



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 17: January-February 1989

The old year is gone and another is upon us before we know where to turn. A very happy and prosperous New Year to all our readers and may the Llancarfan Society continue to flourish through 1989. Remember to pay your subs!

The first community event before Christmas was the lighting of the Christmas tree which was attended by a large crowd including many children. There must be more children in the parish than for many a year. Three carols were sung by the light of the tree and then we all trooped away to continue preparation for Christmas. The tree was illuminated each evening until Twelfth Night, adding another splash of light and colour to that of several other trees in nearby gardens. Again, our thanks to Graham Brain for organising the tree and to Derek Higgs for the electricity supply. One or two folk were concerned about the lime tree which was moved to make way for the Christmas tree base. Be reassured, it has been replanted elsewhere in the valley and it needed moving as the triangle by the ford was becoming very overgrown by the three trees which we planted ourselves when they were given by the Vale Council six or seven years ago.

Christmas day has always been one for the family and its quietness in Llancarfan suggests that tradition continues. Boxing Day was a great contrast, with its usual influx of visitors attracted by Fox and Hounds' lunches, the tug-of-war and the 'duck egg' race. The lunches need no explanation but some 'out of town' members might not know about the other two. The tug-of-war was started about 14 years ago, originally as a battle between the ladies of the Tuesday Club and any village men brave enough for the inevitable immersion in the waters of the ford. Of recent years it has become more the province of the Fox and Hounds, and some of its regulars, but whoever organises it and takes part, the collecting boxes for various charities are generously filled. A very large crowd watched this year as various young and not so young men splashed about in the water of the ford which was much warmer than usual.

The egg race is a newer venture, first organised last year by Gwynne Liscombe for PHAB, a charity dedicated to bringing together the physically handicapped and the able-bodied. Incidentally, an apology to Gwynne is in order; I forgot to advertise the egg race in the last Newsletter. This year the proceeds were shared between PHAB and Maes-y-coed School of which Barbara Milhuisen is Head Teacher and from whom I have received the following letter:

'Dear John,

I write as head-teacher of the above school and would be grateful, through the medium of the Newsletter, to say a few thank-you's.

For the benefit of readers who were not in Llancarfan on Boxing Day a 'Duck Egg' race was held in which 1000 plastic eggs, with numbers, were released in the river above the Ivy Pool. They floated down the river and were retrieved at the bridge between the two car parks at the 'Fox and Hounds'. Last year a similar event took place, with proceeds in aid of PHAB, but it was decided, this year that the proceeds should be divided between PHAB and the Maes-y-Coed School, each organisation sharing the selling of numbers. My school is now richer by £250 which will be spent on special chairs for children with a physical handicap.

Now comes the point of my thanks; all of this would not have been possible without the efforts of three who I can only describe as Musketeers. I refer to Gwynne (Liscombe), Phil (Watts) and you, John (Etherington) and your valiant efforts in the water of the river. Also, the staff of the 'Fox and Hounds' for allowing us to invade their premises and use the facilities and all of the people who turned up on the day and gave so generously, but most of all to the village for lending itself so ideally to the event. The sun shone, and it would have made Dick Evans very happy to see such life and activity in the village again.

Yours sincerely, Barbara.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL. This is now due; a reminder and renewal form were sent out with the last Newsletter. Payment is £5.00 to Phil Watts at Abernant. Next month we shall only be able to send-out Newsletters to paid-up members. If you renew before March, the necessary back-copies will be sent.

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A letter from Phil Watts to the Editor, John Etherington

I write as the instigator of the Llancarfan Society which has been in existence for approximately 18 months. Perhaps it would be worth while at this time to recall my words to the press, and to remind ourselves of the intentions of the casual letter which brought about a big response. I said that it was a pity that people in Llancarfan and of Llancarfan and district only got together for funerals, so all that was intended was some sort of reunion. We have gone much further than that, having held three dinners, three whist drives, a barbecue, a craft fair, a quiz, a village walk as well as monthly meetings at the Fox and Hounds on the first Tuesday of every month. However the biggest thing that we have done is the printing of the Newsletters which have been enjoyed by all of our members and I am sure, also, by many non-members. For this, Mr Editor we are very grateful to you not only for the amount of work which you have put-in on our behalf but also the thoughtfulness and attention to detail which you have displayed in your articles and printing of reader's letters. At this stage I am reminded that Ernie Badcock was

known as Mr Llancarfan and I have the feeling that we have found a new Mr Llancarfan who is just as modest. May I on behalf of all our readers say thank you and may you long continue to write many more Newsletters. Shall we take a leaf out of Alistair Cooke's book and say 'Letter from Llancarfan'?

To the rest of our readers I would like to say that John can only continue to give us letters from Llancarfan if he is supplied with sufficient material. So, readers, keep writing articles for him to print. John moved to Llancarfan in 1968 so he is dependent on other people for information from before that time. When I wrote the articles on Bill and Doris Watts, I was hoping that it would spark-off a lot of people to write about their parents or people of character in Llancarfan. We are still waiting to hear in more detail of the like of Tudor Liscombe, Joe Lewis, Ruth Jenkins, David Harris and family, Wally Lougher. Some more Griffith's (Dai and Morris); Morris Sweet; schoolmasters Davies', Samuel, Lewis, Evans etc. and their staff. Ivor and Jenny Weight, Frank Booker, now 94 years young, Tom Morgan, Penonn, Vivian Thomas, Pancross, Emylyn Williams, Aberogwn. There must be many more, but all these mentioned were Llancarfan characters.

During the past year we have been very busy organising events to spread the word of the Society. We have decided that during the next year we will be concentrating on three major events: 1. A repeat of the Llancarfan walk, with the inclusion of Llancadle, Llanbethery and Llantrithyd, if there is a demand. 2. Craft Fair and Barn Dance at Pancross. 3. Annual Dinner in September. The walks will be on May Day, the Craft Fair on the first Saturday in July when we have arranged a DRY day!

Thank you all for your support and may we go from strength to strength and all have a Happy New Year.
Sincerely, Phil Watts.

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Llancarfan School during the Second World War by Barbara Milhuisen

I started school on the 17th April 1939 when I was 5 years and 5 months - my friend Margaret Griffiths the same day - she was not yet 5. At the same time Peter Newton, followed two days later by Ann Williams and then Gwyneth Fairfax. Tony Thomas did not start until the following November; like his illustrious brother he did not need as much education as us lesser mortals.

These details were taken from the School Admission Book which also shows that my mother, then Dorothy Mary Evans, entered the school on 1st May 1916 with her sister Edith, followed two years later by brother Ric (Dick) and eleven years later by sister Glenys. The Headmaster in my mother's day was Mr Rees Davies. Two other Headmasters, Mr T. Idris Davies and Mr T. E. John intervened, followed by Mr G. F. Davies who moved to Maesteg in 1941 to be succeeded in Llancarfan by Mr W. J. Samuel.

My grandmother cleaned the school at that time and I would be given messages for her by Mr Davies. I well recall his very clear blue eyes which to a young child appeared penetrating and forced you to look directly at him. War was declared at the end of the year and Dick went off to join the Army. My grandmother moved with Glenys to her sisters, out of the area and my mother temporarily took over her job. She gave this up when my grandmother, on a visit to Llancarfan, died suddenly in Woodlands, the home of Mr and Mrs Liscombe. A few years afterwards her death was followed by that of Edith who returned from nursing service in Africa and India and lived long enough to reach England and then to be buried in Llancarfan. Another brother, in later years, after travelling abroad came to stay with Dorothy and again died suddenly with a funeral service at Llancarfan Church. My memories of school are all of war-time. The school bell was not rung after 1939 and has not been rung since.

The school was divided into three classes and I recall that the number on the roll was 55; this number would be written up in chalk on a small blackboard above the fireplace. The number changed slightly when the evacuees joined us. The first I remember was George Hansen who arrived on 4th November 1940. He of course remained with his family, married and settled in the Vale. Among others were Peter and Anne Finch. Peter kept returning to Llancarfan and considers that the education he received there was that which has most affected his life. He now lives a few miles from my brother Clive who has settled in Kent.

There were three doors, two at the back and one at the side. The first door came from the back, through the girl's lobby to the Infant class. From this lobby one could also go to Miss Thomas' class. From the other back door one went through the boy's lobby. Here there were pegs for hanging up clothes and wash hand basins with only cold water taps, yellow soap and a smell of Jeyes fluid.

Toilet arrangements were primitive. At the rear, separating the gardens were the toilets - male to the left and female to the right. Just two each, the headmaster and senior boys sharing one, the same for senior girls and female teachers. The reason why there were such good gardens, I am sure, is because the contents of the lavatories was put into the ground when they were emptied once a year.

Heating was by coal fires with giant guards; the senior boys and the headmaster would carry coal from the coal-house and see that the fires were kept going all day.

Milk was delivered in churns, at one time by Lady Boothby (Fonmon Castle). Milk was free for everyone; it was scalded by heating on the coal fires and in the afternoon what was left was served cold but difficult to drink with so much skin floating around.

After Mr Davies left and Mr Samuel arrived the teaching staff of the school consisted of Mr Samuel for the top classes. Miss Maimie Thomas, later Mrs Sid Watts, the middle classes and Miss Connie Griffiths the infants class.

Miss Griffiths was very firm and strict. All were able to read by the time they left her class

at just over 6. From that class to Miss Thomas and the happiest of any period in any educational establishment and I may say that I did not finish my education until I was 39. In Miss Thomas' class we learned to write; before it was printing, still only with a pencil. Here I learned the foundations of other skills which were later to be my career. My grandmother had taught me to knit but Miss Thomas taught us plain and purl and to follow patterns. It was also part of the curriculum that when we moved to the next class on certain afternoons the girls would be with Miss Thomas and the boys with Mr Samuel. I think the boys were expected to see to their gardening plots but I can also recall in the very early years, the girls having gardening lessons.

Miss Thomas had endless patience with all of the subjects that she taught and I can even remember her playing the piano on the few occasions when Miss Griffiths was absent. I think she found it easier to teach me to hem and to do other embroidery stitches than my aunt Glenys who is left handed but Glenys had natural gifts and abilities with her hands that Miss Thomas recognised and encouraged.

I was not so happy when I moved to Mr Samuel's class for two reasons. There was pressure to work and to pass the dreaded scholarship; the 1944 Education Act had not arrived and in order to gain further education it would have been necessary to pay. How could my mother support this, for we lived in a rented house, owned by Mr Tudor Liscombe and my father was serving in the R.A.F.? The 1944 Act did of course take away the necessity for paying but one still had to pass an examination. My other problem was my little brother Clive: whereas I was not too keen on school, he from the time he could walk, because we lived in the nearest house to the school, plagued my life by wandering into the school whenever the fancy took him and that seemed to be every day. Mr Samuel would then instruct me to take him home. He relented when Clive was still not 4 and on 2nd November 1943 he was enrolled along with Evelyn Pilot and John Cheal who had also been evacuated to Llancafán but only from Cardiff.

I mentioned that it was necessary to work to pass the scholarship but when did we ever find the time? I seem to remember so many interruptions caused by air-raid warnings - these were sounded from St Athan and at the first ominous wail we would abandon our books and run. There was supposed to be an orderly process in which each child was allocated a house to go to and wait for the all-clear. We lived at Ty Uchaf (now High Lanterns), the house nearest the school, consequently many more than should have, fled there. An area had been prepared under the stairs which were stone and so it was a secure place. Blankets were also there for night visits. We were supposed to carry our gas masks which had been issued early in the war. My mother was quite happy to see us arrive but refused to stay under the stairs, day or night, and she would go into the garden taking Clive with her. I always 'created' when he was put into his gas mask which, for babies, meant being completely enclosed. I was glad when he grew too big for it. When the all-clear sounded we were not so quick as on the outward journey!

There were other distractions; children were encouraged to help the war effort. This meant going out to pick hips for rose hip syrup. We had many other rambles and excuses

for going out in the afternoons - trips to 'Bromwell' were commonplace to pick blackberries and crab apples and in late Autumn, to shake the hazel trees for nuts. Another effort, as far as the girls were concerned, to help our country was knitting for the troops. I knitted a khaki scarf for Dick (I wonder if he ever wore it). I was learning to turn a heel to knit socks for my father but I know the war was over before I achieved this.

Mr Samuel had a car and drove to school daily from Cardiff. I seem to remember other visitors had to rely on public transport as far as Bonvilston or Llancadle Cross and then walk. The school nurse was a regular visitor arriving this way - she always told us to clean our teeth with Gibbs SR toothpaste! I only recollect a medical examination by a doctor once.

Other visitors to the school included Sir Ivor Thomas. I think he must have been a school Governor; we were expected to stand up when he arrived. We were also visited by the American Army and a General, I think he was, gave a talk and invited questions. We were more interested in the chewing gum and empty Lucky Strike packets they so carelessly discarded. Sweets were rationed and extra candy most acceptable.

There were other foreign visitors and these were prisoners of war. Germans we never saw except one on the end of a parachute who was shot down and landed somewhere near Gowlog but Italians there were in plenty. We loved to sit on the school wall and chat to them but Mr Samuel did not approve; he never spoke to them and if we were caught we had to go in from playtime early.

Morning assembly was taken by Mr Samuel and he would read a homily every day, one I recall, about the evils of alcohol, illustrating it with the story of how one man's possessions went through the door of the shop which sold the alcohol. We were never asked to explain how this was, so it was an exercise to fathom out: the possession first had to be sold to raise the money which then went in his pocket and finally through the door.

Mr Samuel read a lot to us; I was completely indoctrinated with his stories of Winston Churchill and in particular for us to understand that someone like Winston Churchill had problems with his education but the most important thing to do was read. Mr Samuel imparted much information about Canada and in particular the Prairies. I was determined even then to go to that country when I was older. I later learned a lot more from Mr Williams of Ford Farm who told me about Moose Jaw where I later lived for a couple of years.

There were some attractions that were legitimate and others were not. If we lived in the village we would go home mid-day for dinner but the children who came from Llanbethery and Llantrithyd on the school bus brought sandwiches; I think they were supposed to stay in the school grounds. The teachers had a very short mid-day break, they would take only half an hour to dash home in turn, Mr Samuel accompanying either Miss Griffiths or Miss Thomas.

One cold day in February there was a mass breakout, Harold Fairfax, Hubert Taylor and David Evans and I don't know how many girls did not return until 2.00 p.m. The punishment was one stroke of the cane for the boys - Mr Samuel did not believe in caning girls. Maybe he would have done so if he realised we had been smoking old man's beard in clay pipes.

The war completely dominated our lives and our actions. There were notices displayed in strategic places - coughs and sneezes spread diseases; trap the germs by using your handkerchief. Just inside the Fox and Hounds was a notice 'Careless talk costs lives'. We were told to keep our eyes open for silver paper and any strange looking shapes. We were convinced one day that we had found a bomb and persuaded Mr Samuel to walk down to the Cliff meadows where a large brown bottle was half submerged in the river - all in school time.

Not only were sweets and food rationed but so were clothes. Everyone was allowed so many coupons. One day we had our feet measured in school: I am not sure for the boys but if a girls foot measured 8 1/2 inches she was allowed an extra 20 coupons. My feet measure just that size today, but I qualified as my second toe when stretched is longer than my big toe - my mother was very pleased.

There were some happy times when my father was in the R.A.F. None of my contemporaries had a father in the armed services and wherever he was posted, even when abroad in France, he would write to me. According to Miss Thomas the letters were interesting and she would read them aloud to us. Then there were Dick's visits. He was stationed in Cardiff Castle for a while, I am not sure if he was meant to have an army car and drive out for a few hours to see Dorothy, he always passed the school for us to see him. I was very unhappy when he was posted off to Italy.

I left Llancarfan School in July 1945 to follow in my mother's footsteps except that she had to walk to Moulton to have a lift in Norman Hardy's cattle lorry to get to the County School. I had a second-hand bike, but not for long.

Notes The old toilet-block is still there - in the mid-70's Gareth Price felled a diseased elm tree which went through the roof at one end! The school was connected to main drainage at the same time as the rest of the village in about 1974 but in the intervening time, after Barbara's schooldays, a septic tank was built in the lower part of the school gardens - does anyone remember when? Barbara's uncle Dick is the Dick Evans who wrote some of his memories for us in Newsletter 10 and the letter which appeared more recently (Newsletter 15), Tony Thomas now farms Pancross and has also written for us.

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A bird mystery

A few months ago Pam Higgs and Pat Kilday wondered about a strange, raucous bird-call from the wood. Derek Higgs told me about this and a few days later I heard the same beast, sounding a bit like one half of a donkey's 'hee-haw' and nothing like any British bird

I know. Two days later I had a fleeting glimpse of a large black bird, pheasant-sized but more rotund. Another sighting a few days later confirmed this, the colour being a dusty greyish black like the top of a jackdaw's head and the body distinctly dumpy. After a bit of searching and various suggestions we decided on Guinea Fowl and this is now confirmed by the gamekeeper for the shoot. They were introduced with the pheasant chicks and will probably become naturalised. Their cry when disturbed serves as a warning of foxes, dogs and other intruders.