



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 23: September 1989

The evening of Monday, August 7th was fine and quite warm for the barbecue at Abernant, kindly organized by Phil and Ruth Watts. Judging from the attendance of more than 70 members, it was one of the most popular functions which the Society has held. The added pleasure was the discovery that the event also celebrated our treasurer's birthday - another milestone in fact; I shall not embarrass him by saying which, but he won't see thirty again!

During the evening, Gwynne Liscombe, resplendent in chef's tall hat, worked wonders with the barbecue, fed us very well and we still managed to make a small profit for the Society. Thank you to Andrew Griffiths for lighting-up the garden and to everyone for manning the bar, running the raffle, generally keeping things organized and washing-up.

Phil and Ruth have done so much for the Society that I can't resist telling you that they became grandparents for the first time a couple of weeks after the barbecue. Congratulations to Vivienne and Meurig on the birth of their son, Rhodri.

It is a pleasure to see that the PHAB Year Book for 1989 reproduced our editorial on the Boxing Day duck-egg race. You will remember that the proceeds of the race were shared between Maesycod Special School and the physically handicapped, under the auspices of PHAB, for which Gwynne Liscombe is Divisional Director.

Announcements

Despite the fact that the barbecue was announced in previous Newsletters, several people said that they did not know about it. In future we shall include announcements and notice of future events under this sort of largetype heading on the front page of the Newsletter. Even if you don't read the rest of the Newsletter, have a look at the first page when you open it. Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner will be held in Rhoose Community Hall on Saturday, October 28th, cost £7.00 per head. A booking form was sent-out with the last Newsletter but I got into trouble for asking that it should be returned to Phil Watts who will be on holiday later in September. If you have not booked yet, please send the booking-form and cheque to Barbara Milhuisen at 73 Tynewydd Road, Barry, S. Glam. The earlier returns to Phil Watts will be dealt with so don't worry.

An interesting find: Those who walk in the village will have noticed that Paul Schmit of Brook Cottage is having a porch built on the southern side of the house. During the digging for foundations some of the paving slabs had to be lifted and one was discovered to be a gravestone. It was a bit time-worn but still legible and recorded the interment in 1851 of "Martha, wife of William Lougher of this parish, aged 27". The family tree of the Lougher family, researched by Major Edwin Lougher and to which we have referred before, records only one William Lougher (1797-1873) at the appropriate time, founder of the Treguff-branch of the family. Today, the family is still at Treguff and Philip Watts showed the stone to the 20th century William Lougher but the trail goes cold here, for the first William's wife was not a Martha and the family is so large that many members will not appear on the family tree. A bit of genealogical research will be needed to go further.

How the gravestone came to be a paving-slab is another question. Possibly it was a reject which had been broken in the making, as the stone was not entire. It is more likely that the slab migrated to Brook Cottage garden when the Methodist Chapel next door was sold to Andrew Vicari and the first steps taken in converting it to a private dwelling (late 1950's or early 60's?). Sadly very few of the headstones have survived either here or at the Baptist Chapel and with them have vanished various items of local history.

Donations: Further donations have been received toward the Childrens Sports fund which we acknowledged in the last Newsletter. These were from Cars Cardiff, Evan Williams Jr., Philip Jenkins and Powells Garages. We are grateful for these, and the previously acknowledged donations. They have gone into a separate fund which we shall use in future for the specific benefit of the children rather than losing it in general Society finances.

Flaxland Ever since coming to Llancarfan, I have wondered about the names of Flaxland Fach and Flaxland Fawr. A few days ago, cycling through Fonmon we came across several fields of flax which I have never before seen in South Wales. It must have been glorious when in full flower - sheets of pale blue - but we saw it only as it was being scooped up by a combine harvester, presumably for cattle food or linseed oil. Is this the derivation of the name? Does anyone know? Do any of our farming members know whether flax was once more widely grown as a crop in the Vale - maybe even for linen making?

The building of Woodlands

Newsletter 22 contained the answer to Gwynne Liscombe's quiz question about the house which had not changed since its building. It also contained an error. Gwynne points-out that Woodlands, the house in question, was not built by his father as the editorial stated. The real story is interesting and will appear in a future newsletter.

The Hedge at Llantrythyd

The note in the last Newsletter commenting on the damage to the hedge in the lane between Carmel and Llantrythyd, asked who could have sprayed it with weedkiller. Fortunately the note said "I don't think it can be anything else". Fortunately, because it wasn't weedkiller after all, though the true explanation is one of equally amazing

irresponsibility. Joan Scott-Quelch tells me that a road surface burning machine was used along that length of lane despite the drought and despite the fire-risk of ripe barley and dry grasslands beside the road. Various folk complained, and Joan in her role as Clerk to the Community Council, remonstrated with the highway authority. However, a great deal of damage has been done, some of which will be there for a year or more to come. Since the few drops of rain which we have had, a few new leaves have appeared but it is still pretty miserable. A report of the whole affair appeared in the local paper, but your editor missed it. I am also indebted to Heather Adams who telephoned me to say that she and Fred had seen the immediate aftermath, with some of the road repairing equipment still nearby.

Letters from Readers

From Phil Watts

Please find enclosed some notes, given to me by Mrs Letty Gardner of the Manse, Llancadle. Although she is not a member, she is able to read the Newsletters of friends. She makes comments on people who used to live in Ty-to-Maen and the use that she made of the railway passing along Llanbethery Moors. She has since contacted me to say that the railway closed 62 years ago in 1927.

She mentions her brother, Evan Bealing. I did not know him but I did know her mother, Elizabeth Ann Bealing of Cuba Cottage, next to the Green Dragon. Cassie Bealing, an unmarried sister lived there also. Mrs Bealing was one of the old fashioned hard-working sincere people that could be found living in villages and playing an active part in village life. Mrs Bealing was a devoted church going person. I remember she used to ride to church from Llancadle when she was over 80 years of age, until a broken leg put a stop to this. I think my mother beat her by a couple of years as a bike-riding octogenarian. Mrs Bealing died in 1964 at the age of 93.

Those who know Letty will recall how, for many years she nursed a sick husband and now appears to be going one better than my mother by still driving a car as an octogenarian!

From Mrs Letty Gardner

The Gunson family lived in Ty-to-Maen in 1920 and their baby had the most wonderful pram I had ever seen. I am sure there wasn't one like it in the whole of the Vale. I used to see much of that baby because my brother (Evan Bealing) was courting the young girl that used to take him out and of course used to visit my home for an excuse to see my brother. Her name was Doris Bounds.

My father had that terrible flu in 1918 and Dr Miller of Cowbridge, being his doctor in those days, made the medicine up and, therefore, my mother used to send me to Cowbridge to collect it.

There were four trains a day, 8, 11, 4 and 8-o'clock and there was a halt at Llanbethery. I used to go on the eleven-o-clock and back on the four-o-clock. Having an aunt in Porth I

also used to travel on the Taff Vale Railway as far as Pontypridd then changed trains for Porth, to visit her.

The name of the station master at St Athan Road was Mr John and his wife was the baby nurse as we used to say in those days.

The stations were as follows: Lower Aberthaw, St Athan Road, Llanbethery Halt, St Mary Church Road, Cowbridge, (Aberthin Halt), Maendy, Ystradowen, (Llanharry), Llantrisant and Pontypridd Junction (change for Porth).

Editor's notes. The baby of the Gunson family was presumably Cicely, now Mrs Tyree of Florida, about whom a note appeared in Newsletter 12. According to C. Chapman's *The Cowbridge Railway* (1984) the Aberthaw line closed to passenger traffic in May 1930 and to goods, south of Beaupre siding, in November 1932. The two stations in brackets in the list above were added from details in this book. The TVR timetables referred to the halts as Llanbethery and Aberthin Platforms. Our previous article on the Aberthaw railway (Newsletter 8) asked whether any readers had photographs showing it in operation but so far Mrs Gardner's notes are the fullest recollections that we have received.

Electoral Registers: Over a year ago Frank Jameson very kindly spent some time at the County Records Office and collected together a set of xerox copies of Electoral Registers for the Parish, taken at ten-year intervals from 1850. They have proved invaluable in checking various details of articles and make interesting reading in themselves.

In Newsletter 6, Tony Thomas commented on all of the houses which he had once known to be lived in by Griffith's. A most intriguing statistic emerges from the registers for, in 1850 there were only two and then the following developments occurred. 1859:1, 1869:4, 1881:5, 1900:10, '10:13, '20:24, '31:30, '39:25, '49:12, '59:9, '69:3 and '79:2. Some of the early changes of course reflect the increasing emancipation of the populace - many more men became eligible to vote between 1850 and 1910 and women's voting first started in 1918 (over 30!) and 1928, so we would expect more Griffith's to appear just because more of them were so entitled. However, a thirty times increase from 1859 to 1930 seems unreasonable. The register as a whole did not grow this much. To echo Tony's question of "Where did they all go?", "Where did they all come from?". To what extent were they all related? - in a few cases we know, but can the remaining members of the family tell us more?

There are some other interesting things as well including names which seem to have disappeared. In 1900 and 1910, one Frederick Coleman was recorded living at "Fingerpost". The name reappears as "Noah Langford - Land near Fingerpost" in 1920. Presumably the fingerpost was a direction sign but who remembers where it was?

In 1881 Alfred Thomas Hughes lived at Crosstown "freehold rent in lieu of tithes, The Ecclesiastical Commissioners". Alfred Thomas was the vicar of this parish for many years and his name appears on the commemorative stone in the front-wall of the former Church

Hall, laid in 1912 (Newsletter 19).

Spellings are interesting and variable! Llancarfan was Llancarvan until 1920 when it appeared in both correct form and as Llancarfan. Llanbethery is also recorded as Lambethery or Lambithery while Llancadle sometimes drops its first L. Curnix, Cwrnix and Gwrnix all appear whilst Ford, predictably becomes Vord. We have already talked about Gold Oak which Les Griffiths identified for us as Gowlog.

Finally, the days of post restant in the countryside are gone, together with the post offices. Many of our writers have recalled the comings and goings of "Tom Shanks" who "slept rough" or "lived in a shed" and "disappeared for months on end". In 1920, for the first time, the electoral register records Thomas Shanklyn c/o The Postmaster, Llancarfan.

Corrections, Suggestions and Articles: After each issue of the Newsletter various folk tell me that "so and so" has found something wrong but not often do the corrections come my way. Please let me know because many of the things we write are a single person's memories and often those memories have faded with time. Worse still, the editor sometimes jumps to wrong conclusions. It will help to put the record straight if you can let us know of any errors. This time we already have two corrections, one from Gwynne Liscombe on the building of Woodlands and the other from Joan Scott-Quelch and Heather Adams concerning the hedges at Llantryhyd.

Another comes from Joyce Andrews, Fox and Hounds. In the last Newsletter, one of Ernie Badcock's diary entries identified the child who was killed in an air raid as the son of Geo. Gibbs but Joyce's recollection is that the name was Victor Gibbs. Enquiries reveal that he was Victor George Gibbs, known to the family and close friends as George.

Corrections, or notes for an article, can be sent to John Etherington, Ceffyl Du, Llancarfan, to Phil Watts at Abernant or any other Committee member who will pass them on.

Hedges, Fields and Woods in Llancarfan

by John Etherington

Llancarfan sleeps in a quilted fold of ancient landscape where soil-marks and some field boundaries have existed time out of mind. By contrast, our venerable church and the old houses, Garnllwyd, Llanvythin, the ruined Llantrithyd Place and others, are really quite youthful. Despite the lack of remains in the valley itself, we are overlooked by a magnificent Iron Age Hill Fort - Castle Ditches. Evidence of late-Iron Age and Roman occupation has been excavated at Whitton Lodge and much older, Neolithic tombs lie in the valley bottom at Tinkinswood and St Lythans. These are the burial places of the first farmers of our fertile Vale, over 5000 years ago. What sort of countryside did these former neighbours of ours inhabit?

Until very recently, historians told us that Britain was an impenetrable place of wildwood,

which persisted in many places until quite recent times. The past decade or two of scientific archaeology, backed-up by the evidence from preserved plant materials in peat bogs, ponds and lakes has knocked this idea on the head. Better techniques of excavation and aerial photography have also revealed the much greater extent of prehistoric cultivation than we ever suspected. The "Celtic fields" of the downs and moorlands were not alone in the landscape. They are simply those agricultural traces which have survived from Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age times because no-one was daft enough to cultivate such poor soils again, at least until the Napoleonic Wars when the devil drove, or in our mad twentieth century when great tracked machines can destroy anything.

Why did Rome come to Britain? Certainly not for a wasteland of wildwood and swamp, but to dispossess the owners of a rich cropland. The countryside which became Roman Britain in 43 A.D. was probably almost as open as today's landscape. "The Romans lived in some places that the medievals thought to be uncultivable, and sometimes their predecessors had done so long before." (Rackham 1986). Some hedges existed then but many came later: the oldest which we can date are pre-Norman but many more were planted between then and the time of the Great Enclosures (private Parliamentary enactments between about 1750 and 1815).

Botanists used to think of hedges as relatively uninteresting and newish, but the work of Dr Max Hooper, some 20 years ago, revealed their value in the interpretation of local history because many are quite old and can be dated, approximately, by the number of different shrubs they contain. Hooper's "rule" is that each thirty-yard section of hedge is likely to accumulate only one new species of shrub each century and, consequently, if it was planted with one species of shrub only, would be 500-600 years old when the average thirty-yard shrub-count was six. Almost all hedges planted within the last 200-300 years were of a single species, mainly hawthorn. These include all of the Parliamentary Enclosures Acts hedges. Prior to that time some multispecies planting was done and some of the very oldest hedges were woodland strips remaining after clearance (assarting) - it is for this reason that the "rule" gives only an approximate age but generally it effectively separates very old from the more recent Enclosures hedges (Hooper, Pollard & Moore 1974).

My former student Philip Masters made an extensive study of hedges and shrub numbers in this parish in the early 1970's and, by comparison with documentary evidence it is obvious that the rule works well here and that the valley bottom, roads and parish boundaries have very old hedges. About a quarter of all the hedges in Llanvythin have more than seven and a few have nine shrubs in the average thirty yard section, giving an age of 600-800 years which corresponds well with our knowledge of them as small, ancient enclosures of this monastic grange which was granted to Margam Abbey shortly after its foundation in the early 12th century. On the plateau above, the count is less, an average of 4.5, suggesting hedges planted in the 1500's long before the Great Enclosures. Again this fits with the oft-quoted observation of Rice Merrick (1598): "The Vale was a Champyon and open country without great store of inclosures; for in my time old men reported that they remembered in their youth that Cattel in sometime, for want of shade, to have from the Porte Way runne to Barry, which

is four miles distant." (The Porte Way is the modern A48).

Enclosure came early to the Vale then, and the wave of social change which was swept in by the Parliamentary Enclosures in the late 18th century had less effect here. Remnants of medieval open-field ploughing, the ridge and furrow so characteristic of midland-English counties have largely been destroyed by later cultivation of these enclosures in our parish, though occasionally when the sun glances low, I have seen traces near Flaxland and below Cemain. Peter Mathias has pointed-out a particularly good example to the south of Crosstown. The clay soils of the Lias shrink mightily in the drought - my garden often has cracks three or four inches across and a couple of feet deep. When it rains again the crumbling soil disappears down these chasms so it is hardly suprising that there are few vestiges of former ploughing even where the land has been under grass for centuries.

Cross-Green Hill is an ancient road eroded down deeply between the fields by the torrents of water which gushed down cart-tracks for centuries before Mr Macadam thought of his surfaces. The hedges are older than the church with hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn, wild rose, dogwood, wayfaring tree, spindle, aspen, wild privet, sallow (more than one species), cherry laurel (a rarity here in South Wales), English elm and wych elm, ash, oak, field-maple, elder, yew and some I may have forgotten. It is almost certainly a relic of the hillside woodland through which the prehistoric track made its way up the eastern side of the valley, in which case it is even older than the Iron Age Castle Ditches and maybe, even, the Neolithic long-barrow at Tinkinswood. It is not just the hedges but the individual shrub-plants which reach these amazing ages: hedge pleaching (laying), like coppicing of trees, rejuvenates the plants which grow up again and again from the cut bases and survive for much longer than an untouched mature tree which may die after a few centuries.

The old pollarded ash tree at the top of Cross Green hill, by the stile, has a cut branch which is over 50 years old and that branch is much less than a quarter the diameter of the trunk-base set in the hedge. At a guess it might be 300 or 400 years old, as are the scattered huge oaks in some of the field boundaries. One of the biggest is on the opposite side of the road to New Mill.

To the north Cross Green Hill the steep banks of the field are a shrubbery of hawthorn, blackthorn and blackberry bushes with glades full of wild-flowers which have escaped the ploughing and fertilizer which has destroyed them elsewhere. In the spring there are primroses, cowslips and their hybrid, the false-oxlip in all its variants between the two parents. There are also pink primroses and pink "oxlips" which I had always assumed to be hybrids with garden polyanthus (itself, bred from primrose and cowslip crosses, amongst others) but a botanical colleague from Oxford tells me that pink primroses are a natural wild variant, though garden hybrids do also turn-up.

The same hillside has early purple orchids, spotted orchids and a list of other flowers too long to mention here but totalling over 60 species without counting the shrubs or the 30 or so other flowers which grow in the wet soil of the springs further down the hill! Its

hedge-bottoms are green with dog's mercury from February onward, a plant which can only invade new hedges and woodlands very slowly. Almost all our hedges in the valley have this plant, evidencing their antiquity which is shared by the ancient-woods, Coed Garnllwyd and Coed Quinnet. By contrast, Coed-y-Crinallt above the village, is quite young: its huge elms which were felled after the Dutch elm disease fungus killed them 15 years ago, were about 170 years old and were planted into a steep field-enclosure of which the old erosion-terraces are still visible in places. Predictably Coed-y-Crinallt has little dog's mercury its place in early spring being taken by the bear garlic which most visitors notice via their noses! It is prettier though.

Coed Garnllwyd is a Nature Reserve maintained by the Glamorgan Wildlife Trust and is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated by the Nature Conservancy Council. It is filled with ancient-woodland plants including the uncommon herb-Paris, which also grows in a woodland corner at Broomwell, and the orchid, broad-leaved helleborine. Once a medieval coppice woodland, it is now a peaceful haunt for buzzards, badgers, foxes and countless woodland birds including the blue-tits which nest in boxes kindly provided by a University of Wales research group so that their family histories may be recorded. Last year, our cat proudly produced a bird-ringed corpse from which we later learned that the little creature had been hatched in Garnllwyd Wood ten months before, only to be brought into danger by our nut-feeder.

It is suprising how much elm there still is in the hedgerows of the parish. The disease got the big ones but only occasionally, where they stood in hedgerows did it spread through the roots and wipe-out the adjacent hedging plants and even then, only the small-leaved English elm was seriously damaged. The wych elm, recognized by its bigger leaves, was more resistant and rarely suffered so much. A new growth of English elm suckers is coming back, even in Coed-y-Crinallt, and a future generation will again see those 120-foot giants which used to shelter the village as the westerly gales tore through them. In the night, through our open bedroom window, the creaking and clamour was like a sailing ship, often punctuated by the crash of falling branches and trunks while the rooks squawked their irritation at the disturbance.

English Elm is notorious for suddenly shedding large branches, even in calm summer weather, and it may be for this as much as its use in coffin wood that the old proverb "Elem hateth man And waiteth" was coined.

When Dutch elm disease first came, the Parish Council asked a village working party to investigate the possibility of protecting the trees by injection. It included Derek Porter, Jim Grove, Ian Fitzherbert and myself but, sadly, we concluded that it would be too expensive. With hindsight, this was welljustified as we now know that protection only worked with trees which the owners could afford to inject with fungicide every year for more than ten years.

Despite these losses and the fears for trees in other parts of the country, this valley is filling-up with timber. Fields which were grazed in 1930 are young woods and all of the old laid hedges, rows of trees. Even the bareness of Butais (Broadhayes?) field which was built-on only in the late 1960's has now been submerged in a green foam of foliage. We shall have to cut some of them soon, where they overhang properties and roads.

Rackham, O. (1986) *The History of the Countryside*. Dent. A scholarly review

by Britain's most prominent historian of woodland, hedgerow and land use.

Pollard, E., Hooper, M. & Moore, N. (1974) *Hedges and Hedgerows*. Collins New Naturalist. All you need to know about hedges.