

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 163 SEPTEMBER 2015



SAINTS, SINS & SALVATION

*Catching up with
the latest revelations on the
mediaeval walls of St. Cadoc's church*

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SEVERAL SUBSCRIPTIONS UNPAID! IS THIS YOU PLEASE?

EDITORIAL

It's been something of a hectic Summer for us White Chapel dwellers. We've married off Ben our eldest, welcomed middle son Thomas's engagement to Ayesha (who proposed to him up the Nash Point lighthouse!), and celebrated Mrs. Fell Senior's 100th birthday. So several of the other demands of village life have rather fought for space in our heads.

However, some village demands continue to be rewarding, not least the chance to interpret the latest astonishing finds on the church walls. After the departure of the conservators on June 19th, visitors have flocked here to see the latest remarkable images. A piece in *The Gem* whetted even more appetites, & Canon Derek Belcher found himself explaining the finds to *Télévision Francaise 1*, 'the most widely-viewed tv channel in Europe'.

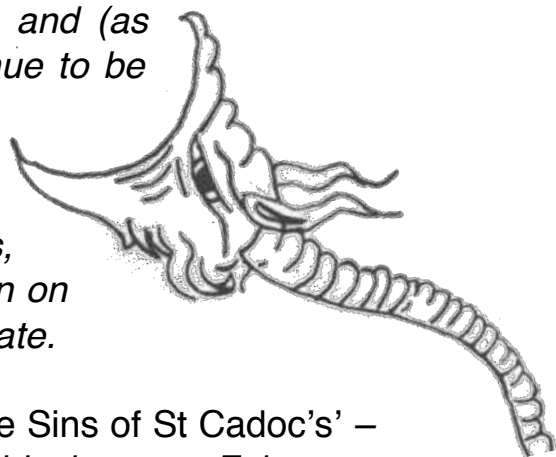
Which is why this issue again deals at length with the latest cultural heritage discovered in the church. It is one leg of the tripod that supports village life; the other legs being of course the school and the pub, all to be defended! You may be surprised how many visiting groups have squeezed in a summer pilgrimage (spiritual or otherwise) to St. Cadoc's. These have included the students of regular supporter Madge O'Keefe, 45 members of Cardiff's Archaeological Society, Llanelli Ramblers, Boverton WI, South Wales Decorative & Fine Arts Society, and many visitors from halfway around the world. See Australian Paul Johns' ancestral quest (page 10) .

Nevertheless, to redress the balance, this issue also shares recent anecdotes about the village's 201-year-old Methodist chapel, once a focus of non-conformist life. Finally, we must not neglect to welcome Katherine Kemp to our Society committee. And many congratulations go to the young village people who have triumphed in their exams (as has soprano Sophie Thomas, with 3 As & 1 A* at A-Level, off to study music at King's, London).

FROM THE DRAGON'S MOUTH

You don't need this journal to underline how remarkable have proved the painted discoveries on the walls of our church, a church which a few decades ago was in danger of turning into a roofless ruin.

The finds have, of course, brought responsibilities, and (as between now and next February) visitors will continue to be frustrated by necessary closures which aim to bring the rest of the church up to scratch. Fortunately though, the treasures do encourage donations, from major sponsors, from casual visitors, and even the sale of those celebratory booklets seen on the front cover - well over a thousand being sold to date.



*To be strictly honest, the third booklet featured – 'The Sins of St Cadoc's' – isn't quite finished yet. However it **will** be available by next February, which is when the latest restrictions are scheduled to end. So what follows here is a taster, a trailer for that booklet, reviewing & previewing for readers some of the astonishing facts and understanding of the latest finds.*

SAINTS, SINS & SALVATION

The south-west corner of St. Cadoc's church is now dominated by one of the finest depictions in Britain of the Seven Deadly Sins. The satirical skills of the artist are of excellent order, instructing our church goes through cameos of sin which are surely antecedents to the satires of not only Holbein, Bruegel, and Hogarth, but also present day political cartoonists.

It is very much to the credit of conservators Jane Rutherford and Ann Ballantyne that they have been able to rescue these paintings in situ, preventing with timely intervention their falling off the wall, dragged down by the century-layers of lime wash. It is remarkable that they have been able to rescue a great deal from the shattering effect of installing the short-lived mid-20th century vestry (which nevertheless did destroy the lower sections of the paintings). It is laudable that they have brought to light paintings of great distinction, yet paintings on the roughest of surfaces by an artist who had certainly not prepared the smoothest of canvases!

So, while the artist worked with the simplest colour palette of lamp black, ochre, slaked lime (and a hint of lead-tin yellow), what distant 15th century messages was our mediaeval artist commissioned to hand down to us?



Above are four of the sins, as photographed in September 2014. They illustrate (clockwise from bottom left), Luxuria (**Lust**), Accidia (sometimes translated as '**Sloth**', but see below), Superbia (**Pride**) and Ira (**Anger**).

Further conservation on this wall continued to mid-June 2015, making safe and clarifying these paintings, but more major work on the adjacent south-

west wall has now brought even more significant revelations. These paintings, which are painted alongside and within the arch of an original western window, complete the sin set (though they contain an in-built enigma). Seen below, and reading anti-clockwise from top left, are Avaricia (**Avarice**) (*photo Sept 2014*), Som(p)nolentia (another '**Sloth**') (*Dec 2014*), and the literally gorgeous Gula (**Gluttony**) (*June 2015*).

The enigma, of course, a distinct deviation from Pope Gregory's defined set of seven corporal sins, is that we have no '**Envy**' but possess two '**Sloths**'!



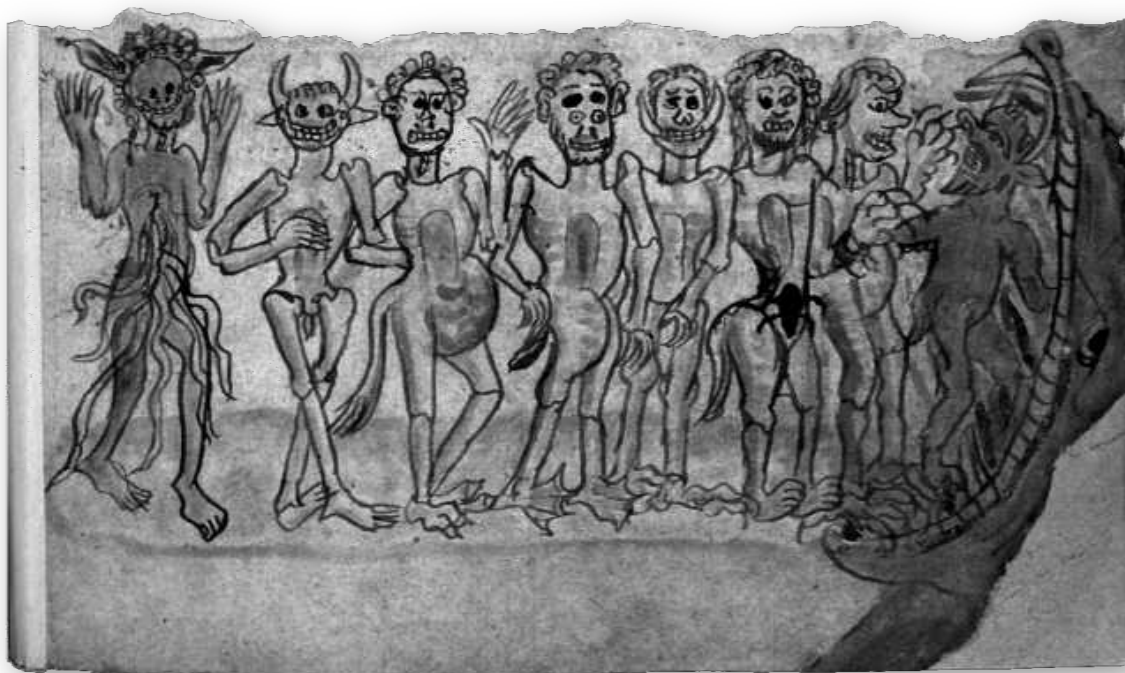
The reason for this remains a puzzle. **Sloth One** - 'Accidia' - is the despair & apathy (known as 'wanhope') that enveloped lonely monks in their hermetic lives given to prayer. Suicide could be a genuine temptation.



Sloth Two is easier to understand. Who (see Newsletter 162) could not identify with the person resisting the call of the church bell (or possibly the clamour of the alarm clock)? Nowadays we can't even claim that a demon kept us in bed! But the puzzle remains - why two 'Sloths' in Llancarfan?

When I finally get round to *The Sins of St Cadoc's*, my booklet must further explore why they are there, these wonderfully-drawn warnings about our potential mis-behaviours. One has to ask how they were used to promote Llancarfan's social harmony. How effective were they? Did the preacher use them directly, satisfying the growing need for vernacular sermons? How often did our images serve as Mediaeval PowerPoints? Or did they just stand alone as 'the lewd men's Bible'? Were they any more than decorative reminders of what we mustn't do beyond the church door?

Certainly as one looks into the moral guidance of sermons that have survived, you realize that our walls are distinctive cameo 'playlets', echoing the sermon scripts delivered from the pulpit, or around the church cross. Our sins are not depicted as metaphorical souls, 'deformed and myshapyn' by a particular sin, such as are shown at the foot of this British Library



manuscript - (Add.37049.74.r). Our Pride is not 'horned as bulls' which 'betokyn prowde men'; nor does our Avarice have 'lang hokyd nayles lyke lyons' to denote his greed and extortionism. Our sins are cameos from the life of Llancarfan, sins enacted in the vain hope of us mending our ways.

Up there on our walls, Big Brother Morality would wag its finger at us all of the year round. However it was particularly in Lent that the parishioners could expect the pulpit to warn us about our sins. One monk called John

Mirk, living in a monastery near Shrewsbury, saw this as a moral ‘marketing opportunity’. He wrote a whole yearful of sermons, widely used by preachers, suitably enriched with sinful diatribes for Lent. Clearly too it was important to define & classify sins in order for the confessional to exact the due penance. Punishment, or the remedies, must as always fit the crime.

There remains, of course, a particularly intriguing challenge. This is to deduce what our pictures, sadly obliterated in their lower third, once depicted as the fate, or perhaps origin, of our corporeal sinners. Clearly we can see them hovering above the purgatorial mouths of dragons, and within a hair’s breadth of slithering down intertwining necks into . . . into what?

Well, one might have expected a fiery hell. But perhaps not. Visual evidence suggests that in fact the dragon necks are growing from the anatomy of a recumbent man. If you look at the photograph on page 4 you may see carefully rescued traces of a man’s knees, fragmentary indications of a hand perhaps grasping a dragon neck segment, and a few hints at the body’s dimensions. Enough survives to suggest the parts of the body from which the dragon necks emerge. Imagine the missing parts, and you may conclude that the **Sloth** dragon could emerge from the Feet, **Avarice** from the Hand, and it is patently obvious where the **Lustful** dragon has its origin.

That this visualisation is not fanciful is supported by related images in other churches (e.g. Trotton in Sussex & Little Horwood, Bucks.) and also by the writings of the day. For instance, a 14th century book called *The Scale of Perfection* says of the ‘ymage of synne’ that ‘the **head** is **pride**, for pride is principal and the firste synne . . . the **armes** of it are **wrathe** . . . the **belly** of this image is **glotonye** . . . the **membres** of it are **leccherie** . . .’, and so on, each sin having its own bodily origin.

Understanding this, our mediaeval ancestors might well have followed gratefully the prompting of the latest Llancarfan finds, still only partially uncovered, but offering a vivid counterpoint to the Deadly Sins. Opposite our ‘ways to be bad’, to the north of the South West window, have appeared three of the **Seven Corporal Works of Mercy**. You can see the first pictures of two of these on the middle pages, illustrating the good principles we should follow in life. You may agree that, on the whole, these are decent rules of thumb for civilised co-existence in a Vale village.

All of which thoughts can only begin to scrape the intriguing surface of St. Cadoc’s sins and virtues, helping both us and our many visitors to gradually appreciate the use and significance of our remarkable artistic heritage.



The two illustrations here are the latest discoveries, the counterpoint virtues to the Seven Deadly Sins.

These are two of the *Seven Corporal Works of Mercy* - a third has still to be fully uncovered.

Top left is an injunction to 'Bury the Dead', tonsured clerics reading the rites of final commitment over a shrouded body. A Hand of God blesses the act, while an apparent pilgrim onlooker discovers with us the path of righteousness.

Our pilgrim appears again at the bedside of the dying [bottom left], learning to 'Visit the Sick'. His staff seems in fact to be a flaming taper.

The unphotographed third image is of 'Clothing the Naked'. Not many of the four possible remaining 'Works' - Feeding the Hungry, Quenching the Thirsty, Sheltering the Homeless & Visiting the Imprisoned - are likely to have survived later 'improvements'.



There is a fascinating parallel to be discovered in a 'Seven Sacraments Window' at Devon's St. Michael's, Doddiscombsleigh. Their 'Last Rites' has many similarities - not least the timeless commode beside the bed.

Photos (c) Ian Fell

The montage below relocates the font to its original location, that is, back to where it was photographed in the 1890's. Consider the visual implications for the family of a child as it was baptised and duly freed from the 'Original Sins' of Adam & Eve. Did painted sins really plunge into the baptismal waters?



IN SEARCH OF THE JOHNS : AN AUSTRALIAN IN A HAYSTACK

The *Fox & Hounds* has not been short of antipodean visitors this Summer. Among the guests, several retracing their British ancestors, was the companionable Paul Johns. Paul spent a week here at the end of July. He is the direct descendent of a Llancarfan farmer's son, James John, who left for Australia in 1862 (and it seems became a 'Johns' when he got there).

'The thing is,' observed Paul, peering at the *Fox's* splendid antique wall map of the Vale, 'Asking questions about ancestry, you get *some* questions answered, but a lot more questions then appear.' You can say that again. Looking for Johns in these John-rich villages is not just one needle in a haystack; with the Johns there are hundreds of needles.

Paul's starting point, you might say, is a memorial stone which sits, leaning slightly, in St. Cadoc's churchyard. It reads : 'To the Memory of Elias John, late of Brooks Farm, Cadoxton, who died December 22nd 1897, Aged 89 years'. This gentleman was Paul John's grandfather's grandfather.



Curiously, *The Barry Dock News* report of Elias's death got it wrong. On 7/1/1898 they admitted that 'we should have stated that the funeral . . . took place in Llancarfan, and not in Merthyr Dovan Churchyard'. But Elias's burial was a homecoming, he being born here in Llancarfan in about 1808.

Born here too was his son James, aged one in the 1841 census, who 20 years later would be the Australian adventurer.¹ By 1851, we have further details here of Elias John as a 'farmer of 46 acres'. We learn that his wife Anne came from Wenvoe, and that they live with daughter Anne, age 16, and son James 12. Ten years later (1861), Elias is a widower. He has moved to farm 80 acres at Brooks farm, to the south west of Cadoxton. His 80-year-old father, John John, has moved in with the family (he originating apparently from Aberdare). Plus James, Anne, and a daughter Elizabeth.

This for Paul was where things get intriguing. 21-year-old James is in the Cadoxton census in 1861, but a year later he sails for Australia. Why?

Well, those of us with Australian relatives (quite a lot of us²) were too ready with the answer. **Gold rush!** We *knew* James John went panning for gold.

¹ Interestingly, his family is recorded in the census immediately next to 'Edward Williams, 59, Clockmaker'. This was Edward Williams II, son of clockmaker Edward I. Was he related to the famous Henry Williams?

² Even I had a great-great-uncle James who went out to Australia to seek his fortune, and came back with enough gold to start a grocer's shop in Clitheroe, Lancashire. From carats to carrots!

Except that he didn't. 'Why James left,' says Paul, 'is still a mystery. I originally thought he was chasing gold in the gold rush town of Gympie, in Queensland. However, it seems he travelled to Australia *before* the gold was discovered! But now I've found that they were farmers of cattle, not of crops, it *could* suggest that he came out there to start a farming life.'

However, James didn't have too long grazing his beasts before the gold began to glitter. *Wikipedia* says that 'James Nash reported the discovery of 'payable' alluvial gold on 16 October 1867.' At which stage, as Paul Johns confirms, his ancestor didn't sit around grazing his cows. 'We do know that James ended up in the Gympie Gold Mines, and he eventually became the Manager of a number of mines in the Gympie area. Big title. But I'm sure he was probably digging as well as managing. So life would have been pretty grim from the start. He died relatively young too, in his early sixties. James left behind six children, the youngest of which was eight years of age, who was my grandfather – another John Johns.'

So – a Llancarfan lad did his bit to populate Australia. Paul's grandfather moved as a child to Brisbane, capital of Queensland. He passed on entrepreneurial skills to Paul's father, who came up with a cunning plan to supply Brisbane with fridges (and the wiring to make them work). Paul's father later became General Manager of Queensland's largest electrical retailer. In short, ice cubes must have proved white gold for the Johns.

Back here in the fields beyond Cadoxton, James' dad Elias still farmed at Brooks in 1871, but by 1881 he had retired with family servant Mary Morgan to Little Orchard, Penmark, and in 1891 we find him (and Miss Morgan) in Elm Cottage, Merthyr Dovan. We noted his death above.

But still the puzzle remains : why did young James leave his Cadoxton farm for Australia. Could a factor have been, not the golden gold, but the black gold? In other words, the coal exploitation that created brave new Barry?

Certainly, as Paul John's discovered, you will find few traces of Brooks Farm, Cadoxton today. It may well be clearly marked on the *Fox's* map, but on 13 December 1889 (well after Elias John had retired from farming) the following headline appeared in the *Barry Dock News*:

**FURTHER BUILDING LAND FOR
BARRY DOCK TOWN.**

**THE WHOLE OF THE BROOKS FARM
TAKEN UP.**

This report enthuses that the Barry Dock Town Syndicate has ‘just taken 75 more acres from Mr. Richard Bassett, being the whole of the Brooks Farm.’ (A Bassett would have been Elias’s landlord.) An earlier article (22 November 1889) has already asserted that ‘the future of the Barry Dock district will be one of exceptional prosperity’. Roads, hotels, houses & churches are to blossom on the landscape, ‘well out of the reach of the smoke and coal dust which will arise with the dock operations’. And a new road ‘which the Local Board of Health intend constructing . . . will run through the Brooks’ farm’ as part of creating ‘the great town of the future’.



One can hardly imagine that young James John had a sense of these future visions, 27 years earlier. But you do wonder if he ever discovered the fate of his early farming landscape, now buried beneath the streets and houses of new-town Barry?

Paul Johns says his quest for roots will continue: ‘I’ll still keep digging, and undoubtedly will return.’ Meanwhile, he is more

than grateful to Mrs. Ann Walker of Flaxland Farm, the remarkable Miss Carol Dunn of Llanbethery (seen here, surely his distant relative), Tony Lewis, and many others, for guidance, encouragement, and their welcome.

Paul is delighted to have found not only ancestors but also his presumed relatives in the Vale – a fact that he celebrates rather beautifully:

‘The gold rush? I think we’ve found gold in more ways than the ore that’s in the ground. This journey has been about my strong ties to family, and *that* makes me a very wealthy man, having so much family even here in Wales.’



SUNSHINE IN THE CHAPEL : 201 YEARS OF NON-CONFORMITY!

Last year the White Chapel celebrated its 200th anniversary, *writes Penny Fell*. We've failed to conform here since 1997, and planned to honour the bicentenary with a village party. However, family illness distracted us. So this brief historical resumé acknowledges that turning point – marking, too, the recent sad passing of Jim Grove, who adapted it with such flair.

This early Wesleyan gem is a striking landmark in Llancarfan. Originally a smaller structure - you could detect a much lower gable end when we re-rendered the southern wall – “our” chapel has survived since the reign of “Mad” King George III. Wales took to heart the 18th century teachings of John Wesley, and the chapel was built just 17 years after his death. Perhaps more significantly, it arrived three years after Non-conformists split formally from the Church of England in Wales. You can imagine a certain frostiness between the congregants of the arriviste new (Ebenezer) Chapel, and those loyal to the 800-year-old St Cadoc's, only a few yards away.



For some reason, according to the *Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments*, the chapel was rebuilt in 1835. When we moved in we learnt that at least one of the stained glass windows is Georgian in origin, which would tally. Then, by the 1850s, Non-conformism in Wales was on a roll, and the plaque over our current kitchen window says the chapel was rebuilt in 1858. A two-storey annexe, with a Sunday School (now Ian's study!) was added in 1891. This must have been the Chapel's heyday – with worshippers trooping up to the door, then at the north east end of the chapel.

Of the headstones seen in the photo, some ten remain, placed against the garden walls.³ The oldest legible one remembers Thomas Edwards who died in 1820, aged just 22. The most recent, dated 1918, is of Sarah-Jane Rees, daughter of Richard & Sarah Lougher. Almost a century's span.

There are still Society members who have vivid memories of the Chapel in their youth. Apparently it acted as a venue for an inter-denominational village Eisteddfod in the 1930s. Graham Jenkins also remembers, from his scrumping days, the apple trees on the hill behind! He recalls too a mini kitchen, complete with tea urn, in what is now our rear spare bedroom.

We know that many of the Lougher family were staunch Wesleyans. Thanks are due to Clive Lougher, whose late father Layton was born at Llanvythin, for an account of the building's transition from chapel to home.

In the 1960's, Clive has reminded us, Layton commissioned a painting from a promising young Welsh artist, one Andrew Vicari. The *South Wales Spectator* ran an article on this commission in 1965. In this Vicari confides that "I decided last night to take a permanent studio in Llancarfan. The south Wales countryside, apart from Arizona, is the only countryside that has any meaning for me anywhere. I visited this fascinating village where Layton was born. It was marvellous – beautiful. There is an empty chapel in a glorious setting shrieking to be painted. I am going to convert it into a studio." Andrew Vicari stuck to his word. For two or three years the chapel became his studio and, incidentally, also a home of legendary partying.

Over the years the Chapel has never quite lost its reputation as a 'world-famous-round-here' party place. In his short story called *The Prince of Wales*, John Williams invented a dubious fictionalised version of this chapel, making it the home of a porn-film hero under siege by reporters. "*Lee Fontana lived in a converted chapel in Llancarfan, so at 9.45 there they were ringing on the doorbell of a very tastefully converted chapel . . . the kind of place Pete had only ever seen in the Saturday magazine. Open plan . . . all burnished hardwoods and brightly coloured Sixties furniture.*"

Nothing, of course, could be further from the original Wesleyan heritage - although since its days of worship, the building has had several real-life identities. It was a children's nursery with the Groves; and somehow its colourful heritage has remained a spur for all kinds of creation. In truth, when the light shines through glorious windows, it's hard not to feel elated. There *are* times when we wonder if our chapel inspired Andrew Vicari to create some wall paintings, discretely hidden under today's white walls . . .

³ See for instance Newsletters 24, 30, 31, 59 & 89.

MICK MACE REMEMBERS WITH A NEW SEAT

Mick Mace has been anxious for the community to keep in mind the contribution to Llanbethery of his & Sheila's dear friends, Roy & Mary Booker. Memories may not fade, but memorial benches do – as had an original bench placed in their memory. Hence Mick's determination to commission a brand new seat for the village, 'totally weatherproof and teak in colour', to provide rest with reflection on the village grass.

Mick writes that he was glad to have people's blessing for a short formal re-dedication, which took place on Sunday 19th of July at the hands of Canon Derek Belcher. The Rev Malcolm Davies was also there for the blessing, Malcolm & Jean being former Llanbethery residents.



Mick offers in his report his thanks 'to everyone who assisted with a donation', noting that 'a generous contribution was received from the *Llanbethery Rural Community*, an unexpected and much appreciated action.' He reminded those at the re-dedication how well the Bookers were known beyond the village. Many echoed Mick's warm words – 'May they never be forgotten'.

HACKING It is sad to discover that the online archive of *Llancarfan Society Newsletters* was recently hacked. Graham Brain reports that the content has therefore been deleted by the hosting company. Hopefully nothing is lost, and steps are in hand to restore the records of our history.

ERRATUM Castle Ditches (162). Owing to the loss of internet for a week in May, we did not receive in time Adam Gwilt's correction to image 5 in the finds photographed. These are Roman pottery sherds, not crucibles.

The publication of this newsletter has now been subsidised by a greatly appreciated grant from The Vale of Glamorgan Community Fund

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NEXT COPY DEADLINE PLEASE : 21 NOVEMBER 2015

Sat 5th Sept 1200
Friday 18th Sept
Friday 25th Sept
4th December

Penfest in the Orchard, Penmark. Usually great fun!
Llancarfan Society Annual Dinner.
Society Benefit Evening : 'Second Best Exotic Hotel' screening.
Christmas Social Evening.

ST. CADOC'S CHURCH

The new building works continue in the church until at least the 14th of December. Access for services in this period will be by the small priests' door.

WELCOME TO new residents, including Becci & Andy at Crynallt, and Julie & Adrian at Fox Hollows.

LLANCARFAN COMMUNITY CINEMA : 7.30 pm

Friday 25 September THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL (PG)
Friday 23 October AMY (15)
Friday 20 November MR. HOLMES (PG)
Thursday 10 December WILD TALES (15)
Saturday 12 December MINIONS (PG) Doors 3.00pm



The STOP PRESS picture above shows Society Mystery trippers visiting the Senghenydd Mining Memorial on 22 August. More in our Christmas issue. Meanwhile, Llancarfan is rivalling the Great Wall of China. Richard Williams has hand-crafted a fine new wall outside Primrose Cottage. And the Community Council achieved good repairs to the church wall, seen here in pre-launch wraps!



Audrey Porter & Sue Taylor added welcome greetings in celebration of the 100th birthday of Marjorie Fell. Meanwhile, Messrs. Brain & Fell tested their antiquity cycling the Kennet & Avon canal - Reading to Bristol. And Keith Thomas opened a summery garden for his village-wide birthday feast.

