



LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

Newsletter 63 August-September 1994

The trouble with a Newsletter which appears eight or nine times a year is that it often misses deadlines. Last time we reported that a planning application had been submitted for four wind turbines at Llanbethery and featured a letter strongly opposing the whole concept of wind power stations. Before the Newsletter dropped through your letter box events had overtaken us, the application having been rejected by both Vale and County Planning Committees. The reasons given were the adverse effects on character of the area and quality of life for local residents coupled with fears for aircraft safety, radar and radio reception (Report in the Barry and District News August 4).

The Society has been requested to publish details of other events than our own, taking place in the Village Hall. This seems a very good idea. If you have details of future events please send them to the editor (address below) at least six weeks in advance. This seems a rather long time ahead but as we only publish every six to eight weeks it is essential. The long gaps between Newsletters reflect a shortage of contributions. If any of you remember promises to write, the editor will be truly grateful.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

ANNUAL DINNERS: The second dinner is on Friday 4 November, cost £10.00. A booking form was enclosed with the last Newsletter. Places are still available.

WHIST: A Whist Drive will be held on Friday, October 21 at 7.30 p.m, in the Village Hall, entry £1.00.

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. We will also be pleased to print short announcements of village functions but they must be sent in writing, at least 6-8 weeks in advance. Subscriptions and problems with mailing: to the Membership Secretary, Phil Watts, Abernant Bungalow, Llancaf, Barry, South Glamorgan, CF62 3AD. Agenda items and correspondence for the Committee to the Secretary, Sheila Mace, Pel y Dryn, Llanbethery, Barry, South Glamorgan, CF62 3AN. Arrangements for visits to sick members: Len Fairfax, Summit View, Aberthin, Cowbridge, S. Glam. (Cowbridge 772654).

OBITUARY - RICHARD JOHN by Phil Watts:

We have to record the death of another of the beloved Llancarfan people Richard John at the age of 90. He was born in Llancarfan, commenced his education in Llancarfan school and always maintained a close connection with the village, most notably by bringing the Ulmer Spatzen Youth Choir from the city of Ulm-Donau in Western Germany to Llancarfan for many recitals in our ancient church. The first visit was in 1959. The choir and their conductor were so impressed with the beauty of the Welsh countryside and the

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hospitality of the people that a song was composed by the conductor Herr ??????? and called "Lovely Glamorgan" was always included in the choir's repertoire and dedicated to Richard John.

Richard John reached the top in the Local Government administrative ladder by becoming the Clerk to Glamorgan County Council and Justices and was well respected in the field in which he worked. A long way for a boy from Llancarfan school. A fellow mourner at his funeral pointed out to me that Richard John must have been a very clever man because he did the work of three men - one in South Glamorgan, one in Mid Glamorgan, and one in West Glamorgan!!

IN MEMORY OF RICHARD JOHN by Dr Evan Thomas

Richard commenced his schooling in Llancarfan village school, passing the examination into the Barry County School. After this basic education he joined a Barry firm of solicitors as a general clerk.

From there, in the 1930's, he became an articled clerk in the Clerk's Department of the Glamorgan County Council. After the 5 years which it took to become a qualified solicitor he was appointed to the post of Assistant Solicitor which involved dealing with legal cases in most of the Police Courts in the administrative county. He was promoted to head the Department as County Solicitor in 1943, an arduous post which he filled with distinction until 1952 when one of his senior colleagues, the late Mr Clifford Walter who was Deputy Clerk to the County Council and Clerk of the Peace, became Clerk of the Council. His obvious successor was his immediate junior Mr Richard John.

Unfortunately, Mr Clifford Walter's tenure of office was a short one as he died prematurely on his way to the office about 18 months later. Again this resulted in promotion for Richard who, in 1952, became Clerk of the County Council and Clerk of the Peace. The latter post was later abolished but Mr John continued in his important position as Clerk of the County Council until 1969 when he retired. He served with such distinction that he was awarded the C.B.E.

He married Beth who unfortunately died some 10 years ago leaving Richard to live on his own and he occupied his time serving on several committees and tending his well-kept garden.

His only son, Royston, followed in his father's footsteps becoming a solicitor and later Clerk to one of the Southern English Counties but he will have much to live up to to serve his County as well as his father served Glamorgan County Council.

A NOTE FROM PEGGY LUNN (nee Deere - Audrey Deere's sister)

Members of our family were very touched to read Audrey's obituary in the June-July Newsletter. We would like to say how much we appreciated seeing so many people at Bonvilston Church, paying their last respects to Audrey relatives, people she grew up with, old Bonvilston families and new, members of the community activities she loved to take part in and members of the clergy of both Church and Chapel. She would have remarked in her own

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inimitable way "Who do you think was there! ----", giving the details. She loved to tell the tale and we loved to listen. We, her family, will miss her in the family circle. She was a much teased but well loved Auntie and Great Auntie. We were saddened by her illness but take consolation that she is no longer suffering and at peace.

PHEASANTS, CONCORDE AND EARTHQUAKES by John Etherington

When we lived in Llancarfan, on a still evening, it was not uncommon to hear a sudden crowing of pheasants followed by a thunder-clap and the faint sound of a high speed aircraft. These events were most noticeable on winter evenings with the sort of clear sky which portends frost. It first happened the late 1970s when Concorde began commercial trans-Atlantic flights - the sound is the sonic boom of the aircraft approaching the Severn estuary at high speed.

Why pheasants responded to the boom - often seeming to anticipate it by a second or so - I do not know. The sudden change in air pressure must upset them. Here in West Wales we hear the boom less often, despite being 100 miles closer to the Atlantic so I suspect that the deep Llancarfan valley acted as a trap for the sound.

I was reminded of this bit of wildlife lore when I came across the following entry in the diary of a mid-Wales carpenter and cabinet maker, Thomas Jenkin's, who lived in Llandeilo in the mid-1800s:- 1868. October 30. 10.30 While at supper felt shock of earthquake. October 31. Found on enquiry that others in town had been much frightened, having felt it more severely, and it was more or less felt all over the district. At Glanbrydan the pheasants and fowls were screaming. (The Diary of Thos Jenkins of Llandeilo 1826-70 ed. by D. C. Jenkins (1976) Dragon Books, Bala).

Don't worry though. Next time you hear a pheasant in the evening it will almost certainly be shouting at Concorde! - earthquakes are pretty infrequent in Wales, but it is interesting that the birds respond in the same way.

Footnote: this was originally intended for Newsletter 62 but had to be heldover for lack of space. In the meantime you will have read about the enormous explosion at the Milford Haven oil refinery which occurred one lunchtime as we were out with our dogs. Though

nearly twenty miles from the refinery the bang was so loud that we suspected an IRA bomb at the Brawdy air base (only three miles away). What is interesting, in this context, was that the pheasants in the valley below us erupted into shrieks of alarm in response to the explosion - no other birds or animals seem to be upset in the same way the cattle quietly continued their chewing as if nothing had happened.

NEWS OF MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND PLACES

At the last Committee Meeting it was proposed and agreed that the Society should contribute £50 toward the celebration of the induction of our new Vicar on September 13.

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Other items from the Committee Meeting: a further purchase of daffodil bulbs is to be made - please let the committee know if you have ideas for additional places which might be planted. It was agreed that the May Day walk should be transferred to the Spring Bank Holiday - 29 May 1995. In reply to a question it was pointed-out that the Community Council have no obligation to walk the footpaths during the current survey but intend to assist.

The Barry and District News (18 August) carried a photograph of the newly restored Green Dragon at Llancadle. The old thatched pub and its modern extension were destroyed by fire in 1992. It is good to know that the "Green" is open for trade again but what a pity the old thatched roof has not been replaced. Had it been a listed building this would presumably have been a condition of the restoration. Yet another of the old thatched houses of the Vale gone for ever and though Ty Mawr at Moulton has been restored to thatch

it is not the simple thatch of local tradition. A day or two ago (31 August), the Western Mail reported that the landlord of the White Hart at Llanddarog, Carmarthenshire, was in trouble for replacing his traditional West-Wales thatch with something "prettified" and more appropriate to Dorset or East Anglia! - seems that we have not yet solved the conflict between planning-law and manifest public wish.

Glamorgan Anglers club used to fish in a pond adjacent to the Dow Corning works in Barry but a new development has made continued use of the pond impossible. The Barry and District News of 29 September announced the completion of their new fishing pond in Llantrithyd. The pond will be stocked with fish and open for the commencement of the season in June 1995. In a sense this sets the clock back several hundred years: members who attended previous May Day walks at Llantrithyd Place will remember the ruins of the fishponds in the gardens of the house. These ponds from another age were not for sport

but added fish to the produce from the the kitchen garden.

With sadness we have heard of the death of Doug Hughes, formerly of Fordings. Doug's funeral was in Spain where he died suddenly at his holiday home.

FOLKTALES AND MEMORIES OF THE VALE

A recent book, Tales of Old Glamorgan contains several items which are relevant to our area. Not surprisingly the author recounts the well-known tale* of the haunting of Llanfeuthin (sic) but some local stories concerning winged serpents are new to the editor:- "A woman who visited Penmark as a girl also described the winged serpents in the same way and told a tale about the "king and queen" serpents who frequented the woods about Beaupre, near St Hilary. The older people of the area told her that wherever a winged serpent was found, she would find buried treasure nearby. One day her grandfather, who had met a winged serpent in the woods at Porthkerry Park, decided to catch one. He awaited all day with his brother until finally one appeared. They shot and wounded it, but despite its injury it rose up and attacked the two men. Although men and creature were

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hurt, the battle continued until finally the brothers killed the serpent. The old woman said she could remember the skin and feathers being proudly displayed in her grandfather's home ---."

Snakes also feature in the stories. Near Penmark, a large snake with a crown on its head appeared morning and evening to a farmer's daughter. This went on for some months but then the snake vanished, leaving a gold ring which brought great luck and wealth to the girl. When she became old she promised the ring to her own daughter but, for some reason, it was buried with her and the family's fortune changed for the worse. In another story a snake was responsible for curing a child of scurvy, the disease having broken-out near St Nicholas.

It is also no surprise, in such a book, that a short chapter is devoted to Iolo Morganwg - much of this concerns the same events John Etherington wrote about in Newsletter 44 but also it contains a transcript of Iolo's gravestone at Flemingston:-

"In memory of EDWARD WILLIAMS (Iolo Morganwg) of the village
Stone Mason, Bard, Antiquary
Born in Penon in the adjoining parish of Lancarvan, on the 19th March, 1746 Died on the
18th day of December, 1826

His remains are deposited near this spot. His mind was stored with the histories and traditions of Wales. He studied nature too in all her works. His mortal part was weak, and rendered him little able to ply trade, but God endowed him with mental faculties, patience of research and vigour of intellect, which were not clouded by his humble occupation. He was never at school, yet he became a large contributor of acknowledged authority to bardic and historic literature. His simple habits, cheerful manners and varied knowledge made him a welcome visitor within the mansions of the rich as well as the cottages of the poor, and many there are who will still have kindly recollection of him. By these and others who appreciate his genius this tablet was erected A.D. 1855. He feared God and walked meekly and upright with his fellowmen."

(Wendy Hughes (1994). Tales of Old Glamorgan, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch)

* When writing these notes the editor thought we had already printed the tale of the White Lady of Llanvythin but this has proved not to be so. The story is told below.

THE WHITE LADY OF LLANVYTHIN an extract from Marianne Spencer's Annals of South Glamorgan, 1913.

We have previously described the finding and identification of human remains at the house (Newsletter 44) and it is hardly suprising with such a background that there is a ghost story.

When Marianne Spencer was writing her book, Dr Evan Thomas has told us she spent some time at Llanvythin, then rented from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by Walter Lougher. Walter was Evan's maternal uncle. It is probable that Marianne Spencer had the following story by word of mouth from him a little before the First World War. Marianne Spencer takes up the tale:-

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"The ghost was said to have been the wife of the man who was immured in one of the walls. She frequented chiefly the old cellar, but she also wandered up and down the stairs in her white rustling raiment, it was said, "looking for her husband". This legend had more than once been made the subject of a practical joke played on the superstitious. Such a joke was played on the farmer, a former tenant of Llanveithin, who was plagued night after night by this "woman in white". She must have been unusually strong for a spirit, for she beat him until he was black and blue, twitched the bed clothes off him, and generally disturbed him. The farmer determined to "lay" this troublesome ghost and having recently lost a colt with a whitish head, belly and front legs, he utilized part of the hide for this purpose. A narrow unbroken strip was cut from the hoof of one of these legs across the head and down to the heel of the other front leg. The rest of the hide was then cut up into narrow thongs and woven together with string into a bag, supposed to be large enough to hold the ghost. Through the neck of the bag was threaded, as a drawer, this long narrow strip of white skin, and the mouth of the bag was then fixed across the open door leading to the cellar. "And did you catch the ghost?" asked the curious questioner. "No", replied the victim of the practical joke, but she must have seen the bag and been so frightened and angry that she she served me worse than ever the next night, and I was too afraid of consequences to myself to replace it; nevertheless it has served its purpose for she has never troubled me more." But the farmer who believed in the reality of these ghostly visits was a Weklsman. and a bard, and he embodied his experiences in a Welsh rhyme of which the following is a translation:-

THE GHOST OF LLANVEITHIN

The experiences of the Bard of the Vale concerning her when living near her:-

When I was a stripling Living at Llanveithin There was a white
lady
There and around the building
Her dress was of white silk without a spot, And her movements
remarkably quick,
So that her gown made such a rustle
As a strong wind makes passing through holes.
I made a large bag with four thongs
Of the hide of a yellow bellied, white footed colt
I placed it at the door of the cellar
To catch the grand ghost of Llanveithin.
For thus making it I was punished;
She came to my bed that night,
She punched, squeezed and bared me,
And kept me stripped until I was well nigh perished."

NOISE POLLUTION by Phil Watts

In your last Newsletter you seemed to be concerned about the amount of intrusion into our lives of noise pollution. I wish to state that I can often stand outside my back door at Abernant and hear absolutely NOTHING. I must admit that there are times when I hear things I used not to hear. I am grateful to be able to exercise the gift of hearing even though it may be unpleasant.

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I remember as a small boy I used to call my mother out of the house to see an aeroplane flying over. I am still attracted by the flying machine be it a fighter jet or a jumbo jet as I was to see Concorde last Sunday flying to Paris.

POTATO GOOSE QUILL POP-GUN by Phil Watts

Is anyone familiar with a potato goose quill pop gun? I have a vague idea of being shown how to make one of these pop guns.

A quill is cut off the goose feather and a potato cut into slices about the thickness of a potato chip. One end of the quill is inserted into the potato. removing a little plug of its flesh. The same is then done with the other end of the quill. A small stick, a little smaller than the internal size of the quill is used to push one plug of potato quickly towards the other inside the quill. The result is the furthest piece of potato will be popped-out by the compression of air within the quill.

I have not seen this working for 60 years and I do not have all the material to test a potato goose quill pop gun.

IN REPLY TO POP-GUNS by John Etherington

By an odd coincidence, only two or three days before Phil sent this item, I was reading a book on East Anglian agricultural history entitled *The Long Furrow* (Ashley Cooper 1982 Bulmer Local History Group and 1987 East Anglian Magazine Publishers Ltd). A diagram was given of a very similar pop-gun made from a piece of elder twig. The soft pith can be removed from the middle of the twig to make a tube and, using a smaller twig as a plunger with two wet paper pellets at each end, one can be fired in the same way as the potato pellet.

I have not come across this sort of pop-gun since 1945-6 when, just after the war, one of the first toys to become available was a metal version of the potato pop-gun - the outer tube was brass (possible war surplus from manufacture of small-bore ammunition?) and the plunger was die-cast in the shape of a rifle. I was nine at the time and remember them vividly as there was a bit of a craze to own one - mine came for a birthday - probably in July 1946.

CHANGE OF USE by John Etherington

A couple of months ago Phil Watts wrote about items used for purposes other than those originally intended. This caused Mavis Coles to notice the use of a shotgun in chimney sweeping (Newsletter 62).

Almost as outlandish, we found this remedy for boils in *The Olio Cookery Book* (L. Sykes. Benn, London. Eighteenth impression 1928):-

Place one teaspoonful of gunpowder in a good thick fig. Eat one three times a day before meals till the boils disappear. N.B. Safe and sure.

It does seem a bit extreme - I imagine the active principal is the sulphur in the gunpowder.
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Phil wrote about uses for clothes pegs - we can add one more. A week or two ago I opened a packet of Polycell wallpaper paste which had been wrapped in a polythene bag and clipped with a wooden clothes peg about 15 years ago! - it was still perfectly usable. I'm afraid this reflects the tight-fistedness which makes me keep cars for a very long time. We have had four Nissan estate cars all but one of which have notched up over 100,000 miles. The present carriage is almost ten years old. At sometime around its first birthday the interior mirror started to rattle incurably. I wedged an old windscreen sponge behind its stalk where it remains to this day - a bit mummified but controlling the rattle!