



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 7: January 1988

The Society has been quiet during Christmas and the New Year though this could hardly be said of the Village. The annual Tug of War and the PHAB egg race ensured an exciting Boxing Day as well as raising over £600 for the physically handicapped. For the first time, we have had a communal Christmas tree, visible to all who approached the village past the ford or parked outside the 'Fox'. Many thanks to Graham Brain and his helpers for organising this.

Most of Newsletter 7 is taken-up by contributions from two well remembered past inhabitants of the village. The first is Dilys Liscombe whose father, 'Jo' Lewis, was the last of a long line of smiths to work the Blacksmith's Shop. Dilys and Gwynne Liscombe remained in Llanccarfau until the mid-70's when they moved to Barry. The second contribution is from Campbell Reed who lived at Bridge House (renamed Bridge Cottage) until 1965, and is now in Baswich, Staffordshire. Dilys' article on Llanccarfau School has been written specially for the Newsletter but the article by Campbell is slightly different as it was originally published in 1955 by the Barrian, the magazine of the Barry Boys Grammar School. Campbell was then 15 and his contribution evokes, with sensitivity and wry humour, the feelings of a young man, growing up in this ancient and lovely part of the Vale before too many of the more recent changes had come about.

Llanccarfau School in the 1930's

by Dilys M. Liscombe

In those days there was no lower age limit at which a child could start school and consequently many, like myself, started at 2½ to 3 years old. All local children walked to school as there were few cars, but when Llantrithyd School closed in the early 1930's, the Infant and Junior children from that area came by bus, picked up the Secondary children from Llanccarfau and took them to Rhoose school, which had recently opened and catered for Secondary pupils, in addition to their own Infants and Juniors.

The school was the focal point of the village and much of what went on in the village stemmed from the Headmaster. George F. Davies was a man who many people will remember. He lived in 'Cartref' Llanbethery and was interested and involved in all that happened in the village, from being Chairman of the Parish Council to Chairman of the Young Farmers Club. This community involvement was mentioned at his funeral service which I attended - he is buried in the Old Parish Churchyard at Llangynwyd.

In later years he transported us to school in Barry daily in his Austin 12 car (AWN 273). He also took several of us to music lessons (after school) in Cardiff, which in those days was quite a journey. I can always remember calling every week at a shop in Mill Road, Ely where he bought us peppermints - I am still very fond of peppermints - this may be the reason!

He was a strong disciplinarian, but although it was allowable in those days, only once can I remember him using the cane - when two boys decided to follow the hunt. The school bell tolled all the afternoon but they did not return and faced the consequences the following morning.

George Davies was a very musical man - when he later went to live in Maesteg he was a founder member of the Maesteg Operatic Society. Singing was part of the everyday timetable and all his commands were given in Welsh - 'Unwaith eto', 'gyda'ch gilydd' etc.

They were the days of the 11 plus examination and if you were fortunate enough to pass, during the Summer Term you were taught the basics of Algebra and Geometry as preparation for the Grammar School. The school was staffed by two other teachers, again both living locally. The Infant teacher was Connie Griffiths who lived in Bridge House (now Bridge Cottage) and Standards 1 & 2 were taught by Mamie (Morfydd) Watts (nee Thomas) - now living in Rhose.

Neither of these was 'qualified' but this did not detract from their performance and dedication as teachers. As far as I can remember none of the teachers (except G.F.D. who was known as Gaffa Davies) had a nickname but, at one time when one of the staff was sick for a long period a relief arrived Miss Bushel, who was immediately nicknamed '4 Pecks'!

The Infant Class was in what is now the Staffroom. There was always a roaring fire in the corner in winter. To the left of the door was a huge cabinet with a sloping glass top, which housed numerous fossils and antiquities. - is it still there - or what happened to it? I can remember using slates in the Infant Class, then progressing to boards and chalk and to books and pencils in Standard 1.

We were taught mainly the 3R's, music and needlework. The boys were taught gardening and there was always an excellent plot of small allotments below the steps at the bottom of the School hill. Also the girls helped to keep the flower garden above the old girls toilets.

Handwriting was a strong point at the school - all notices to parents were written by the older children and this was used as a Handwriting Test. A copperplate style was used which produced uniformity and a distinctive style. In fact many years later, while working in the Civil Service, I was handed a letter across my desk by a colleague, saying 'Isn't that handwriting like yours?' - it was written by someone brought up in Llancarfan School!

One of the main pastimes in the yard was playing hopscotch on the small wall near the top gate. Perhaps others can remember more games that were played?

The School field was not often used, as team sports were not taught. If a Sports Day was held in Summer, it was normally held on a flatter field at the top of Penylan hill.

Although the education we received was not perhaps as varied as that of today, I think we all had a basic education, and the school has produced many pupils who have later become prominent personalities nationally (and some world-wide) in their own field.

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A Village in the Vale
Reed

by Campbell

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I live in Llancarfan. It is a quiet and, to me, a very beautiful place. A cluster of pleasant hamlets make up the parish: Llancadle shadowed by the stacks of the cement works, Moulton with its thatched inn and duck-pond, Walterston and Bonvilston, with its memories of the Normans.

In our village, wooded banks rise gradually from the bed of the lovely glen. Take the winding road to Pancross. Stand there at the point where the view opens and you command a sweep of fields and sea as fine as any in Wales. So back down into the valley and it is as if the world is falling away behind you. There is peace there. Little wonder that the holy men of early Christian days, St. Cadoc and the rest, came to build their monasteries and schools.

For centuries this sheltered dingle, like Llantwit Major away to the west, was a place of light and learning, attracting students from all over the British Isles. Many pilgrims and wandering scholars, fleeing from the noise and dangers of the world must have had their first view of the valley from the hill of Penonn and said 'This is the place. This is where I always wished to come. I will stay here'. On that very hill, centuries later, was born Iolo Morganwg, famous poet and wit. On the site of the monastery at Llanvithyn, now a farmhouse, during rebuilding operations about 50 years ago, a skeleton was found, reputed to be that of a monk who had been walled-up. It is assumed that he was walled up as a punishment for having broken his vows for it would take a very slow monk to have been walled-up in the ordinary course of affairs. Also in the valley are many wells, several of which are said to possess miraculous curative powers, having been blessed by the early saints who dwelt there. The wells are now neglected and the miracles scarcer.

To the east of the village is an ancient hill-fort known as Castle Ditches, said to have been a Roman fosse. The Romans and the R.A.F. have both taken out large establishments in

this part of the Vale. Where cows dawdled, planes taxi; where Iolo sang, jets whine. Llanccarfan church is early Norman. It was despoiled of many ornaments and much property by the reformation. Last summer a tribe of bees swarmed in one of the window embrasures and were as much of a nuisance as Henry VIII had been.

As in most villages where change is not frequent, the past is as much with you as the present. The church and the chapels have their graveyards within earshot of the stream that has flowed through the centre of the village as constantly as time's ever rolling one. On a stone pillar are the names of those men of the village who lived here but rest elsewhere. In so small and quiet a place, the names on the headstones and the cenotaph have a meaning they would not have in teeming cities. They are the names of those who, as we do now, came down the hill from Penonn and up the road from Llanbethery, and will do so no more.

Notes: i) The thatched inn, the 'Three Horseshoes', at Moulton perished by fire in 1962: the cellar of the old building remains in the new modern pub. ii) More on Llanvithyn and skeletons in future numbers. iii) Castle Ditches was an Iron Age hill-fort, about 10.5 acres in area. Its occupancy by the Romans is a subject of speculation but excavation has shown that the late Iron Age farm at Whitton Cross was occupied into Romano-British times. The 1900 and 1921 6-inch O.S. maps show Castle Ditches as a 'Roman Camp' but the current map simply indicates 'Fort'. iv) If you have enjoyed Campbell's article you might also want to read Glyn Daniel's *My childhood in the Vale in the Vale of Glamorgan Series*, Vol. 1, Stewart Williams, 1959.

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Literacy in Llanccarfan

by John R. Etherington

The registers of marriages in St Cadoc's Church present us with a representative cross section of the village population, at various times from the 1700's onward, with evidence of their ability to write. When we first looked at the registers Phil Watts pointed out an obvious change from the earliest registers to those of this century. A limited survey has been made by taking samples of 40 marriage certificates over four periods of history. In each

case the information is based on the signatures of bride, groom and the first two witnesses so each sample consists of 160 signatures. If one of the wedding party could not write the vicar wrote the name followed by '---his (her) mark.' or 'Mark of---' (I suspect that in some cases, especially in later years, the vicar did not do this - presumably to avoid embarrassment, and so the level of literacy may be slightly overestimated but this is probably not serious). Ability to write a signature is not proof of total literacy but, once it was more or less universal, the signatures were generally executed with some facility suggesting that the signatories were used to writing. The first entry available to us was dated 1788.

A survey such as this is not in any way novel. Such things have been done elsewhere but it

is interesting to see what happened in this rural parish which was remote from city life until this century. The four periods are also early enough for churchgoing social distinctions not to have blurred the patterns prevailing in the community at large - the records include all from landed gentry to farm labourers and servants. By the beginning of this century almost every parishioner was able to write. This was probably well above average for urban areas at that time and possibly above the British average in the late 1980's.

Date	Illiterate	Literate	%
1788 to 1802	115	45	28
1838 to 1850	74	86	86
1852 to 1874	45	115	72
1888 to 1920	3	157	98

Notes. The Church of England and other religious bodies promoted elementary education from the mid-1700's and the State did not intervene for another century. Forster's Education Act (1870) made the availability of education universal and the School Boards were established to administrate this. The Mundella Act of 1880 made elementary education compulsory and, in 1891, feepayments were abolished (Keynon, 1981, Dictionary of British History). We are grateful to Fr. Bill Feild for letting us see the copies of the registers, the originals of which are deposited with the County Archive.

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Letters from Readers

Newsletter 6 contained part of a letter from Tony Thomas, Pancross. Here is the rest, relating to his early years in the village (1930's):

I would also refer to the Blacksmith Shop which was the hub of Llancarfan. The ring of the hammer on the anvil was to me the sound of the village. I often took cart horses to the blacksmith to be shod, on my way to school and brought them home at lunch time. I also remember a lecture from the blacksmith for wearing out and losing so many shoes off my pony as they now cost 15/- (75p) a set. In hot summers the wheel banding plate was in constant use as the wagon wheels dried out and had to be re-banded. This involved a wheelwright as well as the blacksmith and also a good man with a sledgehammer. I like to think I was partially responsible for the plate being left there but I would have liked it to be set flat. The anvil, the centre of the shop, where much of the world was put to right and where many games of drafts were played, is now in our workshop.

Looking back I think the big change is in the people. They were nearly all country people. When I started milking cows first there were 40 people with herds of cows, now there are 4. In the village the Fox and Hounds, Broadhayes, Cross Green, The Green, Penylan, Glan-yr-Afon, Great House and Ty-toMaen all milked cows. Nearly everybody was able

to help hay making, and did, including the womenfolk. There were always craftsmen in the village who could thatch, build ricks, lay or top hedges and of course help at threshing-time. The price of progress.

Tony Thomas, Pancross Farm.

Snippets

'On October 29, 1877, died Ann James of Penon Farm, Llancarvan (sic) near Cowbridge, aged 105, leaving two sisters in their nineties.' (Country Quest, September 1987, p. 29). This came from the writings of Wirt Sikes who was American Consul in Cardiff, published in an American monthly magazine of the time. (I have been unable to verify this - anyone know if it is true? JRE)

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Flemingston Moor by the River Thaw, the Parish boundary of Llancarfan, was a favourite haunt of the Ceffyl Dwr, the small and beautiful Welsh water horse, a phantom which persuaded travellers to mount and then frightened them to death, or worse, before vanishing. Don't talk to little horses! (The Folklore of Glamorgan, Roderick).

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Llancarfan Parish Register of Burials. In 1898 the vicar added a marginal note to a record of burial, following the death of a parishioner in Cadoxton: 'Killed by being struck with a quart jug'. This was the year in which Barry Dock No.2 was completed and there are certainly documented accounts of wild drinking in unlicensed shebeens, gambling and lawless behaviour often needing intervention by the Police (Barry: the Centenary Book, D. Moore, 1984). Was this death a consequence of such behaviour? Perhaps the time in which we now live is the best after all.

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Where did the water come from? Before mains water came to the village the Fox and Hounds had a cistern under the back-kitchen which was filled by handpumping water from the river. Gwynne Liscombe says the intake is still there. Woodlands had a well in the garden on the hillside - the spring which fed this now overflows onto the road opposite the 'Fox'. A pump in the garden of Penylan took water from a spring and another spring, close by, fed a tap on the roadside bank of Hollies (once Rose Cottage) There was a well at Penonn behind the outbuildings on the south side of the road and a pump between New House and the river. Opposite Pennymeade there is the remnant of a well in Dai Phillip's field which must have been used by Newmill. There must have been many other water sources - does anyone know where? Of course there were the medicinal wells also, including the 'rag-well' in Breech Wood and the wells at Garnllwyd and Abernant. Whether their water differed from that of the local domestic wells is open to doubt but an

acclimatised stomach was probably needed to withstand the iron and Epsom Salts! Did the springs ever dry up in summer?

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Help needed. Several members have written short letters including all sorts of information. Most interestingly many have told us where and when they lived in Llancarfan. We are slowly putting this sort of thing together into a 'house and family guide' When complete, the guide will tell us who lived where at any time back to the beginning of the century or before. A draft copy will be produced within the next year or so in the hope that many of you will want to buy one (just the cost of printing and postage) and hopefully tell us what is missing or what is wrong with it so that we can move toward a final version. It is a surprisingly difficult task - memories are sometimes unreliable to 5 or 10 years - dates in particular have to be cross-checked but we hope to do some of this from past electoral registers. If anyone has some spare time during the week, which they would like to spend on ferreting-out some of this sort of information from the County Archive, please contact me (I don't even have time to wash my car!).

A few members have written with more extensive recollections of their times in Llancarfan some of which will appear in future Newsletters including contributions from Mr Albert Newton, Dr Evan Thomas and Mr Herbert Thomas. If any other members want to put pen to paper it will help to keep the Newsletter going in future months.