



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 14: September 1988

The bad weather which opened the last Newsletter continued unabated for almost another month, making this one of the wettest summers that anyone remembers. However, there have been sufficient breaks in the rain for the harvest to go ahead and the grass-crop seems to have been huge. Perhaps with so much water coming off the land, river quality has also improved - the largest salmon catches on record in some parts of the country - perhaps this is related to the recolonisation of Nant Carfan by trout after several years with none? What do our fishermen members think?

Pheasants continue to bombard the village windows. This time it was Ceffyl Du on a sunny morning at the end of August. I rescued a stunned hen from the attentions of the cat but she died almost immediately. Though barely fledged, the bird was a good weight and it seemed a pity not to accept such a gift of the gods. For the culinary record, I roasted it, wrapped in foil and stuffed with a large new potato to keep the meat moist. Two succulent cold meals with salad.

Our last Tuesday evening gathering in the 'Fox' was a bit disappointing with only a few committee members and regulars. Of course, it was the middle of the holiday season - midwinter is more rewarding.

We are beginning to run a bit short of contributions which is why so much of this Newsletter has come from the editor's pen (keyboard, I suppose is more apt). Any offers? Not necessarily just village history, ancient or modern after all, I have managed to fit a recipe into this editorial!

Annual Dinner. A few tickets remain for the Dinner which is to be held at Rhoose Community Hall on Saturday 24th September. These are available from Phil Watts, Abernant, Llancarfán at £7.00 per head. The meal will be an informal buffet with plenty of seating so that people can circulate more freely than last year giving a chance to meet old friends. There will be a bar and raffle as well as a chance to voice your opinions on the running of the Society. Volunteers for election to the committee will be welcome as our numbers are slightly depleted while both Treasurer and Chairman are currently coopted rather than elected officers!

Future events .

The next Tuesday gathering will be on 4th October in the Fox and Hounds at 8.30, preceded by a short Committee meeting starting at 7.15 pm. Perhaps, as the evenings are shortening and most folk have returned from holiday, a few more members may come along. We will have a few photographs and documents to look at.

There will be a WHIST DRIVE on Saturday 19th November at Rhoose Community Hall commencing at 7.30 pm. Now that the Post Office with Rene Jankovic have sadly gone, tickets will be available on the door at 0.75p including tea and biscuits.

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Childrens Games.

Roger Hammond (formerly of Corner House) sent a note in response to Les Griffiths' short article saying that he remembered the game which Les called Cat and Dog. He wrote: 'I used to play this at school in London in about 1950. We called it 'tic-tac' or 'tip-tap'. I thought at the time that the latter name derived from the fact that the smaller piece of wood was tapped on the tip to make it rise into the air'. Roger's note has jogged the editor's memory - the name which Herbert Etherington used for the same game at the beginning of the century in Kent, was 'tic-tac' and he said that this described the sound made by tapping the smaller stick followed by whacking it with the larger one. Can't find anything in the reference books on this obviously old game. Does anyone else know more and is it still played anywhere in this day of TV and radio-controlled toys?

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HARRY HUGHES: THE LAST YEARS by John R Etherington

Visitors to the 'Fox and Hounds' perhaps wonder who the Harry, of Harry's Bar, was. The older inhabitants of the village will remember him with affection and those of us who shared some of his life regret the passing of a rather special man.

Harry Hughes was my next door neighbour from 1967 until his death in 1975. He lived for most of this time in 'Chapel Cottage', the extension of 'Chapel House', now the home of Sam and Patsy Smith. The cottage is no longer a separate dwelling as it has been incorporated into the enlarged 'Chapel House'. Harry was a stonemason and jobbing builder. He did so much around the village that there are still signs of his work everywhere. The stone wall of 'High Lanterns' ('Ty Uchaf') garden, the riverside wall of the pub, 'Brook Cottage', 'Pennymead', the garden wall of 'Hillside' (rebuilt in stone this year), repairs to 'Broomwell' and so many, many more.

The window of Harry's cottage looked-out on the garden of my home, 'Ceffyl Du' (Black Horse) and I first met him just after we bought the Black Horse Land at auction in the 'Bear Hotel', Cowbridge. To Herbert Thomas' chagrin the closing bid was less than my pre-sale offer for the plot but, sportsman always, he bought me a drink on the strength of it!

Harry and his neighbours from Chapel House, Ivor and Jenny Weight watched us each

weekend as we turned up with a Landrover full of tools, two children and two dogs! By the spring of 1968 we had removed the young woodland which had sprung-up in the Black Horse garden and excavated the driveway by hand. Harry watched me digging the awful yellow clay with its limestone boulders and decided that anyone who could dig must be alright! From that time onward we talked every time he saw me. He and Mr & Mrs Weight came to see Jack Evans' Drott excavator tearing-out the hillside platform on which our bungalow now stands. After that we put a caravan on the site and became full time residents. Viv Price delivered our milk, Clare went to the village school and Nick to nursery school in Cowbridge, the 'Fox' was packed to the doors every night under the good offices of Trixie Phillips and Glyn Llewelyn while the customers' cars blocked our gateway! However, I kept well away from the pub because I wanted my evenings to be sacrosanct, at least until most of the building was finished.

Careful supervision of the Drott preserved all of the trees on the site and to Harry's amazement we took up pick and shovel again for the foundations. 'Why don't you get a JCB?', he said, but I don't think he realised my enthusiasm to keep every tree and shrub intact. Ivor Weight next door, however, discovered that I was a professional botanist and began to worry about the garden. He was an amazing vegetable grower. I remember the leeks in particular but he thought I would be a competitor, not realising that our half-acre would become a sort of woodland wildlife park! Sadly his lovely, old cottage-garden with flowers, vegetables and that beautiful magnolia was utterly destroyed by a speculative builder after Mrs Weight left to live with her daughter Olive in Cardiff.

Once 'Ceffyl Du' was more or less finished (less really as there are still jobs to do twenty years later!) I gravitated toward the 'Fox' in company with Gwynne Liscombe, Derek Higgs and others. Harry used to appear at about halfpast nine on most evenings, except for the 'Rhoose Club' days. More often than not he was joined by Coalman Glyn (Glyn Probert) who came from Queen Street, Barry, coincidentally only a few doors away from my second wife, Sheena.

The two of them would lean on the top end bar until closing time, drinking Hancocks' HB, then the only draught beer to be had, and usually laughing about its affinity with the waters of Llancafarn Brook. Mary Webber, who was on duty most evenings behind the bar, was infuriated by these suggestions and Harry would often compound her rage by banging on the bar for service. "Who's banging?!" still brings a smile to my face. I can see Harry's wry grin as if it was yesterday, with Glyn chuckling away behind his hand or sometimes with that slight speech impediment he had, making an over the shoulder, laughing aside. The pair of them were a delight and it is sad that they left us so early in life. Bill Price from 'Flaxland Fach' has gone as well. He was another regular in this group and was even more outspoken against the beer but, for some reason, Mary never seemed to be so bestirred by his complaints or earthy suggestions. It was all in fun, from men whose life had been hard. It is likely we shall not see such folk again.

Harry and I would often stroll back up the road together after closing time and lean on the churchyard wall talking whilst he had the last fag of the day. My most vivid memories are of midsummer evenings with a sunset afterglow in the sky above the wood and the churchyard dotted with the shining lanterns of glow-worms. Sadly they have gone now; agricultural chemicals and years of zealous grass-cutting have taken their toll. I haven't seen

a glow worm in the village for almost ten years. The last one was when Nick was finding his teenage feet and catching the last bus back from Barry. It sat green-glowing on the hedge bank beyond Pancross in the still, hot night beside the fields where Viv Thomas once heard the corncrakes each summer. Alas they are also gone, common only somewhere in the Scottish far north.

It was on such occasions that Harry would wax philosophical, talking about the past and all the things which were lost for ever. He had lived for a while in a shack at the western end of Castle Ditches, high above the village. The ruins are still there if you care to look. Harry would sit, in the dawn, watching foxes and their cubs at play or glimpsing the Broomwell badgers on their way back from a night patrol. He was a quiet, contented undemanding man to whom such memories were a lifetime treasure.

Harry came from a big family in Llanbethery and like so many country boys escaped early from school. One of his first jobs was in the gangs set to straighten and improve the river Thaw; job creation of a forgotten age. Despite this lack of formal education he was interested in and questioned everything. On another of those evenings with the moonlight catching his tobacco smoke and the wind souging in the elm tops behind us, he mused about the archaeologists who came to Castle Ditches. 'How did those old boys know to put the trench just there?', he said. 'That trench went straight to that skeleton - how did they know?'

Once a year Harry and Coalman Glyn would take-off to Chepstow races in Glyn's car and, on their return we would have a week or two of reminiscences. Like a couple of happy schoolboys they were! Both confirmed bachelors, both living alone in their very different homes, this Chepstow excursion must have been one of the high spots of their lives.

A bit later, after the first round of improvements to the 'Aubrey Arms' at Bonvilston, Harry conceived a desire to see what they had done to the old place. By this time Enoch Lewis, Headmaster, had retired and occasionally joined us in the 'Fox'. Harry would go round to 'Maes yr Afon' and winkle him out and we would set off in a car to the 'Aubrey'. Harry was impressed by the new plush, Enoch would entertain us with stories of his very early days in Llancarfan and the evening would pass in a flash, or perhaps a haze of Trophy. We didn't do this many times for Harry was now coming toward the end of his life. He did however, get hooked on the expeditions. When he discovered that Billy Phillips was doing-up the 'Highwayman' we occasionally went in that direction. I hadn't set foot in the place since the older days of - what was it? - the 'Carpenters Arms' and then the 'Whitehall Inn'? - but we were amazed by Billy's renovation. We were made more than welcome because Billy never forgets a face and knew us all from his days in the 'Fox' a few years before.

Harry's last two major works in the village were the building of his own bungalow and the conversion of 'Brook Cottage' next door to the Wesleyan Chapel ('Whitechapel'). Harry's bungalow is now 'Pennymead'. It was built beside the old wooden Carpenter's Shop which he used as the base for his jobbing building work and whilst he put bricks and mortar together he used to invite me in to look at progress whenever I passed,

with my old Labrador, Peta, who was then very near the end of her own long life. After Harry left us and the bungalow was sold, the Carpenters Shop, once David Griffiths' workshop, was demolished to make-way for the garage of 'Pennymead'. Harry didn't need a garage; his old green Austin pick-up survived all weathers and was a familiar sight spluttering around the lanes or chugging back up the Tumble after a visit to Cardiff for building materials.

The conversion of Brook Cottage marked the beginning of the end. I saw him most mornings when I walked Peta at about half-past eight (I get up a lot earlier these days!). Harry would already be hard at it but when he heard me, out would come the inevitable cigarette packet and a conversation would ensue. I can't remember quite when it was, but one day, shortly after the roof went on, he was a bit under the weather. 'Bumped myself coming down through that doorway', he said. I thought nothing of it. All of us who have built, or gardened, know the hazards of cuts and bruises; you ignore them and they get better. Harry had spent a lifetime not noticing such things and except that he once or twice said the problem was still with him and he was feeling a bit groggy, none of us thought any more about it.

There was nothing unusual about the last evening in the Fox. I talked, on and off, with Harry and Glyn, walked up the road afterwards as usual while Glyn drove away to Queen Street and Harry leaned on the wall puffing his fag. I went off home shouting goodnight to him, knowing he would have another smoke in front of the fire and then go to bed. I never saw him again in life.

Late next morning (it must have been the weekend) Mrs Weight knocked at the door, a little bit distraught, though that did not surprise me as she was quite old and my steps are designed for the young! 'John, I think something's happened to Harry' she said, 'Could you come and look, I'm a bit worried about going in on my own'. Harry had gone to sleep in front of the fire which was now cold and grey. His cigarette had dropped from his fingers and burned out on the hearth, another trail of grey ash. I knew from the moment I saw him that his life had ebbed away many hours before and I have a vivid recollection of thinking how like Harry it was to make his departing a quiet and dignified affair.

He would have so loved the day of his funeral when it seemed the whole Parish was in the Church and all his friends moved to the top bar after the ceremony. Harry, it was a rare and lucky privilege to know you and I bet you'd never believe how much you're missed. Harry now rests under a simple stone not far from the West Door of St Cadoc's Church overlooked by Coed y Crynallt with its rooks that were such a familiar sound for him. He was only 59.

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The Brittany Connection

Many years ago, John and Jean Williams (Old Orchard) told me that there were strange concurrences of naming between Brittany and the Vale of Glamorgan: Penmark and Penmarch, Penybont (Bridgend) and the town of Hennebont (or would Henybont be a nearer equivalent?). Since then, we have camped in Hennebont and been to look at Penmarch. We assumed that the coastal trade between South Wales, south-western England and Brittany, culminating with those modern travellers, the 'Johnny Onions', was responsible for these similarities. The Celtic languages Breton, Welsh and Cornish mark a

more enduring connection, from prehistoric times, between these Atlantic lands. The coastal trade is certainly of great antiquity and it is no coincidence that the Arthurian legends link these places together in myth and time-worn history.

The story took another step when John recently lent me a guide to the port of St Malo which reveals another, deeper connection. The French author of the guide points out that the port was named for Maclou or Malo, a Welsh monk, native of Llancarfan, who fled to Brittany in the 6th century A.D., and became the Bishop of the island Abbey of Aleth in the estuary of the Rance. In due course the bishopric was transferred to the island upon which the modern town is founded and hence named St Malo-de-l'Isle. Malo was godson and disciple of the Irish St Brendan the Seafarer who is reputed to have reached America nearly a millenium before Columbus (read Tim Sevrin's remarkable book, The Brendan Voyage, describing his successful reconstruction of St Brendan's leather boat, an ocean-going curragh, and his trans-Atlantic voyage).

A lesser coincidence is that St Malo lies on the estuary of La Rance, with its tidal barrage and power station. This is likely to be joined by a much larger cousin in the Severn Estuary before the end of this century.

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LATCH - Landough children's cancer appeal.

One of our members, Graham Brain, is making a sponsored cycle ride in company with various friends and colleagues, from Birmingham to Llancarfan on the day of the Dinner, September 24th. The distance is 134 miles. Many villagers have already sponsored Graham. If you would like to add yourself to the list please send your name and address to Graham at 'Ynys Dawel', Llancarfan with a note of your sponsorship amount per mile. It is not only a worthy cause, it is also a daunting undertaking which deserves a lot of support and would be one way of thanking Graham for his help with the Children's Sports in the summer.