

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 180



DEC 2019

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our winter issue. A big thank you to Richard Belcher for snapping and providing the pumpkin pic for the cover (*sans* Santa hat – that was added later by a mischievous photoshopper). The fayre within ranges from ecclesiastical movie magic to ghoulish gatherings, and from presidential (Milhuisen, not Trump) memories of the festive period to our old friend Iolo Morganwg's plaque-worthy place in the history of fake news.

We also mark the passing of good friends and neighbours. There have, alas, been so many sad losses in recent months, and in this issue we look back on the lives of Phil Gammon and Trevor Winterbottom, both of whom were much-cherished members of the local community for many years.

We had promised to include an appreciation of the life of Blair Evans, another pillar of the community, who died just before the September issue went to press. However, his widow Rae has said that she would rather recall happy memories of Blair after the New Year has arrived, once spring has sprung. We look forward to sharing those with readers in due course.

PHIL GAMMON 1939-2019

Phil sadly died in November. His grandson, James Leonard, writes of a long, fruitful and generous life in the community. We shall all miss him.

Philip Hugh Gammon, my Grandad, was born in Bexley Heath in 1939, and grew up in Stanton, Hertfordshire. In spite of lifelong asthma, he always loved and played sport of all sorts, with a determination. He was an outdoor boy who, in his father's words, loved raking the streets.

He went to the village school, followed by Hertford Grammar School, then Shrewsbury School as a boarder, quite a leap of culture for a village boy. There he thrived both academically and at sport. He read Natural Sciences at St John's College, Cambridge, and became captain of football – which he said was his main achievement, other than being able to take Nanny (Mary) to the May Ball in 1961. As a penniless student, he always had to work during the holidays, and in 1959 he had met his future wife while working for the summer in Lynmouth. They married in 1962.

After graduation in 1961 he started his first job at Distillers Company in Barry. My mum was born in 1964, Uncle Jonathan in 1967, one of each – perfect! In 1967 the family moved to Llantwit Major. Grandad, always full of energy, joined drama group, tennis club and more. Life was good here; it was a place full of other young families and long-lasting friendships were made. In the 1970s they moved to Sandhurst, working for Stanley Smith in Isleworth, making plastics. If he ever had a box of chocolates, Grandad would raise it to the light, examine it and declare whether it was one of his own works. He worked hard and became a director there.

In 1983 the family moved back to South Wales for a new job with Metpost, and settled for 20 years at Glan-yr-Afon in Llancafán, a place of very happy memories. After retirement, Phil still had plenty more energy to expend. He further increased his involvement in many village activities, including tennis club, seven years as chairman of the Llancafán Society, and seven as churchwarden for Father Malcolm at St Cadoc's. It was here that he saw both of his children married. He also took on his most important role to date: being a loving grandad to me, Matthew, Molly and Sam.

A small house in Fanjeaux soon beckoned. It was more than a challenge, but one that Grandad, Nanny and all of us loved. It became our idyllic, childhood holiday home. In 2003 there was another move, to their cottage in Penmark, and in 2014 Grandad had heart surgery, becoming, in his own words, a "breathless shadow of his former self". The last five years were very hard for him but he never lost his huge smile, generosity and love. An added joy

came in 2018 when he became great grandfather to my little boy Reuben. Grandad was our wise old owl, with a strong moral compass. He was the absolute best of us, and the glue that held us together. Grandad was brilliant.

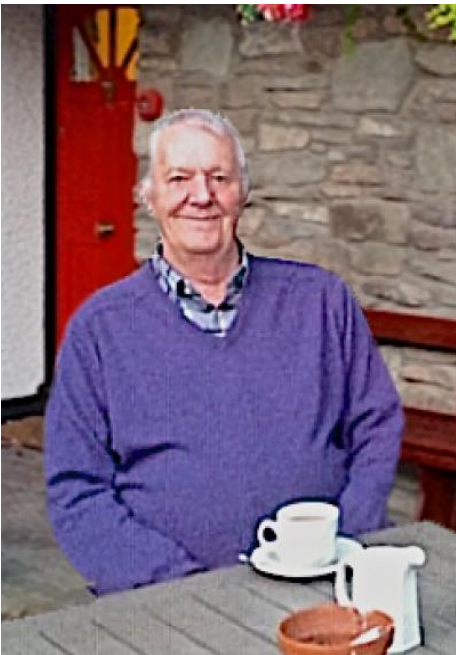
TREVOR WINTERBOTTOM 1939-2019

Since 1976, when he moved to the neighbourhood, Trevor has been a towering, genial presence in Llancafán. Dry of humour and inseparable from his beloved Fran, Trevor's passing in October was much mourned throughout the village. His close friend Dr Michael Stephens writes:

Trevor was born in Glossop, one of four children. In his early years, his parents ran a newsagent and then a fish and chip shop. After leaving the local Grammar School, he worked for Shell Petrochemicals before becoming a cardiac technician at Manchester Royal Infirmary. He excelled at sports – a competent goalkeeper but a fine cricket opening batsman: he played to Minor Counties level.

Trevor met Fran in 1968, at the Manchester unit, while she was a nurse. They married in 1971. Their son Michael arrived in 1972.

Meanwhile, in 1971, Trevor had been appointed Chief Cardiac Technician to the regional centre for the treatment of heart disease in Wales. His brief was to establish the unit's technical department at a time of rapid development for the investigation and treatment of heart disease. He set about this task by appointing high-quality junior staff and establishing first-class in-house training programmes at the (then) new Heath Hospital. It is greatly to his credit that he stood his ground against management attempts to cut back staff numbers.



The fine department that Trevor left (on his early retirement at 57) lives on today. It bears witness to his work in earlier years and is a legacy of which he could be truly proud.

Trevor liked the good things in life, particularly food and fine wines. However, many will remember him best for his cricketing prowess.

He opened the batting for Barry, then formed a team called the MCC (Myocardial Cricket Club) which caused confusion when visiting Lords! He arranged an annual tour to Shropshire where we faced “over the hill” ex-

Warwickshire county players, still bowling at eighty miles an hour. Many was the time one saw him knock the ball back over their heads for six. He once scored a ton when we were all out for 127! He was a stern captain and you would be banished to the far boundary should you drop a catch. If you gave him out while umpiring, you had best flee the ground.

Trevor lived life to the full. He was an active member of the Round Table and served as a magistrate for many years. Those of us who were fortunate enough to have known him will miss him, and we send our sincere condolences to Fran and Michael. May he rest in peace.

OF BELLS AND BLANCMANGE

Congratulations to our President Barbara Milhuisen, who just celebrated her 85th birthday. We talked to her about memories of many Llanccarfan Christmases past: blancmange, goose-swapping and dangling from the church bells...

As Santa's elves get busy at the North Pole and Amazon delivery vans rumble through the village, it's that season again. But Barbara's first memories are very different from our epic festival of consumption and excess. They reach back to the 1930s depression years, when material possessions were few and prized, and village life centred round church and chapel.

"I don't remember my first Christmas, of course. I was five weeks old. I just know it was a big occasion because I was christened on December 25th 1934 – along with my eleven-year-old aunt - Glenys Amelia – who had missed being baptised, in the confusion after World War 1.

"But the childhood Christmases I do remember were very, very happy. I had my mother and father, two grandmothers, two aunts, two uncles, and as the only child for six years I was the apple of their eye. My uncles used to toss me across the river and dangle me from the church bell ropes." They were both bell-ringers, she hastens to add, although Barbara doesn't remember specifically being part of the bell-ringing equipment as they rang out for Christmas.



Santa's reindeer had an easier sleigh-load in those days. "We had stockings, yes – with an apple, an orange (except in wartime) and a nut. And we always got a book – but that was it. The Rupert Bear books were my favourite, that's what I wanted." But as she grew up in the years of real austerity, her small

library ended up being passed on to little (later Sir) Brooke Boothby at Fonmon Castle. “So I didn’t keep them – I’ve reminded him since.”

In the 1930s, and then throughout wartime, Christmas dinners were special but not the *Instagram* set pieces of today. “It would be duck mostly when I was little, and vegetables from the garden. Later, when I was a young woman, we’d have goose. I kept geese and my father, who then lived in



Somerset, kept them too. But we couldn’t bear to eat the ones we’d reared ourselves, so we’d meet at the bridge, swap geese and eat each other’s instead.”

And there were Christmas parties - at least three: the Church, the Unitarian chapel and the Wesleyan chapel - with jelly and blancmange. “And always carol singing round the houses. About eight or nine of us - but not for charity. We did it for us. Everyone was lovely and gave us pennies and we pocketed them.”

Barbara’s mother ran the village Post Office after the war – the volume of post wasn’t as heavy then, but public holidays were a thing of the future and there was a postal service, even on Christmas Day. “If there was a telegram to be delivered, my mother had to leg it over the fields to deliver it, Christmas or not.”

Barbara’s Christmases are still about the family with whom she’ll spend this one. She is immensely proud of their achievements and says her best present this year is her pride in the first-class degree in interior design and architecture her great-niece, Rebecca Ann Mills, acquired from Portsmouth University. “This Christmas I can’t ask for anything more...” *Penny Fell*

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NEXT COPY, NEWS AND LETTERS DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 24TH 2020

A PLAQUE FOR LLANCARFAN'S RATTLESKULL GENIUS: (MARKING THE BIRTHPLACE OF 'FAKE NEWS'?)

On March 11th 2020, the Llancarfan Society will achieve an historical duty – that of placing a plaque on the Pen'Onn birthplace of our village's most famous son, Iolo Morganwg (who was born Edward Williams). This achievement is thanks to many generous crowd-funded donations, and to the enthusiastic support of Professor Catherine Treadaway, who lives in Bryn Iolo, the house later built on the footings of Iolo's parents' cottage.

Vaughan Roderick, the BBC Welsh Affairs Editor, who is of course a popular broadcaster in both Welsh and English, has pencilled-in our invitation to unveil the plaque. Iolo himself should be pleased that this unveiling will mark not only his birthday, but takes place within days of the Spring equinox, or 'Alban Eilir', a name apparently coined by Iolo. (Iolo held his first Gorsedd ceremony at 'Alban Hefin', the mid-summer solstice, on Primrose Hill in London, on the June 21st 1849.)

The prime mover in creating the Bryn Iolo plaque has of course been Gareth Thomas, who at your Society's AGM last May shared the romance and hardship of Iolo's life, as narrated in Gareth's 'creative dramatisation', *I, Iolo*. This fact-inspired novel is fondly engaging, and Gareth will in fact be giving his talk yet again on March 11th at the Llantwit Major History Society.

A promotional introduction for Gareth's book by its publisher *Y Lolfa* summed up Iolo as follows:

'Iolo Morganwg had many faces : stonemason, self-taught scholar, poet, hymnist, politician, patriot, revolutionary, druid, failed businessman, drug addict, campaigner for human rights and perpetrator of the greatest act of literary forgery in European history.'

Well, you doubtless know already that the remarkable Iolo, though 'humble born' at Pen'Onn, was a 'rattleskull genius' (his self-description) who had to struggle to be recognised as a Welsh historian. He claimed to be uniquely qualified as a direct descendant of the bards, being a promoter of Welsh identity and nationalism, and ultimately a grand old man of dubious reliability.

We knew too that he forged or distorted 'history', and largely invented the Gorsedd of the Bards (as later incorporated into Eisteddfod activities). But what took me some time to understand was that his research and invention were not restricted to promoting a distinctive national identity for Wales. Iolo's rituals also had a major spin-off influence beyond these shores.

But firstly, can we really regard Iolo as a pioneer of 'fake news' (which term of abuse is now popular with a certain American president)? Well, Iolo *did* regularly doctor the historical manuscripts he transcribed.

Furthermore, he composed many poems and coined sayings which he then deceptively attributed to names from Welsh history (to the 14th-century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, and somewhat nearer home, to St. Cadoc himself). So while Iolo may not have mis-reported his present day, he was an incorrigible distorter of historical fact. Certainly much of his 'fake history' proves to be tweaked, not to say forged.

Let's face it though, the telling of history has always been subject to distortion. Even a non-propagandist report of 'the facts' is limited by a person's knowledge and interpretation.

And when Iolo was around, people were pretty relaxed about forging 'great works from the past'. For instance, the boy poet from Bristol, Thomas Chatterton, passed off *his* works as if by an imaginary 15th-century poet called Thomas Rowley. And in 1760, when Iolo was 13, James Macpherson, a Scottish 'collector' of so-called 'ancient Gaelic sources', published his 'translations' of 'the epic poems of Ossian' – again, all forgeries. So when Iolo travelled around Wales, collecting and 'improving' transcripts of genuine early manuscripts, while also writing poems 'from the past' and inventing ancient rites – he was in good bad company.

Why then does he deserve a plaque? Why are visitors interested? Well, the fact is, Iolo's legacy of 'traditions and activities', inventions which certainly raised the profile and the mystique of today's Wales, were also enthusiastically copied by other repressed and patronised 'Celtic' countries.

Brittany seems to have been the most significant of these. For centuries France rejected any moves for separatism among the Breton-speakers of France's western peninsula. You'll recall in the 5th and 6th centuries the mass migration of people from Cornwall to 'America', now Brittany and Normandy. There, scholars say the early Cornish language evolved into Breton. Then, while British Cornish became swamped by English, the Breton tongue managed to hold on, mirroring the survival of Cymraeg in the face of the dominant Saesneg.

Many 'outsiders' had long promoted a patronising image of Wales as a land of 'noble savages'. However, by the time of Iolo's death (1826) a more subtle understanding of Wales's cultural and linguistic differences had begun to evolve. In suppressed Brittany too, encouraged by the pioneering footsteps of Iolo, some people realised that Wales could give them a lesson in asserting and celebrating the language, and the equal rights, of other cultures.

One such pioneering Breton aristocrat was an idealistic young romantic called Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué. He was born (in 1815 as the Napoleonic wars ended) in Quimperlé, just inland from Brittany's south coast. La Villemarqué was to take a major interest in Wales's cultural resurgence.

Here in South Wales, after Iolo's death, his devoted Cowbridge-educated son, Taliesin Williams, had diligently published more of his dad's 'research' (both false and factual). Taliesin also continued the 'bardic' activities which were enhancing Wales's 'national' profile.

And such was Iolo's fame that news of his works filtered as far as France – not just his relics of poetry and bardism, but also hundreds of his '*Dicts du druide Cadoc*'. (You can still find French versions of Iolo's invented sayings, attributed to Llancarfan's Celtic saint.)

La Villemarqué was among the Bretons who found good cultural and political reasons to take an interest in Wales. His compatriots began to visit Wales - 'in effect, to find ideas, and to gain support to legitimise their own actions, intellectuals who turned to a Wales where the cultural and linguistic renewal, supported by an industrial boom, appeared to be the example to follow.'

It is hard to realise that Pen'Onn's inventor of ritual was a catalyst for the resurgence of Breton nationalism. But that was the effect on La Villemarqué and other disciples. The Welsh had also been exploring connections with Brittany since at least 1820, and in October 1838 they gave an official invitation for La Villemarqué to lead a 'délégation bretonne' to Abergavenny. Here was held a major musical and literary Eisteddfod 'prolongée par un Gorsedd'. La Villemarqué was even made a bard there – further encouraging him to publish his own collection of Breton folk songs, *Le Barzaz-Breiz*.



Maison de Iolo Morganwg, auteur gallois. — Dessin de Grandsire d'après M. A. Erny.

Determined to rescue his own Breton history, but unable to discover any written Breton manuscripts, La Villemarqué decided to focus on their oral tradition. He was convinced that Breton history survived in 'un gwerz ou un zonn', that is in those folk ballads and songs. But unfortunately La Villemarqué also followed the grand tradition of 'improving' his discoveries. Following similar practices to Iolo, he carried out a linguistic and historical 'restoration' in order to make them acceptable to the literate public to whom he addressed himself'. Yet again, fake history was created.

Ultimately, in both Wales and in France, this less-than-rigorous approach to gathering history and its 'debris' was challenged, both in the works of Iolo and his Breton counterpart. They had both, in fact, also done a lot of good collecting and transcription, but they sadly altered their findings to suit the expectations of their contemporaries. Unpicking the original from the distortions has continued to be a challenging task.

On the other hand, Breton cultural regeneration did take off, and its language and traditions have continued to be revived. As clearly has the Welsh culture – timelessly promoted by our man from up the road.

Anyway, as we launch our plaque to acknowledge Iolo's remarkable life, you would certainly enjoy learning more of his story with Gareth's *I, Iolo*. And perhaps too we should express some gratitude to Iolo's Breton disciples. Take, for instance, another later Cymrophile, Alfred Erny, who made a grand tour through Wales in 1862. In recording his own adventures, Erny published what seems the only existing picture of Iolo's later family cottage in Flemingston. Erny also sketched the oak chest in 'le chateau Llanover' where Iolo's bardic manuscripts were preserved as rare evidence for future scholarship. (These papers are now in the National Library in Aberystwyth.)

In short, we do have Brittany to thank for this image of the marital abode that Iolo shared with his long-suffering family. Perhaps Flemingston also needs a blue plaque on the building which now replaces this lost tumble-down house?

Ian Fell

ROOD SCREEN, SILVER SCREEN

St Cadoc's Church proved itself to be the perfect venue for a special screening of *A Month in the Country*, as part of this year's inaugural Vale Film Festival. The event launched the church's wall painting appeal, raising £1,000



to help tackle a severe damp problem along the south wall, which threatens the conserved paintings.

Screening films in unconventional settings always carries a risk but concerns about seating and acoustics were instantly dispelled as St Cadoc's was

transformed into a Pop-up Picture Palace. The church was dressed beautifully with harvest-festival themed floral arrangements, and lit with coloured lighting for added atmosphere. Cushions made specially for the event ensured everyone had a comfortable seat.

The audience of around 70 was treated on arrival to a live performance by Hiraeth String Quartet, who ended their set with music from Howard Blake's award-winning film score.

This was followed by Ian Fell's informative introduction to the film and St Cadoc's own wall painting stories, delivered with characteristic enthusiasm. The film was then projected on a screen mounted under the chancel arch, which provided the perfect frame for those moments when Colin Firth's character was seen working on the film's wall painting above the fictional church's chancel arch.



Many people, too numerous to mention by name, assisted with the event to make it such a success. Thanks are due to them and to everyone who attended an evening that will live long in the memory, paving the way for similar screenings in future.

Jim Barratt

A ghostly gala



A ghoulishly good Halloween party was held in the village hall on October 31st. The event was organised by the Llancafarn Society and was the idea of Olivia Barry, who



is on the committee. It was an excellent evening which brought together children from the village and surrounding villages, who joined in games like bobbing the apple and retrieving marshmallows from a tray of icing sugar with hands behind their backs. There was also a Halloween costume competition and a spooky disco. Thanks to Edward and Jenny Knott who gave us help in decorating the hall and organising the entertainment. "I

would like to thank everyone who turned up," said Olivia. "Lots of new faces from around the village made it really good fun."



PRECIOUS PACKAGE, DELIVERED LATE
Congratulations to Lucy Brain and Joel Williams on the birth of their beautiful daughter Robin Joanna, who arrived disgracefully late on November 3rd, weighing 7lb 9oz, and extremely contented to be here. Warm wishes to grandparents Graham and Kay.



PRIMARY COLOUR: NEWS FROM OUR SCHOOL



Cross Country Event

Year 5 and Year 6 children were invited to take part in the Vale Cross Country Event at St Donat's on November 7th. The children had a fantastic time. However, due to the horrendous weather conditions they came back extremely cold and wet. Just as well they had all brought a spare change of clothes! Hail showers made the event twice as hard, and as other contestants

fell to the muddy ground, Llancarfan School showed true sportsmanship and helped them up again. It was a tough race and it shocked us all when we found out that two of our students had made it to the final. We can't wait to cheer them on later this month.

Children In Need

On November 15th we had a full day of fun and laughter where children arrived at school dressed in sportswear and wacky hair in support of Children In Need. We donated £1 each for not wearing uniform and gained sponsorship from friends and family for performing a series of three-minute exercises every half an hour during the school day. Together we raised a whopping £606!



Lunchtime legends

Warburtons visited Llancarfan Primary to deliver a lesson on healthy eating and to encourage children to make healthy choices when making sandwiches and packed lunches. Hair nets, gloves and aprons were worn to adhere to health & safety rules when preparing food, and although the hair nets were uncomfortable (and not very flattering) the children still enjoyed the opportunity to have a different and fun lesson in

school. At the end of the day we all took the sandwiches we had made home to share with our families.

By Celina E – Year 6

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY AT THE CENOTAPH



“As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,

Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;

As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,

To the end, to the end, they remain.”

(From “For the Fallen”, by Laurence Binyon)

Rae Evans very kindly provides the village school with poppies and associated goods to sell every year in aid of the Royal British Legion. This year parents and children raised over £178 from sales—a tremendous amount for our small numbers. Well done, everyone!

Ahead of the commemoration services, children learned about the poppy’s symbolism and the significance of Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. Year 6 pupils paid their respects at St Cadoc’s Cenotaph, at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, holding their own service to pay tribute to those who had sacrificed their lives in wars. Children in Foundation and Key Stage Two wrote messages of remembrance on individually decorated poppies which together formed a giant wreath. Children recited “For the Fallen” by Robert Laurence Binyon and “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae, which was followed by a 2-minute silence.



SHAKING IT UP: The LDCA hosted a cocktails night on November 30th, with expert shaker Toby Weidmann mixing the drinks, and a raffle with a hamper as the big prize. Iechyd da!



85 REASONS FOR A BASH....



The clan gathered for a Llancarfan Society Supper on November 22nd and were treated to delicious food (that lemon tart was something!) and a psychedelic halloween light show. A good time was had by all. The event was timed to coincide with Barbara Milhuisen's 85th birthday so as to recognise all she does for the Society and community. Barbara had no problems blowing out the candles on her cake – but then there weren't quite 85 of them!



IN THE DRINK AGAIN

Another issue of the Newsletter, another vehicle in the river. The driver of this Nissan Micra was on her way to the pub but ended up driving – or being swept – under no fewer than four bridges (three foot, one road) before coming to a stop at the southern edge of the village. The Community Council is pondering what signage could go at the ford to ensure this happens less often in future. Ideas welcome.



DATES FOR THE DIARY....



Upcoming Llanccarfarn Society Events...

February:

Bingo Night – always a good evening even if bingo is not normally your thing... Prizes lights, music and wine, eyes down...Village Hall. Further details from Hub closer to date

March:

11th **Launch of Iolo Morganwg Blue Plaque** at Pen-onn, marking the historic birthplace of Llanccarfarn's most celebrated son. Further details to come on the Hub

July:

11th **Village Show**, an early reminder. Entry form is enclosed with this issue of Newsletter. Get preserving, growing, painting and stitching now!

And the rest....

December:

13th Blessing of Christmas Trees, Concert & Llanccarfarn School tree-dressing prize, St Cadoc's Church, 6.30pm

19th Carol Service Llanccarfarn School, 9.30am

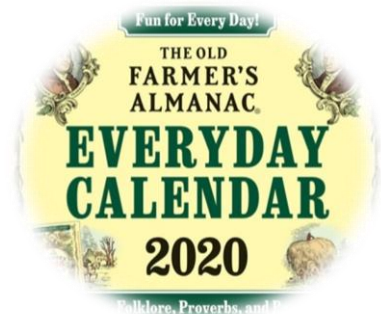
22nd Festival of Nine Lessons St Cadocs Church 7pm

22nd Fox & Hounds Village Christmas Party, 8pm onwards

24th Cringle Crib Service, St Cadoc's, 3pm

Midnight Mass, 11.30pm

25th Family Service St Cadoc's, 11.15am



January:

18th Burns Supper. £20 for 3 courses and drink upon arrival. Licensed Bar. Piper. Vegetarians catered for. 7.30pm

24th "Judy": Renée Zellweger's mesmerising Oscar-worthy performance as Judy Garland, Village Hall Cinema

February:

28th "The Day Shall Come": Dark thriller-satire spotlighting FBI shenanigans, directed by Chris Morris, Village Hall Cinema

March:

12th "Bait": Cariad screening. Hypnotic 16mm film about Cornishmen taking on the tourists. Five-star reviews. Village Hall Cinema

20th "Downton": Everyone's favourite stately home bursting onto the big screen, with Maggie Smith and Hugh Bonneville. Village Hall Cinema

April:

19th "Lion King": Holiday kids' matinee. Big Cats replace the traditional Easter bunny, Village Hall Cinema

24th "Knives Out": Romping Agatha Christie style murder mystery with Daniel Craig, Chris Evans and Jaimie Lee Curtis joining the "A-list turned slay-list party", Village Hall Cinema

May:

Film and Wine Night, Village Hall Cinema – date and film/theme to be confirmed – suggestions welcome! Jules Highfield, llancarfancine@gmail.com

WELCOME IN THE NEW YEAR WITH A RENEWAL



IT'S that time of year again. Annual subscriptions are due on January 1st. A membership form is enclosed with this Newsletter. Alternatively, forms can be downloaded from www.llancarfansociety.org.uk

Being a part of the Llancaf Society family is now better value than ever: despite the increased cost of printing and distributing the Newsletter, membership fees have not increased for many years. And remember, you only receive the Newsletter if you subscribe. Oh, and membership makes an ideal gift!

