



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 8: Febuary 1988

This month we broke new ground by holding the monthly gathering in the Wild Goose at Llanbethery and we are grateful to the landlord, Keith Hancock, for making a bar available to us. In particular it is a pleasure to note that various members attended who we have not seen before and we hope that occasional meetings in different parts of the old parish will persuade others to come along. The Society is open to anyone with an interest in the village or the area, not just those who happen to live in the the Carfan valley.

Members may be interested to know that the appeal for a suitable Community badge (Newsletter 6) elicited no response at all! The school produced about 30 designs which will be judged and a prize awarded for the best. We hope to be able to show one or two of these in a future newsletter.

January has been a wet month and we extend our sympathy to various folk near the stream who's homes or property suffered from flooding. During the night of the 21st both Old Mill and The Green were damaged by floods, together with several cars parked overnight outside the Fox and Hounds. The workshop of Mill Race Cottage was also reached by flood-water. This is the worst we have seen for a very long time. The last serious flooding of property was in 1968 when Fordings was badly affected, but that flood, 20 years ago took place in summer as a result of a very serious thunderstorm. On the same day hailstones the size of table tennis balls dented the roof of the editor's caravan (Ceffyl Du was still under construction) and the wings of aircraft at Rhoose. Water also cascaded through Woodlands and Pembroke house producing an amazing cataract down Woodlands garden-steps (now destroyed). The kitchen of Brook Cottage used to flood fairly frequently until Harry Hughes raised the level of its floor and closed-off the old 'stable-door' to the road when he renovated the house in 1974.

Does any member recollect whether Old Mill has ever flooded before? A very large tree stump was trapped by the sewerage pipe which crosses the river just above the upper ford and it was later swept down the to the top bridge, jammed for a while and then reached the lower bridge on Saturday where it would have remained until the Water Authority arrived on Monday if Mike Higgs had not gallantly braved the cold water to chainsaw it into pieces which could pass the bridge. Did the tree stump act as sufficient of a dam to raise the water level and cause the unusual flooding? The Water Authority could do nothing during the weekend as they are currently working no overtime.

Writing of natural disasters, another less serious one occurred in November, but there has been no space to include a report in the last two Newsletters. Late in the evening of the 11th at 11.00 p.m., John and Jean Williams of Old Orchard were startled by a crash of breaking glass and when they investigated, found a broken window pane beside the front door. Fearing the worst they 'phoned the Fox and Hounds, correctly surmising that at least some of us might be there! A thorough search revealed no lurking villains but we did find a most bemused hen pheasant sitting on the kitchen floor. The bird was uninjured and she departed down the hall in best 'roadrunner' tradition to vanish into the dark of the garden! A rising pheasant can just about reach 60 mph so the damage is not suprising but why she was unharmed is a bit more of a puzzle as birds usually break thir necks on colliding with a window. It is also a bit unusual for them to fly at night but you may have noticed that they are often disturbed by the Concorde sonic booms: maybe one of these set her off?

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Village Notes by Michael Bartlett

Common threads run through a community's history however large or small. Our's has a past as diverse and interesting as any other, it had its share of distinguished inhabitants, its folklore and mythology, its commercial past and even our village society had a predecessor some two hundred years ago.

At the end of the 18th century, a book society existed in the village, ordering its literature from a Cowbridge bookseller. Titles purchased included volumes of poetry, spelling, a ready reckoner, a dictionary and religious works, all probably very improving, together with more light-hearted items such as a juggling book, the tricky songster, the complete conjurer and 'a book of good fat songs'. 'Robin the Cruser', presumably Mr Defoe's literary effort, then some 80 years old, was also acquired. It would be interesting to know the circulation of these books, the standard of literacy at the time¹ and even what happened to the society and its books. Certainly the titles indicate a range of different tastes and inclinations.

It is not surprising therefore to discover that the village was not simply an agricultural community. The various mills were obviously an integral part of farming but at least one farmer had other business interests.

The death of one Henry Williams was recorded in 1790. He was a prosperous farmer, but also a clockmaker. His undertaking was such that he trained at least two apprentices who became clockmakers in their own right, and he produced longcase clocks of particularly high quality, one of which is of sufficient standard to be chosen, along with other carefully selected furniture in the superbly renovated dining room at Tredegar House, Newport.² Two other Williams are recorded as clockmakers, either working in the village or travelling to Cardiff to work on clocks such as that of St. John's Church.

The village is also one of myths, battles were supposed to have occurred here in pre-historic times. Cromlechs continually disappear just before they can be adequately recorded. Romans may or may not have camped at Liege Castle and Castle Ditches to be followed by Oliver Cromwell, in person, to bombard Penmark Castle. Certainly Romans built roads here, traces of which can be found today⁴.

Never mind John Etherington's hydraulic ram, recorded in the October Newsletter, what about the medicinal wells to which pilgrimages were made, one at Coed-y-Breeches and two at Garnllwyd, and the Saints, thousands of them in their monkish habits, busily digging tunnels between Frank Jameson's field and the church of St. Cadoc (not, incidentally to be confused with Caradoc of Llancarvan, a rough do-gooding member of the community who wrote the history of Wales up to 1156, a rather slim volume, I understand).

The myths surrounding Llanveithin are countless, they usually, and indeed very recently, involve skeletons, hardly unexpected when the valley has been occupied for nearly two thousand years and the inhabitants had to be buried somewhere⁵.

Anyway, with such a background, it is not unpredictable that probably Llancarfans most famous son was a purveyor of fables, a purveyor of books also, to the Llancarfan book society, the one time Cowbridge book and general shop proprietor, Edward Williams, the bard Iolo Morganwg. Born in Penonn in 1746 and buried in Flemingston in 1826, Iolo's life was immersed in myths. They started early, he is supposed to have learned the alphabet from his stonemason father, watching him cut out the letters of tombstones. His interest in the alphabet stayed with him, he preserved the Bardic alphabet and a good deal of research and venom was expended after his death to show that it was his own invention. Starting work for his father, on his mother's death, aged 25, he left home to travel and educate himself. In London he commenced writing poetry and was recognised by some of the literary figures of the time including Southey and Cowper. His interests were wide and, in political terms, sometimes dangerous. He was a revolutionary and reformer, one particular poem caused him to be interviewed by Pitt, but he came to no harm.

Iolo Morganwg returned to Cowbridge in 1777, he continued to write and also he canvassed for subscriptions to fund his next contemplated work. As an indication of his status, subscribers included Wilberforce, Thomas Paine, Pennant and General George Washington. His main work was undertaken at this time, not only the writing of poetry but research into the 12th century Welsh colonisation of America, nutritional experiments, hymn writing, campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade, other geological and antiquarian research and selling his books, though how he prospered at that when he appended notes to orders which, for example, referred to a rich farmer's eldest daughter as a 'blubber paunched wench' is difficult to imagine.

His most well known work was his contribution to the Myrvyrian Archaeology with its collection of one hundred early Welsh manuscripts, now accepted to be mostly written by himself. His influence is not far reaching, for he belongs to that eccentric mould of Welshmen, like Dr. Price of Llantrisant, everybody has heard of them but no one is quite

sure what they did.

Today, as the obsession with nostalgia and revivalism continues, perhaps we should look forward and not back, perhaps we could promote the village as a tourist trap, the birthplace of Iolo Morganwg, every visitor, at great expense, receiving a bottle of magical, medicinal Llancarfan well water.

Editorial notes. 1. The short article in the Newsletter 7 suggests that about a quarter of the parishioners were literate at this time. 2. A Henry Williams' longcase clock also stood in the living-room of Broadhayes, when Gwynne and Dilys Liscombe lived there; it accompanied them to Barry when they left the village. Henry Williams lived at Brook Cottage and is said to have bought Broadhayes in 1760 for £60 from Robert Jones, Fonmon (R. P. Perkins historical map). Edward Williams, variously recorded in the Parish Registers as watchmaker, clockmaker and clerk to the parish council, lived at Great House (or possibly an adjacent property) in the early 1800's. Presumably Henry's son or grandson? 3. Castle Ditches is mentioned in Campbell Reed's article and notes (Newsletter 7). The 6-inch O.S. map records the discovery of a sword and cannon-ball at the eastern end of Castle Ditches in 1850. Also see County of S. Glamorgan (1981), County Treasures Survey, item 4. 4. The certain remains of Roman road are those of the Via Julia east of Cowbridge, not far outside Llancarfan parish: the line of the road must have carried it through the northernmost outlier of the parish. 5. Future contribution on Llanveithin. Some of the skeletons were looked at as recently as 1970 by a forensic pathologist at the University Hospital, Cardiff.

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Readers letters

We have received two letters from Dr Evan Thomas of Tyla Rhosyr, Cowbridge concerning his memories of the village almost 70 years ago. Some extracts are given below:

I lived at Llanvithyn House for about three years - 1918-21 and went to the village school where I had my basic education which served so well throughout what has been a most interesting life - 23 years as County Medical Officer of Health, Glamorgan, serving on many National Committees and being finally rewarded by my appointment as an Honorary Physician to the Queen.

My grandfather, William, was one of the Loughers of Garnllwyd and my mother, Edith, his daughter, returned there with my two sisters and myself following the death of his wife in the 1918 epidemic of influenza and kept house for him and her brother Walter until he married in 1920-21. They were such happy years, but apart from that, I spent all my holidays there and have so many happy memories, in particular the wonderful goose

dinners. It was a closely knit community and I paid frequent visits to the mill kept by Uncle and Aunt Liscombe. It was fascinating to see the wheat, harvested at all the local farms, being ground by the power of the water wheel, the flour being taken to 'the Factory' (Mr Durham was Baker) where it was baked into bread which was taken around by Mr Tudor Liscombe in a horse drawn van. One of my memories is being given a good tanning by him for beating his horse with a stick as he passed by! I was about ten at the time.

I remember in particular the Jones boys from Great House, Harris's at the Fox and Hounds, the Griffiths and others but I could never repay the debt to the Headmaster, Mr Davies from Barry and Miss Maggie Lougher, Crossgreen, (she married and emigrated to Australia) - they were wonderful teachers.

Another to whom I owe much was Mr Buckley, the village post-master who made my first fishing rod. I caught my first trout in the Ivy Pool on a Sunday morning while on my way to the Wesleyan Chapel. I didn't hear anything of the sermon as I spent the time admiring the trout in my handkerchief! The Old Mill and Factory Pool were also happy hunting grounds. These days I fish whenever I can on the Ogmere River and in West Wales for salmon and sewin.

Notes. Uncle and Aunt Liscombe - William Liscombe and Jane (nee Lougher, William Lougher's sister). Tudor Liscombe - William's son and father of Gwynne (now on our committee). 'The Factory' (now the Old Bakehouse) presumably so named from its former life as a flannel mill. In a third letter, replying to some queries on this article, Dr Thomas also wrote the following: My grandfather, William Lougher, is mentioned in a book Annals of South Glamorgan by Marianne Spencer. The chapter on Llancarfan was written mainly at Llanvithyn and the authoress gave my mother a signed copy in recognition of the many cups of tea, meals etc which she provided. It gives an excellent history of Llancarfan.

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Future events and information

Taking the place of the March monthly gathering, a WHIST DRIVE is to be held on Tuesday, March 8th in the Penmark Community Hall at 7.30 pm. Tickets from Rene Jankovic at the Post Office (Bonvilston 203). Cost 0.75p including tea and biscuits. Raffle and prizes. The last whist drive was very successful and made a small profit (£27) which will help to finance prizes this time.

The monthly gathering in April will be on Tuesday the 1st in the Fox and Hounds at 8.00 pm. Come along for a quiet drink; we usually have something over a dozen people who talk about all and everything and often produce photographs, documents and other items of local interest.

On May 2nd (May Day) we intend to hold a morning walk (very gentle and suitable for all ages) to look around the village at various points of interest which have featured in the

Newsletters or will be written about in the future. We shall start from the Fox and Hounds car park at 11.30 a.m. and return in time for lunch. More details later.

Membership list Now that the membership list is complete for this year we intend to circulate a list with the next Newsletter. If you would prefer to have your address omitted from the list please let us know within the next fortnight.

School Project Miss Ann Maddocks, the Headmistress of Llancarfan School tells us that the older children of the school will be undertaking a project on the history of the Church and the younger children, a similar project on the school. Later in the year she intends to hold an open day in which some of the results will be displayed.

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The Parish Railway

by John R Etherington

Less than a lifetime ago the Parish of Llancarfan had its own steam trains and station, a part of the Cowbridge and Aberthaw Railway which was completed in 1892 and acquired by the Taff Vale Railway Company in 1894. The story commenced in 1888 when a consortium led by Daniel Owen, a former proprietor of the Western Mail, opened a lime-works at East Aberthaw which used beach pebbles as raw material. Within four years, as a result of his entre-preneurial skills, an extension of the Llantrisant to Cowbridge branch of the TVR was completed, linking the Aberthaw works to Cowbridge. For the next thirty years this little, rural line carried coal and lime, agricultural produce and a few passengers, but it was never profitable and maybe did not satisfy its passengers: on May 6th 1919 the Parish Council was 'asked for a better service Cowbridge/Aberthaw, Taff Vale Railway.' In 1930 the passenger service was withdrawn and final closure came in 1932.

Much of the route took advantage of the level flood-plain of the River Thaw and it is on the eastern side of Flemingston and Llanbethery Moors that the railway passed through Llancarfan Parish for about three miles. Trains stopped at St Athan Road Station just to the south of Llancadle. Did any older members travel to school or to shop in Cowbridge by walking to St Athan Road? The 1921 edition of the six-inch O.S. map also shows a Halt at Llanbethery. This does not appear on the 1900 second edition map, neither is it included in my source of the railway's history. All that remains of the halt today is a gateway in the old railway fence. When was it built and was it much used? Any memories? The O.S. got the 1894 change of ownership right, showing the railway as the T.V.R. Aberthaw Branch.

In 1962 when I first came to Cardiff it was possible to follow the full length of the abandoned track and, with a party of students, I did so on one occasion. Adjacent farms have now purchased portions of the railway land and new fences make the full walk impossible. You can still gain access to the route of the railway by following the lane, past the Flying Goose in Llanbethery, down into the Thaw valley. The old railbed can be walked northward until you reach the barbed-wire boundary of Treguff land.

Iron fenceposts are a reminder of the railway boundary and pay silent tribute to the quality of the galvanised rolled steel which must be 70 or 80 years old at least. Not much sign of the C & A R remains except for these fenceposts and some traces of track-ballast, made of blast-furnace slag, as in so many of S. Wales' railways. There is also a deep cutting beneath the lane from Llanbethery which is carried by a robust Pennant sandstone and brick bridge. This is unlikely to fall down for another century; railway architecture is as good as its fenceposts!

The information on the history of the railway came from The Cowbridge Railway Chapman (1984) Oxford Publishing Co. Mr Chapman's book has almost no illustrations of anything south of Cowbridge - does anyone have any photographs taken on this almost idyllically remote line which curved up the Thaw valley before it was overshadowed by the ranks of power transmission towers? At that time it must have seemed almost as it was in medieval times, passing below the hamlet of Flemingston, with its thatched farms, surrounded by ancient, small field enclosures and along the meandering Thaw which had not yet been straightened by the job-creation project of the late 1920's.

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Extracts from members letters

Joan Harrhy (nee Palling): 'I moved to Ford Cross Cottages from Whitton Lodge on the Five Mile Lane when I was a six year old in 1930. My father was a County Council roadman and in his spare time with help of my mother ran a smallholding with cows and pigs. We moved to Pembroke House in 1944 and rented shed, barn, stable and fields from Mr John Jones who then had the Post Office. These sheds and fields were adjoining Fern Cottage Garden. My father died in December 1950 and my mother in January 1953. I then moved with my husband and family to Bonvilston.

Notes The sheds and fields can be seen in the one photograph of Llancarfan which appears in 'The Vale of Glamorgan in Old Photographs' Volume 1. (Roy Denning, 1987).

Josephine Felton (nee Rainsford but known to the village as Manby): I lived in Walterston Fawr in the 1960's and was married from there in 1966 when I left to live abroad. My younger half-brother and sister went to school in the village and we have very happy memories of our life in the Vale of Glamorgan. The present occupiers of the house may have given you the historical details of the sale brochure which gave quite a lot of information about the origins of the house. We were one of the first 'foreign' families to move in and start to modernise the old house and in our day the barns, stables and chapels were still used for their original purposes. (Gloucestershire)

Dick (R.W.) Evans: I lived in Llancarfan at Ford Cross Cottages from 1915 until 1940 when I left to join the forces in the War. ---. My sister lived for many years at Ty Uchaf (now High Lanterns) and also kept the Post Office in Llancarfan. Mrs Barbara Milhuisen (on the Society Committee) is my niece. (Leicestershire)

Frances and Heather Lowe (nee Morgan, The Green): We thoroughly enjoyed the edition of September and look forward eagerly to future editions. Congratulations to those who inaugurated the society, and we as 'expatriates' are totally in favour of it.
(Wolverhampton)

David Morgan (ex The Green): ---- Heather (Lowe) disclosed that there was to be a dinner for expatriate villagers. My apologies for not being able to make it. Please pass on my regards to my family and old friends. (Portugal)

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