet and felt a thrill of anticipation.

Thomas, the blacksmith's son, was already there, lying dozing on the grassy bank. Richard crept up on him and dropped a few blades of grass on his face. Thomas awoke with a splutter and sat bolt upright, then started laughing.

They stripped off and ran into the pond, and waded between the reeds, watching the dragonflies hovering in the sun while they lay in the shallow water and splashed around. At length Thomas shouted out "I didn't bring a towel, I'd better get yours" and started to charge out of the water.

Richard chased after him and pulled him back in the water by his arm; then Thomas caught him by his ankle, before they made their way, shoving each other and laughing, to the bank. They dried themselves and lay down on a sunny patch of grass listening to a skylark high above.

Thomas lay on his side, his head turned away. Richard contemplated him, His mouth was dry as he took in the strong back and the muscular brown arms. He reached out and tentatively stroked the boy's back. He encountered no resistance. Encouraged, he allowed his hand to continue beyond the base of the back...

Thomas suddenly jumped up.

"Get off me you dirty bastard! I didn't believe what they said but it's true!"

He pulled on his trousers, forced his feet into his shoes, and ran off still fumbling with his shirt. As he climbed over the gate, he turned round and shouted before disappearing from view.

"You dirty, dirty bastard!"

Richard lay motionless for a few minutes. A chilly wind suddenly blew across the field. He felt tired, numb, cold and empty as he gazed across the pond.

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A verdict of "Accidentally Drowned" was returned. In moving a vote of condolence with the family, the Coroner said that he deeply sympathised with them in their bereavement. The motion was seconded by Mr L.J. Davies and passed unanimously.

Look, here's another photograph. Or rather no, it's the same picture, this time faded and cropped to show only Richard. At the top left corner of the image we can see the curve of an oval frame. A photograph that might have sat on his mother's dresser or mantelpiece until she died nearly thirty years later. I think she looked at that picture every day.

