



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 41 October 1991

FUTURE EVENTS: A WHIST DRIVE

This will be held on November 22nd at 7.30 p.m. in the Llancarfan Community Hall. Admission will be £0.75 at the door. Refreshments and Raffle. Please come if you can: there were more Rhoose people than folk from Llancarfan at the last Whist Drive! If you don't play, just come along for a cup of tea and a chat, to swell the crowd - you may win the raffle!

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held in the Llancarfan Community Hall at 7.30 p.m. on January 24th 1992. Nominations for the officers of the Society should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Barbara Milhuisen (address below), or a Committee member. Nominees must have expressed willingness to stand and a seconder is needed. Our Chairman, Derek Higgs wishes to retire and so we shall definitely need a nomination for a new Chairman. All other officers have expressed willingness to serve during 1992. We also intend to hold a less formal function following the AGM, probably including a buffet supper and slide-show as last year. More news later.

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ADDRESSES: Contributions for the Newsletter (which will be very welcome) should be sent to the Editor, John Etherington, Parc-y-Bont - New Buildings, Llanhowell, Solva, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Dyfed, SA62 6XX. Subscriptions and problems with mailing: to the Membership Secretary, Phil Watts, Abernant Bungalow, Llancarfan, Barry, South Glamorgan, CF6 9AD. Agenda items and correspondence for the Committee to Barbara Milhuisen, 73 Tynewydd Road, Barry, South Glamorgan.

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The Annual Dinner Address by the Chairman, Derek Higgs:

With our annual dinner safely under our belts I am reminded how quickly the year is passing and felt that I must break my silence and pass comment on the Society so far this year.

From the many pleasant comments received by members of the Committee and myself, our dinner was very much enjoyed by all who attended. Our grateful thanks to Beryl Price and her very active band of lady helpers who as usual did a grand job. We mustn't forget David Gay and Llewellyn Price for their stalwart work on the bar. Next year we must order enough white wine apologies to those who missed out. It was great to see a "full house" yet again although I am sorry that not everyone who wished to attend was accommodated because of lack of space. Thanks as well to the members who prepared the hall and cleaned up afterwards. The pot of tea provided by Joan and Peter Badcock during clean-up operations was much appreciated.

Earlier in the year, the May Day walks once again were very much enjoyed, with the added bonus of a visit to the newly stocked Deer Park at Llantrithyd for those who ventured out of Llancarfan. Thanks to our guides John Etherington, Val Watts and Len Mortimer. The Barbecue at Abernant was the usual great day, thoroughly enjoyed by all and the weather was kind up to the time of departure when the heavens opened! Thanks to Gwynne Liscombe for yeoman service as chef, and of course to all those who helped, as well as a big thank you to Phil and Ruth Watts - your garden makes a wonderful setting

For the future, we have now finished planting all the daffodil and narcissus bulbs (about 2.5 cwt!) along the river banks between the Ivy Pool and the Fox and Hounds car park. A marvellous Saturday morning, in glorious sunshine, rounded off this wonderful effort by all concerned. Our Secretary looked quite at home sitting on the river bank and paddling her feet, with a glass of wine in her hand and her trusty hound at her side.

Many thanks to Sam Smith, Mark Evans and Phil Watts for helping to clear the river bank and to Phil again, Barbara, John and Jean Williams, Audrey Baldwin and Geoff Burrows for assistance with the planting. Pam and I put the remaining bulbs in the twyn near Broadhayes. We look forward to the spring to see the results of our labours.

A number of Committee members were proudly wearing their new Society ties at the dinner - please contact Phil Watts if you want to buy one (details below).

To reiterate my words at the Annual Dinner, may I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous, Healthy, Happy New Year.

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Ties: We now have a stock of Llancarfan Society ties, available to members at £5.50. They were first offered at the Annual Dinner and sold like hot-cakes so, if you would like one please send your remittance to Phil Watts at the address given above.

The tie is in a most attractive dark green bearing a small embroidered white stag with

golden antlers and hooves and is based on a design by Committee member, Geoff Burrows, who provided the following note of explanation.

"Why a stag? Because it is the symbol par excellence of Llancarfan and district. There are three stags on the shield of Jesus College, Oxford, for long a major landowner. In the legend of Catwg it was two stags that helped with the building of the monastery. There is a stags head in the crest of another local landowner, the Basset family of Bonvilston. And now, again, there are deer at Llantrithyd."

When we first discussed the possibility of producing these ties, the Committee also thought to produce a ladies' silk square. This has not yet been done and we now seem to be in trouble, as several of our lady members complained at the Dinner that the ties were only for the men! We shall have to see what we can do.

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Air-crash, Llanbethery, May 26, 1941, 15.44 by Adrienne Leijerstam

It was a sunny, blowy day in Llanbethery. There was a nip in the air, but clear blue skies hinted at better times ahead.

Aircraft droned in the distance and I was just coming out of the front door of the farmhouse where we have lived for five years, when I noticed a stranger at the front gate. "The planes are still flying overhead then," he said, pointing to the dark, ungainly shape in the sky on the way to the airport at Rhoose.

I was soon to realise that his interest in aircraft was more than passing.

Dennis Blewitt's arrival in the village that day was to mark a very sad occasion.

It was exactly 50 years ago to the day - even to the hour - that his uncle had died in a plane crash in the field behind the farm.

Dennis Blewitt of West Pontnewydd, Cwmbran, had returned to the scene to mark the occasion and, fortunately to share some of his memories.

It was at 15.44 on May 28, 1941, when the twin-engined Beaufort came crashing down in the field behind the farm, not far from where Gwilym Thomas, who then farmed the land with his brother Daved, was working in the fields with his horse and wagon.

"When I saw the plane blowing up in the sky, I jumped on the horse and galloped down into the dingle where the plane went down. As I came near I could hear a fellow groaning in the plane, and Tom Gregory and George Gregory who then lived in Castle Cottage helped to get him out, while I went up to the Cross to direct the ambulance", recalled Gwilym.

Out of the three airmen on board, only the pilot, R. W. Shephard, survived. He made an amazing escape when he was thrown out of the aircraft. Fortunately his parachute opened

and he landed on the railway track, suffering some injuries.

The fate of his two colleagues was not so fortunate. LAC William Sidney Dennis James, from Sebastopol, Monmouthshire (now Gwent), known to Dennis as "Uncle Sid", was killed at just 19 years of age, along with another airman who was from Nether Compton outside Yeovil.

According to information obtained from the RAF Historical Branch in London by Mr P. Durham of Abergavenny, the plane was returning to St Athan when the main spar failed and the aircraft broke up in mid-air. The plane was thought to be testing special equipment, probably radar, at the time.

One of the four cannon carried on the aircraft was never found and probably still lies buried in the fields.

The official crash report stated that the aircraft went into a shallow dive and then did a complete roll to the left, followed by one and a half turns. The plane then broke up.

Dennis Blewitt's visit to the farm was the second since the air-crash. He had first come to the scene about eight years ago when family photographs and memories had spurred him to look into the fate of his favourite uncle.

He then met Gwilym Thomas and his wife Winnie who were still living at the Farm. Gwilym was able to tell him all he knew about the crash and show him the place where the aircraft came down.

Consequently, when I met Dennis on May 28 this year we retraced the same steps across the fields at the back of the farm and down into the dingle to a spot close to the stream.

Hedges had grown into trees and the only possible clue to the disaster was the unevenness of the ground. However there was comfort in the fact that nature had shared in the tragedy.

Like today, there had been cattle in the field and Gwilym recalled that one of the engines which dropped off the plane killed three cattle grazing by the stream.

A mention of the crash from Ernie Badcock's diaries reads "Saw plane crash and pilot come down by parachute. Beau Fighter blew up in air and fell in pieces in Llanbethery. 2 killed 1 escaped." (see Newsletter 40).

Can any members of the Society further complement the details of the crash on May 28, 1941?

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The Rag-Well Tradition in Llancarfan by John Etherington

Four named wells, close to Llancarfan, are marked on the Ordnance Survey map (1:25,000): they are Ffynnon-y-Fflamwyddan in Breach Wood, Ffynon-y-Clwyf below Castle Ditches, Chalybeate Well at Garnllwyd and Ffynnon Dyfrig at Abernant. The first two are named for specific medicinal properties, the third for the iron-rich properties of its water and the last for a saint of S.E. Wales, St Dyfrig (Dubricius) - in other words a holy-well.

Mrs Kate Harber's article in the last Newsletter mentioned the well near the bottom of Penonn Hill (Ffynnon-y-Fflamwyddan), and the custom of tying rags to bushes around the spring. Her article has prompted me to put together some information on this subject which has been lying unused in the files since the early days of the Society.

A few years ago, Ruth Watts, Abernant, was visited by a gentleman seeking information about Ffynnon Dyfrig, the well in Coed Ffynnon Dyfrig, northeast of Garnllwyd Wood and behind Abernant. Ruth gave him as much help as she could but also suggested he contact me. I was not at home on that day, but a few days later I received a letter from a Mr Barry Webb of Llanhilleth, Gwent, saying that he was interested in the folklore of wells and specifically in the "medicinal wells" of Llancarfan. He asked whether the Society could give him any information and, in response, I sent him copies of the various items which we have already published in Newsetters 7 and 9.

Barry Webb replied by sending me a photocopy of an article from the Proceedings of the Cardiff Naturalists Society (1935) by Aileen Fox, entitled "A Rag Well near Llancarfan" (Aileen Fox, was the wife of archaeologist, Sir Cyril Fox, Director of the National Museum of Wales in the 1930's).

Some extracts from the article may be of interest.

"A small spring rising in the woods on the south side of Cwm-y-Breach, S. E. of Llancarfan village, is marked by the Ordnance Survey as Ffynnon-y-Fflameiddan (sic), - the Inflammation Spring ----. When visiting the large contour hill fort Castle Ditches, on the opposite bank of the Cwm, it was pointed out to me as a place of interest by the farmer, Mr Williams of Ford Farm; his wife had been "cured" of erysipelas by its water.

"When I first visited the spring in August, 1935, 3 old rags - pieces of dish cloth and calico - and a piece of brown wool were tied on overhanging branches by the source."

"The treatment described by Mrs Williams consisted in using the water for drinking to the exclusion of all other fluids, in applying mud from the source as a plaster on the affected parts, and in tying a rag, preferably from the underclothing, by the well."

Aileen Fox had the water analysed but nothing unusual was found. It was rather "hard" with a lot of dissolved calcium but this is to be expected as the source is the Liassic limestone. Her analyses did not include sulphur or iron. Sulphur is present in some quantity in the rock and it is possible that sulphides in the water, and more probably the mud, might have a curative property. It is certainly sulphur in some volcanic springs which confers a medicinal quality. The well at Garnllwyd is marked Chalybeate Well on the O.S. map indicating that its water is rich in iron and again other waters of reputed medicinal virtue, have this property.

Are the Llancarfan wells unusual? A survey has located over 1100 holy-wells in Wales and to these must be added many more "wishing-wells" and wells of reputed healing qualities. Perhaps the best known are Holywell itself and St Non's Well at St David's which, legend has it, burst forth as St Non gave birth to the saint.

Is there reason to believe that the waters have healing properties? In earlier times when the peasant diet was essentially bread, cheese and potatoes with meat only an infrequent addition, it is quite likely that iron deficiency anaemia was widespread and that iron-rich water of the chalybeate wells might have helped. If the mud contains sulphides these also may be active in treating some skin complaints but the rag-well tradition also suggests an older belief in magical rituals.

Further clues come from beliefs associated with wells elsewhere. The holy well at St Tegla in Denbighshire is reputed to cure Clwyf Tegla, epilepsy. In this case washing the limbs in the water is insufficient treatment but must be reinforced by a ritual: a votive offering and walking three times around the well whilst reciting the Lord's Prayer followed by a similar threefold perambulation of the church. This ritual seems to be pure magic, possibly predating Christianity, the Lord's Prayer taking the place of some former pagan incantation. The rags of the countless rag-wells in which the disease is "given-away" with the rag again suggest the sort of sympathetic magic which has survived from time out of mind - remember wart-charming.

Does it matter? Modern drugs are tested by comparing their activity with that of blindly administered and inactive placebos. It is well known that a placebo often achieves a partial cure or at least relieves symptoms. If the free medicine from these wells helped, in days when poverty was really a fact of life, should we scoff when our modern world has filled itself with so many other irrational beliefs?

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Field Names: several times now, we have asked whether anyone recalls field names but only a few memories have come forward. Now and then, maps and documents help.

Recently, searching the electoral registers for the correct spelling of a surname, I found a 1931 entry: Arther George Collins, CAE TALBOT (resident at Romilly Road, Barry). Cae Talbot means Talbot's Field and the name appeared as TALBOT'S LANDS in an 1814 deed by which a Mary Williams purchased it, and much other property from the Fonmon

Castle Estate (Deed pertaining to Hillside, courtesy of Mike Bartlett). Subsequently (1828) the same land passed to the blacksmithing Griffiths' family.

Arthur Collins later built the house called Talbots on this land (now nameswapped with the adjacent Middlehill!). Why the field should be so named is not known but the Talbots of Margam, Hensol and Penrice (in Gower) were all substantial landowners in Glamorgan. Does anyone know more or are there any thoughts from a good local historian?

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More on the Railway: The article on the Parish Railway in Newsletter 8 sparked off a lot of memories - we have had letters and notes from five or six people recollecting the railway. The following additional extract from The Cowbridge Railway, by Colin Chapman may be of interest, particularly to any railway or engineering enthusiasts.

"In 1902, the Taff Vale Railway gave serious thought to a proposal for the experimental working of the Cowbridge to Aberthaw section by means of electric traction. ----- third rail or overhead sources of power supply were soon rejected because of high costs of installation ----- A specification was drawn-up for a battery electric railcar, with seating for six 1st class passengers, ten 2nd class and forty 3rd class passengers, together with a large brake/guards compartment."

However, the Locomotive Engineer of TVR was unhappy with the tenders received and in 1903 he appeared at a Locomotive Committee with the design and a photograph of a steam railcar which was on loan to GWR from LSWR. "--- in October 1903, steam motor car No. 1 emerged from Cardiff West Yard Works, the last "locomotive" to be built by the TVR." More were ordered from English yards but did not commence service between Pontypridd and Aberthaw until 1905. So successful were these "autotrains" that several of the older TVR steam locomotives were fitted with an overhead pulley gear to permit auto-working. The engines were run between two autocars from either of which the driver could operate the controls via the overhead pulleys.

We still have not tracked-down any photographs of the Aberthaw line in operation. Any offers, or more memories?

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Bells and Wells - a letter from Dick Evans

Dick Evans has not only been a faithful correspondent since the Newsletter started, he was also named in Phil Watts article on the Bellringers (Newsletter 39) as someone who rang the bells of Llancarfan for many events in the past. Dick writes as follows:-

I read this month's Newsletter with great interest as I have just finished a book by Thomas North on The Bells of Leicestershire in which are the following points of interest:-

The Bishop of Nola in Campania (A.D. 400) is credited with their invention.

The first Englishman who carried on bellfounding as a trade appears to have been Roger de Ropeforde who made four bells for Exeter cathedral in 1284. A few early dated bells have been discovered, one (supposed to be the oldest in the kingdom) is in a church in Lancashire dated 1296.

As bad roads made travelling difficult, bells were cast in church-yards or nearby. Bells cast in the 14th and 15th centuries were not dated but were stamped with the founders' marks. The trade was handed down from father to son, often for centuries - for example one family tree, of a Mr Thomas Newcombe starts in 1506 when he commenced bell-founding and the trade handed down until 1611. There was a founder in Leicestershire named Hugh Watts (any relation of Phil?).

It appears that bells were rung by Gentry and Gentleman Farmers. A set of rules, found in a church in Bowden Magna, reads as follows:-

"If you get Drunk and hithere Reel, Or if you shall presume in Peal
Or with your Brawl Disturb the Peal, With Hatt, or Coat, or armed Heel;
Or with mumlungeous* horrid Smoak, Or turn your Bell in careless way,
You cloud the Room and Ringers Cloak; For each Offence shall Two Pence Pay; Or if
you dare prophane this Place To break these Laws if any hope
By Oath, or Curse, or Language Base, May leave the Bell and take the Rope.

* Mundungus (1641) - stinking tobacco

The most famous of bellfounders, John Taylor & Co, are still casting bells in Loughborough and sending them all over the world. An old list of that firm gives the approximate weight of any bell, worked out from its diameter, i.e. a bell of 12 inches diameter weighs 1Qr. 20lbs and so on up to 60 inches which weighs 42 cwts. I always thought the Llancarfan bells weighed 5, 10, 15 and 20cwts. There was a story that we had room for five bells but the villagers from Penmark purloined the fifth one!!.

In the last Newsletter, Katie Laws (Harber) mentions the "healing well". This was in the second wood on Penonn Farm, called Breach Wood. I used to take bottles of the water from the well to two houses in Barry, one in Garden City for a young girl who had bad eyes and used to bathe them with the water to cure styes - as far as I remember, it did cure them! In the first wood, a butcher from Barry hanged himself on an oak tree! He was found by Mr Leigh who lived next door to us at Ford Cross.

Hope all of this will be of interest.

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