

# LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 158

JUNE 2014



*This is a  
red herring...*

**Parish History.** With regard to the wall painting in St. Cadoc's Church, one of our oldest Church members, Mrs. Brock, tells us that it was on the side of the window between the South door and the Tower. It was not possible, she says, from the faint patches of colour which was all that remained, to say what it depicted. It is of course possible that the painting was deliberately defaced at the Reformation or during the Puritan Ascendancy, or it may have been merely neglected throughout the years. In any case, it is a great pity that it is no longer possible for us to see old churches such as St. Cadoc's as they were in the Middle Ages, with their walls a veritable picture-book of the Bible.

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While we were planning the enticements for this year's AGM, a respected colleague humorously enquired what the South Pole had to do with Llancarfan. We now know – and it's not just that our village revolves around it! But the query *does* raise an issue always to be addressed in compiling this newsletter. How far do the bounds go? Geographically, how far should we reach to reflect our 'community of interest'? Mentally too – how deeply should we dig into our individual curious pockets of knowledge and enthusiasm? At times it's been said that this newsletter has too minutely documented a particular family tree, or an ebullient personality. I'm as guilty as anyone, because I have been known to be fascinated by obscure topics (which, I'm told, are lucky to find any echoes of shared interest)! This is no new conundrum of course; the bounds of our landscape, allegiances, administrative borders, even beliefs have been constantly re-defined and hedged about by the changes of history. But anyway – this present issue *has* reached out beyond our parochial bounds & turned into a 'Beyond the Border' one. (You'll have noticed of course that I nick the 'Beyond the Border' reference from St. Donats, which this summer revives its rather splendid 21<sup>st</sup> 'three-day festival of stories & music from Wales and across the world'.) Alternatively you *could* try cycling to the South Pole like Maria Leijerstam. Her wonderful talk to your AGM was a splendid distraction, which allowed us all to be re-appointed to our Society roles while no-one was looking. Sadly though, Graham Brain has resigned for now, owing to work demands. But we're delighted that Barbara Milhuisen agreed to continue to be our President for another three splendid years. Thanks go to all, not least our membership.

## TRADITION HAS IT . . .

This telling phrase is often used to gloss over an admission that we don't really know the truth about some 'fact' of history. Experts and enthusiasts alike use it to avoid accusations of inaccuracy when the real facts emerge. However, it *can* have a more positive use, because at times a 'tradition' *can* prove to have some basis in history. Three instances come recently to mind.

You may by now have seen the excellent re-display of early crosses in the refurbished 'Galilee Chapel' in Llantwit Major church (not to mention their exemplary new kitchen, loos and meeting space). One of these stones was dug up (in 1789) by Iolo Morganwg, prompted by his childhood memories. A very old man had told young Iolo of the 'tradition' that this memorial lay beneath the earth, the stone having tumbled into the newly-dug lengthy grave of 'Will the Giant'.<sup>1</sup> The Samson Pillar *did* lie there, and you can see it today.

Then again, well worth reading is *The Search for Richard III*, a fine account of Philippa Langley's obsessive pursuit of 'The King's Grave' in Leicester. She knew that 'tradition had it' that Richard's post-Bosworth corpse was hurried into a grave in the (now lost) monastic Greyfriars Church. And – you could knock us down with a feather! – Richard the Third's skeleton was indeed to be found there, spookily under the 'R' of 'Reserved' (or 'R' for 'Richard!') in what was now a car park of Leicester's Social Services.

The third 'tradition has it' concerns our own wall paintings. We talk truthfully of the great surprise in recent years when those hints of pigments beneath the lime wash turned out to be clues to what are now recognised as among the most important mediaeval wall paintings found in recent times in a British church. But for at least a century, red herring accounts of *something* being under the St. Cadoc's limewash had been circulating.

Probably the earliest of these accounts was recorded in the Llancarfan chapter of Marianne Spencer's *Annals of South Glamorgan* (1913)<sup>2</sup>. She lodged with the Loughers at Llanvythin whilst researching this chapter<sup>3</sup>, and she would surely have talked with the then vicar, the Reverend Alfred Thomas Hughes. Consequently she was able to record (p.96) the following :

'In the restoration . . . [*that is, 1875 or perhaps even 1907. Ed.*] . . . all the colour-wash was removed from the inside of the church walls, when they were found to have been stencilled with stars. On the wall of the south aisle,

<sup>1</sup> *Recollections & Anecdotes of E. Williams*, by Elijah Waring, 1850, p.63f.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of this book was wonderfully re-united with Llancarfan by Jeff Thomas of Masterton, New Zealand, it having escaped from the 'Llancarfan Lending Library' in (perhaps) the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century. See Newsletter 155.

<sup>3</sup> See Newsletters 8, 26 & 63

immediately inside the south door, a large stencilled figure of the Virgin Mary and Child was uncovered, but was again covered with white-wash as it was considered to be Roman Catholic.<sup>4</sup>



Today we are indeed familiar with an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but certainly not 'and Child', high above the south door. A surprisingly small image of the Virgin Mary is shown blessing St. George's dragon-slaying endeavours. Remarkably, this seems a unique representation of such a blessing on a British church wall. But the puzzle is that our conservators found this image under c. 25 layers of lime wash, and did not discover any traces of a Virgin on any upper layer.

The 'stars' mentioned by Spencer are also puzzling, because today's visitors will instantly recognize not stars but the so-called 'red rose' (or 'wounds of Christ') stencil work between the major characters in the St. George tableau. [This stencil pattern is in fact not uncommon, and for instance can also be seen in a surviving wall-painting in Newton Nottage church near Porthcawl.]

So, the Spencer account does not appear to match present day discoveries. But then again, in 1907, the Rev Hughes was 78, and (don't we know it?) memory plays tricks, particularly if the vicar was recalling finds of the 1870s.

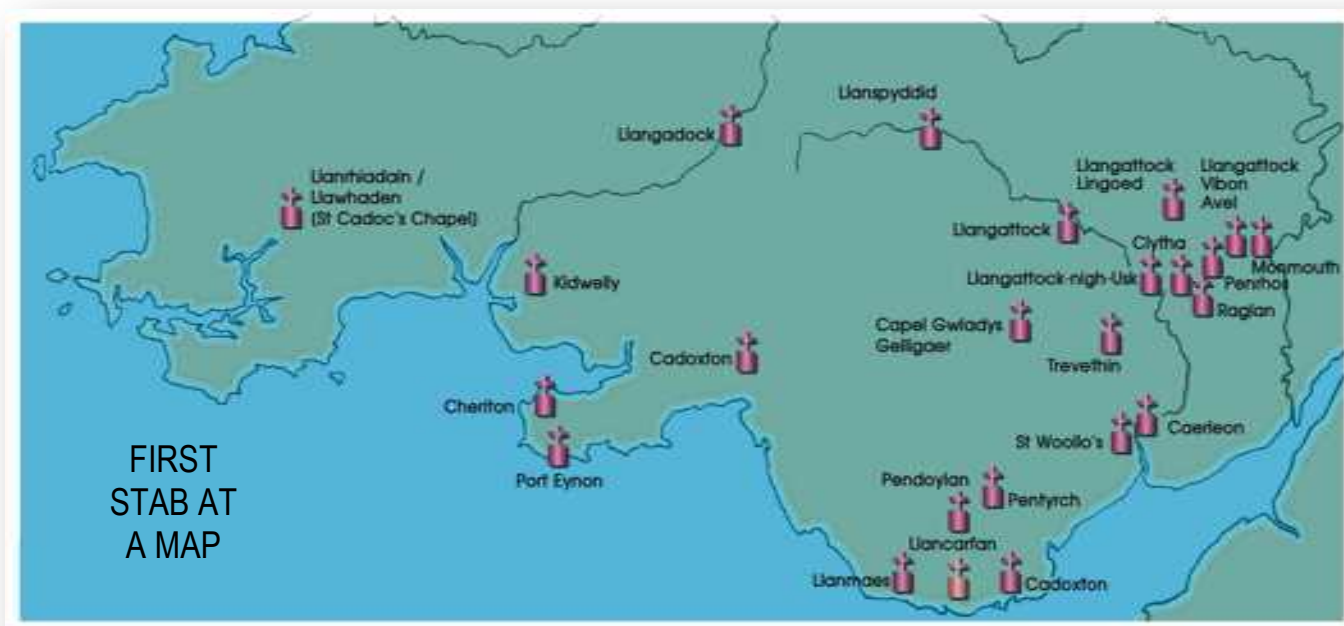
What price then the value of 'tradition has it'? (In passing, it's intriguing to find that a *Glamorgan Gazette* article re the restoration of St. Cadoc's – see footnote below – recalls another repeated conviction. It says 'Local tradition states that a subway led from the church to a field about a hundred yards off' – that is, to Culvery Field. This secret passage has yet to be rediscovered!)

Anyway, such 'traditions' should only encourage us to test the 'truths' we regularly trot out about our church and village. For instance, it is a 'truth universally acknowledged' that before the Reformation, all British churches were highly decorated with wall-paintings or colourful embellishments such as

<sup>4</sup> *The Glamorgan Gazette* of 20 September 1907 records that during that particular episode of restoration the 'west end wall has been plastered, and the walls inside are to be coloured afresh'. Did we know this?

ours. I'm happy not to doubt this – but all assertions merit testing in the light of evidence. Not knowing about 'all churches' (!), it seemed appropriate to research a manageable sample of churches on our local patch. St. Cadoc churches may or may not be representative, but it is reasonable to ask if they followed the 'painted church' tradition. A future newsletter will share some discoveries, but for now the following facts offer an intriguing starting point :

- There are *twenty-four* St. Cadoc churches/chapels in South Wales<sup>5</sup>, many of which are clustered around us in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- There is *one* more in the parish of Amlwch on Anglesey, *another* on the Clyde at Cambuslang, and *one* chapel near Harlyn Bay in Cornwall.
- There are a surprisingly *large number* of St. Cadoc churches, chapels and wells in Brittany, and there appear to be no more anywhere else.



You might agree that the geographical spread & cluster of these dedications in itself raises interesting questions, not least about the far-reaching impact of Llanccarfan. And again, we are justified in asking, if these churches celebrated their saints in paint, what memories survived, or evidence remained?

Meanwhile, I must repeat that 'the red herring' on the front cover is exactly that. It *doesn't* refer to Llanccarfan – though it could surprisingly easily have done so. Which only serves to underline how much of our history is reflected in other nooks and crannies of the Vale of Glamorgan. So watch this space.

<sup>5</sup> Owing to an electricity suppliers' 'computer error', our church found itself last year also paying the electricity bill for St. Cadoc's near Neath, so St. Cadoc's, Llanccarfan is presently credited with a 'rebate' of over £1000!



## WHAT'S OCCURIN'? OR MAYBE EVEN OCCUR'D!

**CHURCH NEWS** The Easter Vestry Meeting on April 30<sup>th</sup> proved one of the last activities here for Rev. Dr. Mark Dimond, who has been holding the fort for a year here during Peggy Jackson's stint as acting Dean of Llandaff. Now Peggy is licensed to St. Mary's Church, St. Fagans, while Mark is to be congratulated on his appointment as Chaplain for the Archbishop of Wales. Perhaps Mark's blowing out of the One Year candle symbolised the blow many villagers feel in both his and Peggy's departure. We understand there will be no likely appointment of their successor until around September.



Rev. Dr. Mark Dimond  
inspects his candle

The other blow is the retirement of Jean Veysey from her long and loving service as Vicar's warden<sup>6</sup>. Jean will surely continue to give power to the church's elbow, but now Rhodi Gray has inherited her role, and Sue Taylor



Sue Taylor, Mrs Dimond, Rhodi Grey,  
Mark Dimond, Jackie Hartery & Jean Veysey

is People's Warden (a role formerly filled by June Studley). So it was fond farewells all round at the last PCC, and some anxiety as to how the Summer will be duly serviced. However, please note that the Archbishop of Wales will be taking the communion service in Llancafarn on 20 July at 11.15 am. (Also 08.30 at Penmark, and 10.00 at Llantrithyd.)

### SPACED OUT AT THE COMMUNITY CINEMA

There was a sigh of relief in the Village Hall on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May as not only did Sandra Bullock return safely to earth from battling a Dyson-load of space debris, but our new projection & sound system proved wonderfully successful in showing *Gravity*, a stunning exercise in computer graphics and 'cinema as spectacle'. <http://llancarfan cinema.co.uk/> is the website for news of future showings, *Gravity* being the last in the present season. The site is currently announcing the date of the AGM as *Saturday 12 July*, and celebrating the achievements of the last year – in which your cinema picked up multiple awards, a grant for comfortable seating, an HD projector, an electric screen, and a visit by a Government Minister.

<sup>6</sup> See Newsletter 156 for Jean's humorous observations & advice to her successors!

## **SHEILA MACE**

The loss in March of Sheila to Mick, his family, and the community continues to be felt, and has been marked both formally and informally, by this Society. Our president Barbara Milhuisen paid a Society tribute to Sheila at our AGM, noting how she had played a significant role (not least as our Secretary) in its formation and development over the years. Recognition too of Mick's devoted support to Sheila in her painful decline was sympathetically acknowledged, and his bravery in the face of loss is an example to us all.

## **SHOW FORETASTE**

Look out shortly for the Village Show & Summer Fair programme – but meanwhile the timetable has arrived for you to Red Letter in your calendars :

- 9.00 am Show open for set-up and entries, then the judging.
- 2.00 pm Public opening – Hall, Churchyard, Tennis Court & Private Road.
- 4.00 pm Show prize presentation & bar opens
- 6.00 pm Hog Roast
- 8.00 pm Live music

## **VILLAGE SCHOOL : 'A HAPPY INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY'**

Jill Davies, Chair of Governors for our Llancarfan Primary School, takes pleasure in passing on encouraging feedback following March's Estyn<sup>7</sup> inspection in March this year. The report notes that 'standards in literacy and numeracy are good overall & the learning experiences are broad & balanced', that 'the staff & governing body share a common vision' and (good to know) that "a strength of the school is the number of very beneficial links with the surrounding community.' We're part of them, and they're part of us.

Unpicking aspects of the report, Jill reflects praise of 'the professional and committed manner [of] the teaching staff, support staff and governors'. She notes with particular pleasure that the report 'highlights that the school is a happy inclusive environment, where pupils enjoy lessons, are well motivated and demonstrate good attitudes to learning - to ***Be the best we can be.***'

## **HOUSE OF CORRECTION**

History is notoriously difficult to pin down to fact, but I can't even get the present right. Following my March piece re Sherlock in Walterston, Non Evans kindly corrects that it isn't 'the Booth household', that her home is officially 'Trewallter Fawr', and that she's lived in her wonderful 'ty goch' for 42 years! I had chatted to Nigel, & didn't want to bother Non – but mae'n flin gyda fi. Oh yes, and the centre-spread school Nativity was of course 2013 not 2014. And, Barbara, I *will* promise to spell 'Milhuisen' properly, honestly.

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<sup>7</sup> Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales.





Misty Exmoor from Castle Ditches



St. Donat's tree



St. Mary's



A blur of Cardiff Morris at the Fox 20 May 2014

**PETANQUE YOU VERY MUCH**  
Phil Watts, Barbara Milhuisen & your society planted these glorious daffodils. And a 4 May gathering of friends launched this new bench, challenging all to June 22nd's Ruth Watts Cup.



**OUR /**  
**The V**  
**send o**  
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**of St.**





**BRING . . . . INTO SUMMER**



St. Mary's Bonvilston

**HISTORICAL BONVILSTON**  
 From April to September, St. Mary's Church is displaying a boldly staged exhibition of the village's history. Very much worth a pop in (Mon-Fri) to see how our neighbouring church plans to reach out and share the stories that shaped the community.



**ARCHDEACON DEPARTS**  
 Rev. Canon. Peggy Jackson had a hearty farewell service at The Six Bells on 17 March, having been licensed as Priest-in-Charge of St. Mary's, Bonvilston, on 9th April.



**A SHAGGY DOG TAIL . . .** Lewi (left), took a short holiday with Bugsie Angell, (right). Granny Sarah walked them along the lower Carfan, high with Spring rains. Bugsie fell in & struggled with the torrent, then was trapped in swirling branches. Lewi jumped in, cleared the log jam, and helped Bugsie to safety. Our Hero!



## A STORM-FALLEN TREE & THE MIRACULOUS ST. DONATS' CROSS

May Day walkers may well remember our 2010 sunny circumnavigation of the woodlands & foreshore to the West of St. Donats, during which we viewed the now-vanished lifeboat operation, and St. Donats Church<sup>8</sup>. When Pen & I walked there again this March, we were shocked to find trees wrecked by Winter storms, including the 'Jousting Field' tree shown on the previous page.

By strange coincidence, this March's dog walk happened almost exactly 455 years after another dramatic storm on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1559. This brought down an ancient ash tree - a fall which, for political/religious reasons, came near to ruining Sir Thomas Stradling, owner of St. Donats. It was the 'miraculous cross', shown beneath this print, that threatened his downfall.

The cross was discovered in the stump of the fallen ash. A vertical split revealed a very distinctive 'pattée', perhaps 'Celtic' cross, about a foot high, depicted in the very heart of the tree. The 'miraculous' appearance of this religious icon was terribly timed. Elizabeth the First had only been five months on the throne. She inherited from her Catholic sister a Britain riding the big dipper of religious practice, first into Protestantism, then Queen Mary's Catholicism, and now back to Protestantism under Elizabeth.

This left Sir Thomas very vulnerable. If he'd wanted to keep his head down, a miraculously revealed cross, famed far and wide, was the last thing he needed. He had been a potent MP under Mary, & a committed Catholic. Royal reaction was slow, but by Spring 1561 he was a prisoner in the Tower. His petition to the Queen, as a 'prisoner in your grace's house', is poignant:

' . . . [A]bout Easter 1559 certain trees were cast down by the wind in a park of your orator's in Wales, amongst the which there was one tree . . . in the very top or heart whereof was the picture of a cross . . . the which cross your orator . . . caused four pictures thereof to be painted . . .

Your orator is very sorry that he had not first found means to have made your Grace privy thereof . . . for if he had known or thought that your highness or your Council would have . . . taken it in ill part, he would not for anything have done it. And forasmuch as that [which] he did therein was not done upon any seditious purpose or ill intent, but only of ignorance . . . your orator most humbly beseecheth . . . that this his imprisonment may be a sufficient mitigation of your Highness's displeasure conceived against him . . .'

Royal injunctions against 'abused images' were re-imposed in June 1559. Just how long Sir Thomas lay in prison for his 'feigned miracles' is not known.

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<sup>8</sup> See Mike Crosta's account in Newsletter 142.

## **THE MARIA-THON : A TRICYCLE RIDE TO THE SOUTH POLE**

Graham Brain was still warming in the afterglow of his brilliant bike ride down Britain's extremes when he got wind of another epic journey. The little girl who had gone to Llancarfan school with Jo, the Brains' elder daughter, had spotted a gap in the record books. Maria Leijerstam discovered that no-one had ever cycled from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole. For this 35-year-old adventurer from Llantrithyd Deer Park the challenge was irresistible. Maria resolved to be the first person to bike to Antarctica's polar plateau.

This triumph under her belt, and invited by Graham to speak at our 6<sup>th</sup> of May AGM, Maria recounted her adventures to a rapt capacity audience. Why the Antarctic? Well, she explained, she'd already tested herself with marathons in the Sahara, and had come to a conclusion : 'Hot wasn't for me. I wanted cold.' So cold she got – minus 29 degrees centigrade of it.

Maria's ride began on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2013, using a remarkable White Ice Cycle designed by herself, boyfriend & her father, and built in collaboration with Inspired Cycle Engineering of Falmouth in Cornwall. ICE for short. She'd apparently fallen off a normal mountain bike countless times, practising in Siberia. So she hoped that a polar tricycle would be the answer, allowing her to travel recumbently, tackling ice and snow with dramatically low gearing.

The South Pole is uphill. It stands at 2835 meters above sea level – (alright, say three times the height of the Brecon Beacons)! It needed uphill pedalling through snow at 25% gradients, lying on her back, avoiding ice crevices, and only just getting the pedals round for stretches of up to 17 hours. Maria's epic was completed in a human-powered 10 days, 14 hours, and 56 minutes.

How about eating? Well, it took up to 3 hours to melt enough water to moisten the freeze-dried food – 'and there's almost no water in the ice out there'. Body heat was critical too, not least for keeping Maria's toothpaste warm and usable. Apparently her iPod only had 'an annoying' 20 songs to keep her company, so Maria learnt to love 'seeing and listening to nothing'. Solo then, with back-up only as the last resort, and without so much as a puncture repair kit, at last, two days after Christmas, Maria achieved the Pole.

Renewed congratulations, Maria, on an astonishing achievement, astonishingly told. And we must remember that her epic journey had its competition – there were two other bikers trying to get there before Maria, and they'd set out three weeks earlier. But they arrived three weeks after her.

Our profound thanks then for Maria's talk (see pictures overleaf), which raised from the audience £180 in donations to the Alzheimer's Society.



# White ice cycle

Local mega-athlete Maria Leijerstam (who lives on the Llantrithyd Deer Park) has been showered with praise for her triumph in being the First Person to cycle to the South Pole. Maria's account of her remarkable quest through the snows of Antarctica held a Society AGM audience spellbound by her achievements. She also offered unique inspiration to The Llancafarn Riders - those who on June 20th will set out for their 'Tour de Galle'. This charity-inspired circuit of Wales will take village school dads only four days, arriving back on 23 June after a 100 mile-a-day saddle-sore journey.



ABOVE : Maria hides from the elements, receives stern praise from our re-elected president, & pedals her beast of a tricycle.



Determined to make future headlines, and hoping to earn in excess of the £4000 they raised last year [see RIGHT], the team is at least 13-strong. Seen above with Maria [L to R] are riders Colin Smith, Rich Corkhill, Mike Marshman, the Snow Queen, Paul Rebhan, Martin Williams, Oli Spencer & Jim Barratt. Their sponsored charities are the School Fund, & Tros Gynnal Plant. See the [llanriders.businesscatalyst.com](http://llanriders.businesscatalyst.com) & the [Just Giving](#) page.





# NOW YOU SEE IT . . . CHANGES ON THE COASTAL ROAD



Now you see it - the bridge pillar of the railway from Aberthaw to Cowbridge - and now you don't. This nostalgic monument to seaside trips has disappeared in road widening at Burton Bridges.

On the other hand, what survives is the roadside's long-neglected Old Mill. Barely noticed in the marshes of the Thaw, this forgotten relic sits beneath a well-hidden anti-tank pillbox from WW2, and is only a short stride from the Berkerolles' fascinating ruin of East Orchard Castle.



## FROM THE INTER-NEST : *Mike Crosta's tales from a teacup*

Sitting as I am wont to do in a morning front room, I was sipping tea before plucking up courage for our village yoga class. Usually I watch the passersby, on foot or in cars, so much larger than they used to be. The vehicles that is. If I am honest, I am bird watching, and particularly appreciating the fit & lovely ladies of the village.

Since the particular day when I restarted using seed as well as peanuts, a different variety of feathered friends have appreciated our offerings. (Can anyone tell me why 20 kgs of peanuts cost £30, but 12.75 kgs of seed only £13?) We needn't have worried anyway about the decline of sparrows, judging by how many then arrived to Hoover up our seeds. And now here was a jay, never before in our front garden. Three young spotted woodpeckers also turned up at the same time, queuing on the feeder branch, almost daily visitors. So it's not just Blair's chickens.

And now, with a flutter of feathers a beautiful sparrow hawk has landed in our remaining moribund tree. It's a youngster, I think, as it doesn't seem too sure what to do. Where are all those tender sparrows that were here a second ago? Fortunately it puzzled over this for quite some time, so that I could properly appreciate it, admire its markings and its commanding presence. Those Hannibal Lector eyes. I doubt I'll see one that close again.

Another deckchair moment brought a young green wood-pecker searching for ants by the tree. It had a stand off dispute with a spotted woodpecker for ownership of our peanut feeder. The spotted won. Their colours were clear & bright in the setting sun, and me a fly on the wall of their private war.

*P.S.* Today (19/4/14) we spotted in our garden a large bird, too big to be a pheasant, and not looking like a turkey. Photographic evidence is available.

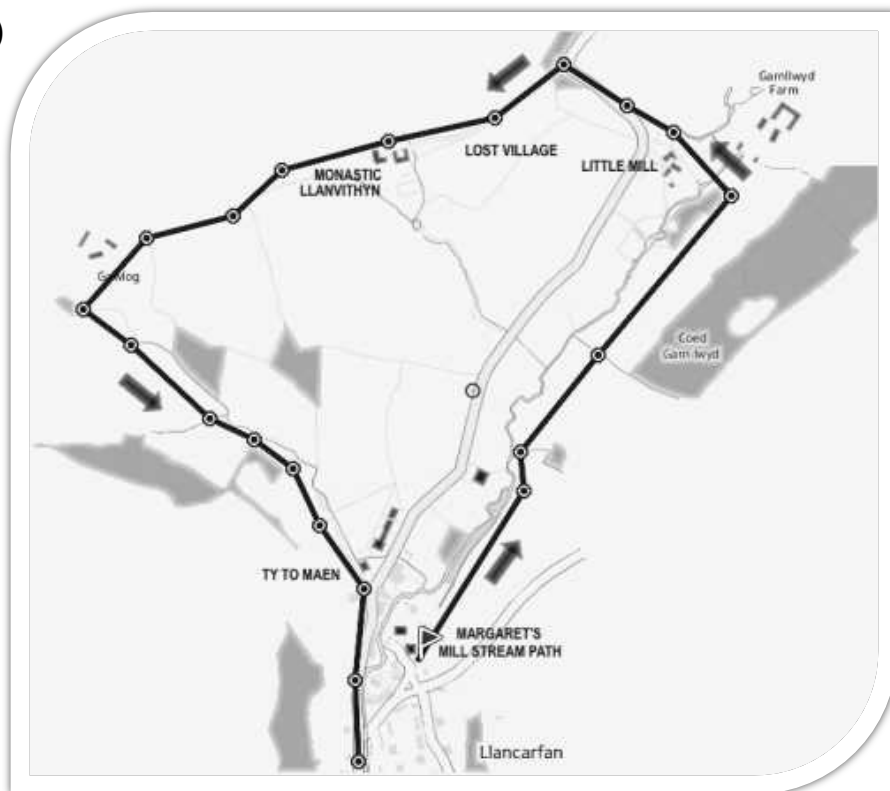


*[Mike? Was it by chance this curious fowl shot by John Millard on his iPad – on St. George's Day? John assures us it wasn't for Sunday lunch! We heard that Tony Thomas confirmed the beast to be a turkey, some of which are implanted with his woodland pheasants, apparently to discourage their roaming instincts. Clearly this beast got the wrong end of the stick - as also do the pheasants. Ed.]*



## THAT WAS THE WALK, THAT WAS . . .

Our history (and fresh air) enthusiasts strode into this May Day's northerly reaches of the village this year, yet again following the footsteps of our society's long-time guide and adviser, Dr. Maddy Gray. Maddy is the University of South Wales' distinguished Reader in History, hiding herself at times under the smiling pseudonym of the 'Heritage Tortoise'. ('Taught Us' – geddit?)



Well, taught us Maddy did, introducing walkers to the intriguing history of Llanvithyn, and translating the humps & sunken ways of nearby acres into a lost village, which we learnt preceded the Cistercian monastic arrival at Llanvithyn. There are colour pictures of this lovely walk overleaf, which on a clear day offers high level views right across to the Quantocks & Exmoor.

Apart from reinforcing our historical knowledge, the walk (involving an encouraging 37 people - aged from 95 to just 3 the day before) reminded us of the difficulties of keeping open the local Rights of Way. Courtesy of several palettes half-inched from Paul Jenkins' building skip - thanks, Paul! – it became just about possible to traverse the cow-churned quagmire at the end of The Conjunction (aka apparently Margaret's, or even The Goblins', path.) But Ken Walls' little dog Phoebe had a close shave with mud and inquisitive cattle. There was consequently a resolve among the younger village gentlemen to do something about these impediments and blockages to our lovely walks, important to both our families and our visitors.

As for the history shared, notably of Llanvithyn & its lost village of Bradington, start with the accounts online in the *Newsletters*, mainly in numbers 33, 54, 63, 84, 85 & 87. You'll find an introduction to this 'monastic grange' at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic\\_landscape/llancarfan/english/llancarfan\\_008.htm](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_landscape/llancarfan/english/llancarfan_008.htm). And Marianne Spencer's *Annals of South Glamorgan (1913)* adds excellent oral history to our understanding of John & Sian Dix's ancient home.

## THE LLANCARFAN SOCIETY MAY DAY WALK 2014



AFTER THE MUD



LITTLE MILL



HISTORY ACROSS AGES



THE LOST VILLAGE



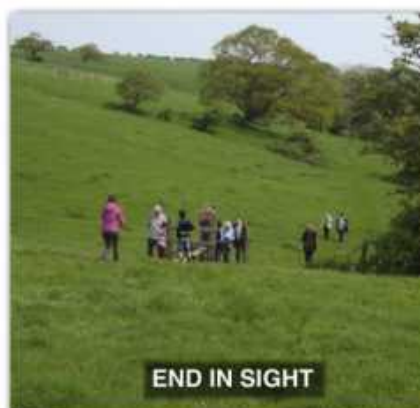
MARGARET & SUE



MICK MACE



CLIVE & BARBARA



END IN SIGHT

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For many of the past issues & more details please see the (to be updated) website at <http://www.llanccarfansociety.org.uk/>

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**NEXT COPY DEADLINE PLEASE : 21 AUGUST 2014**