

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 190 MARCH 2024



Now we must get this right. Our tipsy snapper caught *The Drunken Dullards*, who **didn't** win the *Llancarfan Society's* very successful *Quiz Night* in the *Fox & Hounds* on February 20th. Still, they seemed happy enough! The winners were (we think) the *Barstools*. But the award for the best team name went to '*We Thought It Was a Speed Dating!*'



www.llancarfansociety.org.uk

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

1 MARCH 2024

GORDON KEMP, SOCIETY CHAIRMAN, WRITES :

This Newsletter is a departure from the usual in two ways. It is being distributed not just to members of the Llanccarfann Society but to all homes in the Llanccarfann Community area. Secondly, it is not the glossy format that we have become used to over recent years, but more on that later.

For those who don't know, the Society was founded in 1987 and its current Rules (for some reason not called a constitution) sets out four Objects:-

- To provide a forum for those resident in the community area or who have an interest.
- To publish a newsletter.
- To maintain a website.
- To promote a wide range of social activities.

The current membership subscription is £15.00 a year per couple or £10 for one person.

For those who haven't done so I recommend that you view our website, particularly as it gives access to all the newsletters produced by the Society.

The Society's record of social events is too long to list here but includes dinners, walks, BBQs, mystery trips and theatre visits. Much more information can be obtained by viewing the newsletter archive.

If you look at past newsletters you will see, as noted above, that the format has changed dramatically over the years. The most recent editions owe much to the hard work of the editors, Ian Fell and then Matthew Valencia (assisted by Penny Fell) who produced a professional publication. Unfortunately for various reasons they have not been able to continue, hence the format of this offering which is a return to the past (but I hope no less welcome for that). We are looking for a new editor and if there is anybody out there who is able to take on this role, please contact me kemp66@btinternet.com

The Society is responsible for the Pétanque piste situated below the tennis court in Llancarfan. It is little used. Have you used it or even know that it is for community use? Would you consider using it? Please let me have your thoughts.

Finally, an issue that cannot be avoided. Does the Society have a future? The demographics of the communities have changed since the Society was established, membership has fallen, and the pandemic prevented the holding of the number of events as before. On a positive note, this newsletter contains information on the initial programme of events for this year.

Please then let me have your views. Do you want the Society to continue? If you are not a member, will you become one? Does the Society need to change to become more relevant to you?

Please send me your thoughts but also please continue to support the current events that we are organising.

A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT - MRS BARBARA MILHUISEN

I was the first secretary of the Llancarfan Society which was convened on Monday 27th April 1987 at 8.00pm in the *Fox & Hounds*.

The idea of a Society was thought of by Phil Watts at the funeral of Mr Viv Thomas of Pancross Farm. Phil then put an advert in the GEM newspaper to invite people to contact him. The first to do so was my cousin John Palling. The meeting at the *Fox & Hounds* took place, and (consulting my notes) it was a very amicable. |So a Committee was set up and future events proposed.

I visited Phil recently to pick his brains about the future of the Society. We agreed that our families have been friends for over 100 years, but it is now time to make new friends.

Llancarfan no longer has a school but we still have a Church and a Pub and connections with friends all over the world.

Let us then make new friends, starting of course, with our village. We can never have too many. Let us reach out to all nationalities and hopefully we will make the world a more peaceful and restful place.

P.S. I am still friends and in contact with original members.

The Llancarfan Society presents
a St. Patrick's



IRISH SUPPER



Village Hall : 15 March 2024 : 7pm for 7.30pm

Tickets : £20 : from llancarfansoc@gmail.com
Please book by 11 March

FEATURING

- Irish Stew with Colcannon
- A welcoming fiddle

And introducing

- Irish ballads & jigs from The Welsh Singing Sopranos



THAT'S SO IRISH!

For the good are always the merry,
Sew by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle
And the merry love to dance!

We've boozed with Burns –
Now try a taste of Yeats!

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY EVENTS

More diary dates for 2024

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|---------|
| Mar 15 th | Irish Supper | 7.00 pm |
| Apr 1 st | Picnic & competitions on the Piste
(or in the village hall if raining) | 2.30 pm |
| Apr 17 th | A.G.M. with Guest Speaker
Graham Loveluck-Edwards | 7.00 pm |
| May 27 th | A May Walk | |
| June/Jul | Mystery Tour & Dinner
Date TBA | |
| Aug 31 st | Llancarfan village Show | |

Further details for events to follow

'A BEAUTIFUL CEMETERY IN HONOUR OF GOD'**Ian Fell**

To join in with the debate about the Llancarfan Society's future, I apologize for offering this disproportionately long article. It is a mere attempt at the sort of thing (by all means do it better!) that an active recorder of our village history, past and present, ought to be including in the Llancarfan Society Newsletter.

When I was editor of, and writer for the Newsletter - from 2009 to 2018 - I was more than aware that it was a great privilege to record our village's past & present. Not everyone has had the chance of reflecting such a fascinating settlement of interesting people, many of whom still have, through their knowledge & professions, a significant impact on the world beyond our valley.

Of course though, historically speaking, Llancarfan remained, for many centuries, a focus of power and influence. It might seem quaint to mention it today, but you don't establish and sustain a monastic community under the name of an ever-more revered saint without needing to exert influence and ownership. Not to mention exploiting the resources of a sizeable stretch of our landscape. This, of course, is just what the community of St. Cadoc did. For instance, while the monastery and its estates probably changed greatly over time, each of the monks seems at one time to have had his own endowment of land – at least by the late 11th century. In short, from about 500 A.D. our Celtic brothers here built up ownership and domination of an important circuit of 'Glamorganshire' land, and Llancarfan was enriched by outlying communities who fostered the monastic domains. More of this later.

You may also agree then that, whoever for a time dominated a period of our history, Llancarfan has seemed unusually affected by the shunting around of power. All this has proved rewarding for us explorers of history to write about. And (in whatever future format your Society chooses to record historical interests) these stories

continue to emerge. In fact, in the case of today's latest tale, they emerge literally from the ground.



A few weeks ago (January 24th) your chairman Gordon Kemp and I went along to Fonmon to hear a well-attended presentation by a Dr. Andy Seaman, who (with his students) has been digging holes in Fonmon castle fields. Perhaps you recently caught the story on TV, specifically in Episode Three of the BBC's *Digging for Britain* series? If so, you may have latched onto Fonmon's latest tale – though the TV account was rather buried, in my view, alongside rather too many other archaeological projects.

Anyway, Dr. Seaman's live lecture the other night proved even more enlightening than the telly.¹ (|To put him in context, Dr. Seaman is a very interesting man who lectures - and digs - for *Cardiff University's School of History, Archaeology and Religion*. (He, to our pride, last year also brought his students to Llancarfan to see the St. Cadoc's wall-paintings.)

Today though, with the enthusiastic commitment of the current owner of Fonmon Castle, Nigel Ford, Dr. Seaman is being encouraged to spend several years of excavation in the castle fields. He and his student colleagues have already carried out digging sessions over three summers, and they plan a further four years of detailed scientific excavation. Their broad objective, it is explained, is to further illuminate the 'long-term historical context of Fonmon Castle and its estates'.

Now as it happens, our friend over a pint in 'The Fox', Simon Graves, has long served as Fonmon's Senior Groundsman. And Simon was

¹ You can follow development of Dr. Seaman's research by comparing recordings his talk – for instance, an earlier version was delivered to the prestigious Society of Antiquaries in Cardiff on March 2nd 2023, and can be watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qjR_9XDcbo.

himself 'illuminated' quite early on in the Fonmon excavations. Well, he's been ploughing those fields for years. Then one day, as he relates, he got a note to say that someone wanted to see him in the castle. So he popped in, and found the 'someone' was a 1500-year-old skeleton, very recently (and decently) retrieved from Simon's landscape. Just like an episode of *Silent Witness*. But no Emilia Fox.

Well, to get to the core of Dr. Seaman's engaging lecture, it turns out that Simon's skeletal friend is one of many people who found their final resting place in Fonmon Fields. In fact, some 35 burials have been documented there by 2023. You might indeed wish to watch a recording for details (see footnote above), but it seems that the university team has discovered what they call 'an embankment-protected cemetery', dated to around 500 AD. There is also evidence that this so-called 'cemetery settlement' at Fonmon was the focus of a small supportive 'court', or perhaps even a lost hamlet.

Intriguing clues have certainly emerged from the four initial archaeological trenches. Rather unusually too for our neck of the woods, the finds in the Fonmon settlement have been dated mainly to that Early Mediaeval period – 500 A.D. – this being just after the collapse and withdrawal of the Roman occupation. Apart from burials, the larger evidence found and assessed to date has encompassed animal bones (signs of eating), a spindle whorl (as in spinning), slag (as in black-smithing), and a 'corn-drying kiln'.

Now, given that the digs have revealed this mediaeval cemetery, it is not unreasonable perhaps to wonder (with due caution) whether our predecessors took part in similar activities to those still carried out in modern funerals.

Many a funeral has, for instance, its traditional wake. So it is interesting that among one of the Fonmon discoveries, a student has unearthed a small shard of glass, curved, and with a moulded rib of glass running across its surface. This fragment turns out to be part of

a cone-shaped beaker. Dr. Seaman confirmed its 'high status'). Intriguingly, it is of a shape that you *can not put down* – well, not without something like those ice-cream holders they use to sell you your 'Ninety-Nine'. So –an elegant continental drinking vessel that you can't put down without emptying? Our images of Fonmon's funerary festivities take fire!

Another question still to be asked about the funeral rites that were fore-runners of our own has to be : did they strew or place flowers on the graves back then? Ancient seeds do survive in soil samples. So it might seem a question worth pondering, given that one of Fonmon's newly-associated companies, *All Things Rural*, is involved in the growing of wild flower seeds.



Anyway, fascinating as these things are, you have waited long enough for a Llancafarn connection. So look at the maps showing the boundaries of Llancafarn parish, and it seems clear that while the landscape in question became ruled over *in later centuries* by Fonmon Castle (including, remember, our own village, with notable church-tithing exceptions), the Fonmon landscape was in the main earlier regarded as part of Llancafarn's monastic domain. It is this fact which has allowed Dr. Seaman to make a tentative reference to that ever popular occupant of every Llancafarn bookshelf - the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*. Joking apart, this 'Vita' or 'Life of St. Cadoc' was written shortly after 1066, and re-published with an English translation in 1853 by the Welsh Manuscripts Society. (It's digitised on Google.)

The point is, *Vita Sancti Cadoci* is now authoritatively considered to be a work of religious narrative, **but partly written to determine and put in writing the historical monastic rights to parts of the countryside around Llancafarn**. We are assured that a monastic settlement still survived here (perhaps at Llanvithyn?) well into the 12th century (the community by then living as tenants of the Abbey of

Gloucester). Cadoc's 'Life' thus served as a challenge from our monastic community, aimed at the invading French conquerors. In other words, the 'Life' asserts monastic ownership in the face of those intent on taking over our territories, claiming harvests, and building a spanking new 12th century replacement St. Cadoc's church on (it is thought) the monastic site.



Those villagers aware of our legends will know that the written life of St. Cadoc is full of romantic miracles and mysteries. However, Dr Seaman has now alerted us to other passages of perhaps even greater historical significance which can be found among the *Vita* tales of faith and legend. So on (p.83) :

'De possessionibus predictorum canonicorum.
Primum Atrium deserti, quod est proprie Abbatis,
cum villa Tremgueithen . . . &c &c.'

This reads in translation :

'Of the possessions of the aforesaid Canons.
First the court of the Desert, which is the property of the Abbot,
with the village of Tremgueithen . . . &c &c.'

There are many fascinating footnotes to the above to be found in the Rev. William Jenkins Rees's original translation of the 'Life'. All are however rather too detailed to deal with here. But in notes to the above extract from the monks' list of claimed sites, Rees proposes that the 'Atrium deserti' is 'probably the village of Llancafán, where Saint Cadoc founded his monastery in a "desert"², and that 'Tremgueithen' is probably 'Llanfeithin'.

² Here the Latin translates as 'of the desert court'. But I'm grateful to our constant friend Professor Maddy Gray who shared thoughts about the desert vastnesses of Llancafán!

While again rather too complex to explore here, the 'Vita' offers us (and the French invaders) a remarkable role call of local hamlets, allegedly the property of the monastery of Llancarfan. You may recall our earlier note, that the monks seemed once to have had their individual endowment of land, their 'Atrium' or 'Court'. And so – treading with care – Dr. Seaman is allowing himself to wonder if his new-found site at Fonmon is a previously unknown, largely undisturbed, part of a wide ring of courts, some perhaps kitted out with chapel & dwellings, and serving almost as a defensive muster of canonical outposts planted in the tithe-lands of St. Cadoc's monastery. Such estates could well be the origin of all the little villages and hamlets that are part of the Llancarfan parish.

Historians have still not identified all of St. Cadoc's 'courts', but again, it does seem that the area around Fonmon might well have been one. Dr. Seaman has also tentatively considered the significance of the many graves encountered during the last decade's widening of The Five Mile Lane. Could this have been a similar outpost court or settlement of our monastery? One wonders if further study might support this early hypothesis?



Meanwhile (whilst bowing to those who know better) it is intriguing to read and quote here another passage from *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, (p.324). The following passage describes the preparations said to be made by St. Cadoc when founding his monastery :

'After this miracle was made known to all the western Britons, a great many of the clergy from all parts throughout Britain, flowed eagerly, like a river, to Saint Cadoc . . . Then the holy man undertook to raise up a large mound of earth, and to make therein a very

Maddy suggests that 'it was not a desert in the sense of a dry and sandy place' – no Merthyr Mawr then! – 'but in the sense of a deserted place, a place of isolation and austerity. Which, you may feel, still tellingly describes our outpost of Llanvithyn.

handsome cemetery, to be dedicated in honour of God, where the bodies of the faithful might be buried near to the church . . .’

This, we can note again, is the ‘Life’s’ *founding description* of the first monastic settlement here in Llanccarfan. But surely it can also accurately describe the findings of Andy Seaman’s team as they labour in Fonmon Fields? As the monks chose to put it in their Latin, a ‘vastum acervum de terra erigere, atque in eodem pulcherimum cimiterium in honorem Dei dedicatum facere.’

Four more years of digging are planned, which hopefully should throw more light upon the mysteries of Fonmon’s landscapes. But even today, this discovery at Fonmon of a ‘pulcherimum cimiterium in honorem Dei’ – ‘a beautiful cemetery in honour of God’ – must surely enhance our own village’s understanding of Llanccarfan’s monastic outreach and power.



HISTORY THEN & HISTORY NOW – Tales told by the newspapers

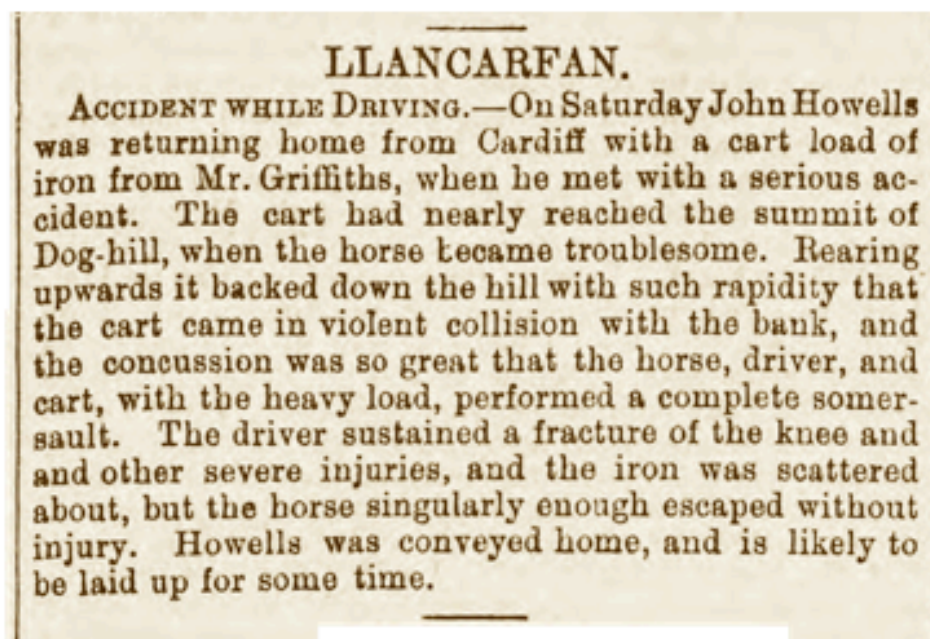
As we’ve said before, the mantra of ‘yesterday for today, and today for tomorrow’ has been a guiding principle behind the *Llanccarfan Society* to date. With this in mind, There has been no stopping our previous Chairman Graham Brain from busily trawling through several digitised Welsh issues of local Newspapers online, and also through the British Newspaper Archive (both are free resources).

LLANCCARFAN.

ASSAULTING THE POLICE ON ELECTION DAY.— William James is a farm labourer, and on Friday, the 19th inst., proceeded to Llanccarfan to exercise his right as a citizen on the occasion of the election of Parliamentary representative for South Glamorgan. After recording his vote James proceeded to a local public house, where he indulged himself “not wisely but too well.” In the afternoon he grew disorderly, and Constable H. Headen was called to eject him from the premises. During the operation James struck and scratched the constable, his violence reaching a culminating point when he savagely kicked Headen and dislocated two of the fingers of his right hand, since which the officer had been under medical treatment. Dr Kelly, Barry, described the injuries sustained by the constable, and the Barry magistrates (Mr J. Lowdon and Alderman J. C. Meggitt) on Monday last fined James 20s and costs, or 10 days’ hard labour.

Llancarfan quite often rears its (sometimes embarrassing) head in papers such as the *Barry Dock News*, *Barry Herald*, *Cardiff Times*, *Glamorgan Gazette* and others. So, for instance, with more than one election looming on the horizon, it's probably good for us to be reminded by the clipping above – found in the *Barry Dock News* of 12.02.1897 – how **not** to behave when election days come around.

Not every misfortune however is the result of over-indulgence (or even of voting for Parliament!). We assume the 'iron' in this report (*Cardiff Times* 11.11.1871) is scrap-iron – but where was Dog-hill?



Finally though, history will not stop happening – as our most recent downpours prove. Here, on the **21st of February 2024**, Mr. Welshegg found an unfortunate place in which to hatch his brood. Sorry Mr.W.

