



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 36 February-March 1991

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1991 by Barbara Milhuisen, General Secretary
The meeting was opened by the Chairman, John Etherington who welcomed everyone and outlined how the Society came into being, in particular acknowledging Phil Watts initiative in advertising in the local press in 1987, inviting anyone interested in Llanccarfafan to join with him with the idea of meeting on happy occasions (rather than at funerals!). As a result, a small group met at the Fox and Hounds and an informal committee was elected which grew into the present committee of the Society.

By 1988 and 1989, formalized events were organized including, in the late autumn or early winter, the Annual Dinners; in the mid-summer a Craft Fair and Sports together with the evening Barn Dance combined with St Cattwg's Church. Whist drives were held at various times throughout the year and May Day walks, at first in Llanccarfafan and now, both in Llanccarfafan and Llantrithyd. Barbecues at Abernant have become an institution, not just celebrating Committee members' birthdays, but an opportunity to meet for further enjoyment. A Newsletter is produced almost every month and distributed to the four corners of the earth and often passed-on to a wider audience than just Society members.

John then continued to say that, sadly, he was leaving Llanccarfafan after 23 years to live in Pembrokeshire but that he would continue to edit the Newsletter for the foreseeable future.

The main business of the meeting was the election of a formal Committee which is essentially a reshuffle of the one which has grown-up over the past three years: Chairman - Derek Higgs, General Secretary - Barbara Milhuisen; Minutes Secretary - Mavis Coles; Membership Secretary - Phil Watts; Treasurer - Joyce Andrews; Newsletter Editor - John Etherington; Committee Members - Geoff Burrows; Andrew Griffiths; Gwynne Liscombe and Mick Mace. The only new member is Mavis Coles, but in her position as printer of the Newsletter she has effectively been part of the old Committee for some time.

The original Committee was aware that the responsibility for our growing bank account demanded some sort of formal constitution, including proper provision for financial winding-up if this is ever needed. The meeting approved a set of rules, with minor amendment. A copy was circulated with the last Newsletter.

The meeting unanimously supported the proposal that a long-term aim of the Society shall be the production of A Book of Llancarfan incorporating some of the more memorable articles from the Newsletters together with additional chapters and photographs. John agreed to steer this project and an editorial sub-committee will be formed in the near future.

During discussion, Gwynne Liscombe suggested that the Society should have a President and that a most appropriate nominee would be Professor Sir Keith Thomas son of the late Vivian Thomas, Pancross Farm and a former pupil of Llancarfan School. John Etherington seconded this proposal and Sir Keith will be contacted and asked if he would be willing to become our President.

The evening's programme continued with a slide show, courtesy of John Etherington and Derek Higgs with a commentary by both. We all enjoyed seeing the village portrayed over 20 years and at varying seasons after which the refreshments supplied by the Committee were appreciated and enjoyed.

The new Chairman, Derek Higgs then undertook his first official task which was very pleasant but tinged with sadness. He requested a surprised John and Sheena Etherington to join him, together with two long-time inhabitants of the village to make a presentation.

Mr Leslie Griffiths, thanked John for his tremendous contribution to the Society and Village-life and presented him with a delightful Jeff Griggs' caricature portrait showing John's interests and some particular foibles! In turn, Mrs Evans of Garnllwyd gave to Sheena a Pieris shrub for the new garden in Pembrokeshire as a reminder of her days in Llancarfan.

The evening concluded with the drawing of a raffle. Ruth Watts always prepares the most delightful raffles, often with a basket of fruit and this time she excelled herself and guess who won the prize? - Ruth herself! -but very kindly she took the fruit as a gift to Mr Gwyn Thomas, Ty-to-Maen. At the very first gathering, when the Society was formed, Gwyn Thomas was present and Ruth had remembered this through his long illness almost from that time. Hopefully our Society is one where this spirit of friendship and consideration continues.

Quiz: The slide-show after the AGM prompted a number of memories including the following observation and question by Gwynne Liscombe:-

One of Derek's slides showed, in the garden of Edgar John's, Corner House, an Anderson Shelter which was used as a garden shed or coalhouse. Who remembers what an Anderson Shelter was and can you remember where others stood in the village?

Was I the Jonah?

Part II; by Dick Evans, Evington, Leicestershire The Second

Voyage

When I returned to Llancarfan from the first voyage things were much the same regarding employment so, when Jimmy cycled out to tell me they were "signing on" again, I reluctantly decided to rejoin the ship. I must have been quite good at my job as they took me on again!

There were a few changes of crew:- the Steward was a West Indian (Grant). By coincidence we had previously seen a coloured girl at dances in St Athan and she turned out to be his daughter who worked in a pub on the Leys. The Chief and 2nd Engineer were the same, the 3rd and 4th were Geordies. The cabin-boy was half-caste from Tiger Bay. The trip followed the same course as the first. The Panama Canal had a record number of ships through - over 100 in 24 hours. Vancouver was about the same - things bad regarding work. You had to hold on to your cigarette or they would take it from your mouth. I took out with me packets of 5 Woodbines and made a profit as they were much in demand! I called at the "5 & 10 cent store" - (Woolworths).

One of the hoboes, roaders in the stockyards told me he was catching a freight train across Canada - the next time I saw him he was on top of one of the freight waggons! Coming through the stockyard there is what was known as "Jap Town" where I had my hair cut off by a Japanese lady. I met a few "remission men" who were paid to stay out of Britain. we called at the same lumber camps, took on the same cargo and set sail back to Britain.

Taking on coal at Port Royal, the ship should have gone to the starboard side of Elbo Alto island, but instead went to the port side and finished-up on the rocks. If the 2nd Engineer hadn't had the presence of mind to reverse the engine, a lot more damage would have been caused, and the ship would have broken in half! As it was, it had a nasty hole in the first and second holds. We tried to launch the lifeboats but someone had filled them with water to stop the boards from shrinking! Seawater leaked into the grain making it swell so the timber stored on top made the deck lift. After two days a Dutch tug came to our rescue. We had jettisoned a lot of our deck cargo, so the native fishermen did well for timber! They rewarded us with a giant turtle so we enjoyed turtle soup. The Chief and I climbed up the rocks and collected seagull eggs. The crew of the Dutch tug had to saw the timber in the hold to relieve the pressure from swollen grain - every grain turned to maggots there were millions of them everywhere and gas given off turned the brass black.

One day a toilet was stopped-up so I went over the side, down a rope ladder, with a steel rod, hoping to open the one-way steel trap. However sharks flashed suddenly across my mind, as my legs were in the water. I climbed further up the ladder but could not do much in that position. One of the apprentices changed places with me but failed to do the job and back on board he asked whether I was scared of sharks - with tongue in cheek I said "No!". The toilet eventually got cleared by using a power hose down the pan!

The Dutch tug's cook gave me a lettuce in a block of ice - no 'frig' in those days. The crew

of the tug caught five sharks, one a hammerhead, horrible looking creature! They shot them and hung them up on board, later dropping them back in the sea, attracting dozens of sharks, however, who tore the carcasses to pieces and the sea looked as if it was boiling with blood.

The mate on the tug was also a head diver - no aqua lungs in those days - and he wore full diver's kit of heavy boots, screwed on helmet, lead belt and rubber suit, with a pump connected for sending down air. He could hardly move and had to be pushed over the side! He patched our ship's holes and by putting out hawsers and anchors we pulled off the rocks.

We then sailed back to Kingston and tied up next to the American tourist ship called "Queen of Bermuda" which had cars and polo ponies on board. A steward from the 2nd class showed me around the ship. We saw the Pan American Flying Boat coming in with mail and convicts going out to work on the road being built to join Port Royal and Kingston. It was not safe to walk down Spanish Town Road on ones own. "Dirty Dick's" bar was at the end of the quay.

I saw pelicans, little black hell divers flying up nearly out of sight and plunging back to catch fish. Also saw giant jelly-fish which could give you a nasty sting. Pineapples were growing in the fields, like turnips, and I had my first mango. I bought a hand of bananas - 127 for 2/6d. - and most of the crew did the same. It was nice to eat a few as they ripened but when they all got ripe we had banana fritters or cooked in different ways until we had more than enough of them!

We were in Kingston about three weeks and the holes in the hold were filled with I don't know how many tons of concrete! I bought a pair of bullock's horns on which were coats of arms of Jamaica and the letters B.W.I. in the centre (Phil Watts says they are still around) also purchased a large piece of pink coral. Young squids were sold, which the natives used to eat.

Said goodbye to the West Indies and headed for home, hoping we would not run into a storm as the concrete in the holes was only a temporary repair. The Bay was as calm as a millpond, however, so we safely reached London Docks, where I again met my sister, and after a few days we sailed to Cardiff and then arrived back in Llancarfan.

By this time there was more work about so it was goodbye to the sea for me. Was I the Jonah?

Birds: notes from Autumn and Winter: by John Etherington

In quarter of a century watching birds around this village something new seems to happen

every year. We have often seen the occasional tiny goldcrest, smaller than a wren, usually near our larch and spruce trees, but this year they have turned-up at the back of the house picking insects from the dwarf conifers outside the bedroom window. Just like a humming-bird, one hung in the air with its wings no more than a blur. I've never seen it happen before

and it is not in the bird-books. The morning after I wrote this, we saw a firecrest in our spruce tree - same size as the goldcrest but with very pronounced eye-stripes: now I'm not sure whether our humming-bird might not have been the much rarer firecrest? Any birdwatchers more knowledgeable than me?

Beside our front steps is a self-seeded Himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria*). This year it is big enough to have had a lot of berries for the first time and, of all the unexpected birds, chaffinches have become hooked on them. They take one berry at a time and, I presume, pick the seeds out. They will brave dogs, cat and visitors to get them so they must be the bird-equivalent of magic mushrooms.

Phil Watts pointed-out that, since Mike Evans put a rather brilliant floodlight in the rear car-park of the Fox, birds have continued to sing until very late at night in the late autumn. We have certainly heard a blackbird at 10.30 on our way out for a nightcap. Hope it does not make them try to nest early.

On the 3rd and 4th January it hailed heavily, the biggest hailstones being larger than peas. This upset the smaller birds which quickly congregated in our large bay-tree - its thick, leathery leaves must have been good shelter and it was soon massed with twittering refugees.

Up in the fields above the village the hawthorns have been laden with berries and the fieldfares are in greater number than usual, "chack, chack"-ing away off the bushes as our dogs disturb them in the early morning. There have been great mixed flights them with redwings and starlings, all congregating together, looking for insects and worms in the grass fields. A little later, in the first and second week of February when it was so cold and then snowed, the redwing suffered dreadfully: some, quite out of character moved into the valley-bottom gardens looking for food and many were so sluggish that they were killed by cars, cats and probably buzzards. Why these summer-arctic birds are so sensitive to cold seems a mystery. During our move to West Wales I saw literally dozens which had been killed by road traffic.

After moving to Pembrokeshire, whilst digging away to fill a skip with rubble, a flight of curlew passed overhead bubbling and piping to remind me that I had seen a flock of them in the wet meadows at Llantrithyd last autumn. They are not often seen around Llancafán - though just occasionally I have heard one flying over at night in the summer. However, Nancy Dobby (Newsletter 13) mentions them in the fields behind the Bakehouse during the 50's - were they more common in days past - anyone remember?

One thing that I shall miss about Llancafán is the early mornings in the high-fields above Cross-Green where we have always walked the dogs. Early in December, very early on a

quite lovely, frosty morning, the mist came in down the valley from the north until it made a rippled sea, pink in the sunrise, with nothing but the horizon above Gowlog, Llanvythin and Trevythin visible from the field above Cross Green. Almost every day seems to bring something wonderful like this: the same view was beautiful under a blanket of snow for over a week in February and last spring a brilliant yellow with buttercups.

Another Change: The Nook (Morningside) was knocked down in late November. The editor's family have always called it "the pink and purple house" - not sure if the children made-up the name or whether it was common usage. Framebuilt houses, of its ilk, with asbestos-cement or matchboard panelling were widely constructed in the 20's and 30's - I believe there is a book devoted to them in the area north of London. Most have succumbed to modern rebuilding and I am glad we collected some photo's of The Nook before it fell into disrepair.

Phil Watts gathered the following information from Les Griffiths at the AGM:

The Nook was built between 1924 and 1928 when Les was serving his time as an apprentice carpenter at the Carpenter's Shop (Harry's Shop). It was built for Danny Gibbon in his retirement from the Fox and Hounds where he had been licensee. The Fox at this time was kept by David Harris and his wife who was Danny's daughter. George Gibbon of Middlehill (now Talbots!), brother of Mrs Harris, was a carpenter and I wonder if he built it? I am told that Danny Gibbon was one to be feared by youngsters who came near. Les says that it was built from new timber and was not a converted army hut as has been believed by some people.

I remember Alice and Blodwyn Jones living there before the War, also the Muir family. Ken Muir married Elsie Harris from the pub, thus retaining the connection with the Fox. Later, Bill Riley lived there. He was an electronics man who left the area in about 1952/3 to service a radar station in Scotland and then returned to the Decca Station on Cemain Road. Around this time Bill Riley's father in law, Mr Taylor, father of Stella, lived in Kenson Cottage at Penmark (now Betty Hill's house). As a boy I remember him as being particularly skillful at handling snakes.

I was married in 1952 and, at this time The Nook was for sale but where does a chap in the RAF, looking for a job in civvy street, find £1000? A wooden structure would not conform to a Building Society's regulations. My mother had collateral at Abernant but I had no earning capacity and even less cash.

During this period I remember the garden between The Nook and the Carpenter's Shop being used by David Harris. Both the properties gained a lot of land when the river was straightened to help with the flooding problems. It is said that the River Board was successful in making the river into a "ditch".

During the War a family called Cheal lived in the Nook having been bombed-out in

Cardiff. There were two daughters, Edna and another whose name I do not recall and a son, John. They ran a greengrocers and taxi business near the railway station for many years afterwards.

The last occupants of the Nook were Mr & Mrs Stevens, chiropodists, who lived there for many years. It is believed, during those last years that the property required a temporary certificate of habitability which was issued 12-monthly - does anyone know anything about this? After Mr Stevens' departure the house gradually fell into decrepitude while a series of planning applications were made and rejected. The demolition now makes way for a modern house and the future will tell us what sort of phoenix arises from the ashes.

Footpaths revisited: there is progress on this front. The missing stile at the junction of footpaths 2, 26 and 27, close to Ffynnon y Clwyf, Broomwell, was in the course of being built when we walked that way in mid-January and stile access to the path opposite Penylan Barn and leading to Ford Cross has now been provided. On the day that we discovered the new stile at Broomwell we also walked the paths to the north of Castle Ditches on which all the stiles are new. Thank you to all the land-owners. Just a few more to go and most of the local paths will be comfortably usable.

Great House: Peter and Joan Badcock of Great House are almost the last of the group we call "the old village" and, of course, Peter's father Ernie Badcock was Clerk to the Parish and Community Councils for almost forty years between 1949 and 1987.

Great House is currently on the market so this will be a final severance of old ties, in particular because we know more of the occupational history of this house than most of the older ones. Ernie used to tell various stories about Great House, some of which appeared in a front-page advertisement in Property Mail on 19th January. The advertisement reminds us that there were originally two houses which it refers to as Bottom End Cottage and Road End Cottage.

The eastern end of the house was reputedly given by the Crown to a Welsh nobleman for raising 500 archers to fight the French at Agincourt - where the story originated is unknown and it probably could not be verified. The original building was Yew Tree Cottage: renamed about two centuries ago when it was extended to form the present Great House. As some of you will remember the roadside part of the house once contained Llancarfan Post Office. Ernie used to say that the yew tree was in the garden until relatively recently but it was cut down and the stump poisoned as it was claimed that it harmed John Jones' bees which were kept there.

On Floods, Roads and other Memories: various readers have commented and sent letters after the publication of the articles on floods and roads in Newsletter 34.

Dick Evans. I recollect the floods when I was a child - the field below Glanyr-Afon used to flood over and when the water subsided, the hollow in the field remained full for many days, so we were able to bathe in this pool in March! There was an old saying "If you bathe before May, you lay in clay"!

My mother used to tell of an incident which happened to her and a friend. They were walking down Cross-Green Hill and when they got to the steepest part they kept tight to the left-hand side of the road to let a horse and trap pass, but, instead of passing them it went straight through the hedge on the right and was never seen again!! I wonder if there are other stories like this that folk of Llancarfan remember?

Ken Lougher. We enjoy reading the Newsletter and there were some interesting items in No. 34 about floods in Llancarfan. I remember one mess in the Church after a high flood but many times the water would reach the outside east wall. The Thaw river was tidal by the Old Mill but occasionally the road at the bottom of Burton Hill would be impassable and the water would back-up over the dam and sluice-gate. Usually one would sit in the van until the tide receded a little. There would be no purpose in taking the Llancadle road to Llancarfan hoping to get to Penonn. Kenson Cottage was so often flooded in the garden, but the "stile type" stone at the front and back doors saved the interior of the house.

I should have some pictures of the large-sized hailstones which fell in Rhoose. They were bigger than an "England's Glory" matchbox, and did a lot of damage to the greenhouse and made holes in the slate roof of the house. Some were embedded in the soft lawn turf. We kept a few of them in the fridge to show to friends because the storm was not widespread.

Regarding the Blacksmith's Shop prices, when we returned from Canada we had to buy a broom and handle. What a price (2d. each in Rhoose Hardware when we were there) - anything from £1 to £1.25. Were those days "The Bad Old Days"?! Lillian and I were married in 1939 and my weekly wage was £2.17s. A year later I was called-up for military service and spent six years in the R.A.F. After being demobbed we bought a bungalow in Rhoose; the mortgage repayment was 16s. 4d. per month. Happy Days.

Editor's note: in Newsletter 20, Valerie Cram (formerly Jones of Great House) wrote "One year the church flooded to a depth that overturned heavy pews with everything else floating around the church." This must have been in the early 1950's? - can you remember Valerie?

Phil Watts. A notorious spot where wet clay would squeeze up into a hump at the middle of the road was on the hill leading from Monastery Mill to the road junction below Llanvythin. At this time my grandfather, William Liscombe, lived in and operated the mill. He frequently complained about the state of the road and advised the road engineers how they should resolve the problem.

The engineer's solution would be to dig-out the offending clay and fill with stone. This solved the problem temporarily, only for another hump to appear further down or up the hill, wherever the weakest spot may have been - such is the force of water.

My grandfathers solution was that the area should filled with stone and the water piped away. This was done in relation to surface water which was drained into the mill-pond. But many years passed by before suitable drains were laid and all the water piped into the mill pond, which does not exist now - much to the annoyance and discomfiture of Graham Levi, the present occupant of the mill.

Llew Griffiths refers to the steam traction engine becoming bogged-down at the roadside. The spot at which this occurred was alongside Bassetts Wood (between Llanvythin and Abernant) which remains a very wet troublesome area. Llew rightly mentions another traction engine having to be sent-for from Cardiff. This caused a lot of inconvenience to the flour people who were delivering to the Bakehouse (which had just started producing bread). The large combine of Ranks and Spillers had taken-over the role of producing flour, from the local water mills.

Because of the bad state of the roads and the unsafe condition of the Abernant bridge the vehicles were banned from using the lane and were forced to take the longer route via the Old Post Inn, Caemaen, Pancross and Llancarfan. The same conditions appertain today except that a sign-post on the A48 directs traffic to Llancarfan along the narrower Abernant road, qualified by smaller signs of passing-places and "for cars only". Work is also in hand to alter the Abernant and Whitwell bridges. The condition of this stretch of road has seen much correspondence between myself, the Community Council and South Glamorgan County Council. In spite of this, the water flows down the middle of the road rather than in a ditch at the side. The council recently resurfaced the road from Abernant to the top of Llanvythin hill, presumably at great expense but you are right, John, tarmacadam is waterproof. None of the water soaks into the land but flows down the road.

Whilst writing this I was reminded how my grandfather drained his lands. Pipes were made of clay and far too expensive to be used for land-drainage. Labour, in the old days, was much cheaper than materials so the surface water was disposed-of by means of open ditches to the sides of the hedgerows. But, where it was necessary to cross fields or relieve low, wet areas, the system he used to adopt was, first of all, to dig-out a ditch with the necessary fall toward a drain or hedgerow ditch, then lay lengths of straight hazelnut branch in the bottom of the trench. I am not sure whether stones were used as well, but it would have been sensible to do so if available. The theory of this was that, after about a season the hazelnut would rot and leave a channel that water could flow through. Not a permanent arrangement but it probably worked quite well for a time and was similar to "mole drainage" which was used in later years.

Sad News: Two unexpected deaths have come as a shock to the village. Ian Baldwin of

Broadhayes died in hospital after a short illness. He and Audrey have always supported the Society and, in the years they have spent in Llancarfan, have made many friends all of whom extend their sympathy.

We also have to report the tragic death of Freddie Hall, Old Bakehouse. Our thoughts are with Veronica and the children, who have had more than their fair share of grief.

Parc Dyffryn: The developers who planned a new village between Bonvilston, St Nicholas and Dyffryn have withdrawn their application following its rejection by the Vale Council (BBC Wales 28th February). Despite this, the proposed alterations to the County Structure Plan allow for new settlements in the rural Vale and eternal vigilance will be needed if we value our countryside. Perhaps the designation of Green Belts coupled with proper enforcement of wise Structure Plans might be the answer? Incidentally, as farms are getting bigger by amalgamation, and many farmhouses converted to domestic use, why are new ones being built, sometimes to be sold very quickly? This is a paradox of agricultural planning permissions versus common sense. Those who read the local press will realise that our Planners are kicking very hard against the prospect of being restricted by a green-belt policy. One wonders why.