



## LLANCARFAN SOCIETY

### Newsletter 74 July-August 1996

Firstly, an apology for the error in pagination of the last Newsletter. It was particularly sad as it cut-across the obituary of our much-loved former Treasurer, Joyce Andrews. It also disrupted two other articles. Perhaps I am over sensitive about such things but, to anyone who was upset, a deeply-felt "Sorry". Apart from this error, the last number was more satisfactory than recent Newsletters printed on our ancient Gestetner machine. Our new system of copying is not yet finalised but we hope quality will continue to improve. As some of you will know, a copy of each Newsletter is deposited with the Glamorgan Archive. John Williams' article on ships with local place-names, and the port of Aberthaw, caught the eye of Susan Edwards, Acting County Archivist who wrote with additional information. Her letter is printed below.

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, 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, Llanarf, Barry, Vale of Glamorgan, CF62 3AD. Agenda items and correspondence for the Committee to the Secretary, Sheila Mace, Pel-y-Dryn, Llanbethery, Barry, Vale of Glamorgan, CF62 3AN. Arrangements for visits to sick members: Len Fairfax, Summit View, Aberthin, Cowbridge, Vale of Glam. (Cowbridge 772654).

#### OBITUARY: NORTON EVANS - "THE WILLOWS", LLANCARFAN.

It is with great sadness that we have to record the death of Norton Evans on the 21st June, aged 61. The funeral service took place at Llanarf Church on Thursday 27th June.

Margaret and Norton joined the Llanarf Society in the early days. Norton became our auditor after we accumulated some funds and had financial operations which needed supervising: he was still our auditor at the time of his death.

Norton was an accountant with Evan Williams Jr Garages in Canton, Cardiff until he formed his own firm of Cars Cardiff in Colchester Avenue. He lived in Llanarf for 26 years and never thought of living elsewhere.

After he established a dealership with the Nissan Car Company, many Llanarf people bought cars from him and usually went back to him when there was a need for change. One always felt that you were given a good deal and that you had bought a reliable car

from a reliable guy. The impression created by the showroom and the garage was that you were dealing with a happy family business.

In the words of the A.A. Salesman, Norton was "A very, very nice man" and he will be missed by all those who knew him. Our thoughts are with Margaret, Huw and Rachael at this very sad time.

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#### LLANCARFAN SOCIETY ANNUAL BARBECUE AT "PEN-ONN" - 30TH JUNE 1996.

Another successful barbecue has come and gone, not without a worry or two, the weather being a doubtful factor right up to the morning of the event! It remained dry, but quite windy and changeable. The wind was strong enough to blow a bottle of wine off the raffle table!

We are never sure how many actually dined for some people pay and don't come, others say they are coming and fail to appear, so in spite of making complicated arrangements for paying and ordering, we are never exactly sure of the number fed. We establish a figure of those coming and add on some; the position is different from the Annual Dinner, where we have to be exact on numbers.

The barbecue was a success, thanks to a large number of people, the cooks, the ticket sellers, the "humpers" of tables and chairs, games organisers and the very many people who brought bowls of salads. None of this would have been possible if it were not for Margaret and Arwyn, who provide the venue, the transport and anything else which was needed to make the event a success.

This was the third barbecue at "Pen-onn" and it was the third to be free of rain, which always seemed to threaten the organisers amongst other causes of headache! Perhaps, while on a successful run, we should think of another venue, or another date to continue our winning streak, so if there is anyone who can offer a similar site, the committee will gladly accept. This appears to be only fair to people who most generously agree to accommodate the event for several years.

So, in spite of adverse conditions and competition on the date, we were still able to hold a very successful barbecue again this year. Thank you to all who supported in any way and don't forget to get in early for next year!

#### SOCIETY MEMBERS - POINTING AND BLASTING

What you might think have they been engaging in? Not using dogs and quarrying surely! No they were not. Phil Watts, Mick Mace and Gwynne Liscombe were representing the Society (as they did last year) at a Petanque (Boule) Challenge at Pentwyn Leisure Centre, Cardiff. This event is the Lord Mayor's Challenge and part of the Cardiff - Nantes Fellowship Annual Celebrations and was held in June.

The Boules were duly polished, strict training (organized by Phil) undertaken and pre-match restrictions imposed. These included no drinking, no cigars, and light diets. All of these preparations took the Society team through to the Final where they were beaten by a

team which they had defeated in an earlier round. Nevertheless the action was frantic and the players for the Society played well, apart from being over-confident in the Final. Entry fees were paid by the Society and the Treasurer was on hand not only to support but to see that the Society's sponsorship was well spent. We think it was and we only failed at the last gasp.

For the connoisseur, pointing is the player trying to put the boule nearest the cochonet ("cosh", or in Bowls "the jack") and blasting is trying to remove the opponents boule from it's proximity to the cochonet.

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Incidentally we heard that the Belgian Pentanque team arrive at European Tournaments in sponsored B.M.W.'s - no wonder the Treasurer keeps an eye on sponsored events!!  
(From the Society Boules Correspondent)

**SS LLANCARVAN AND SS BONVILSTON: a letter from Susan Edwards, Acting Glamorgan Archivist, Glamorgan Record Office**

I was interested to read, in the latest Llancarfan Society Newsletter, of the good ships Llancarvan and Bonvilston, part of the Evan Thomas Radcliffe fleet. The company archives which have been deposited with the Glamorgan Record Office include records of a later SS Llancarfan, part of the Clarissa Radcliffe SS Co, Ltd. This vessel was built in 1937 by White's Marine Engineering of Hebburn-on-Tyne and purchased by the ETR group in 1940 when she acquired her local name. Unfortunately, her fate echoed her predecessor's and the Second World War saw her bombed and sunk two miles south of St. Vincent on 30 May 1943.

The earlier SS Llancarfan, as John Williams suspects, was also part of the Evan Thomas Radcliffe group. She was originally named W.I. Radcliffe after the only son of Henry Radcliffe (a founding co-partner of the company), and renamed Llancarvan on 13 March 1917.

More information on these ships and the company can be found in "Evan Thomas Radcliffe, a Cardiff Shipowning Company", by Geraint Jenkins, published by the National Museum of Wales in 1982, which also has plenty of illustrations. The company records can be consulted in the Glamorgan Record Office, at reference D/D ETR.

**BOATBUILDING AT ABERTHAW by John Etherington**

In Newsletter 73, John Williams wrote of shipbuilding at Aberthaw. This reminded me to look at Moelwyn Williams article on Aberthaw in Stewart Williams' Vale of Glamorgan, volume 4 (1962), where I found the following information.

"Aberthaw, which had probably been a centre of trade long before the Norman conquest, had subsequently become a coveted source of --- customs duties and other port charges."

Much later, in 1781, that illustrious son of Llancarfan, Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) applied for the post of "customer" or customs officer, at the Aberthaw Customs House. In a letter, seeking preferment, he wrote:- "the Custom House Officer or tide-waiter at the port of Aberthaw lies sick of a putrid fever and deem'd by his physicians past all hope of recovery. This place is worth about thirty pounds per annum : could I hope to obtain it --- May I beg the favour of you interfering for me for this place ---." Fortunately the tide-waiter recovered and Iolo never became a customs officer.

The Aberthaw ships of the 15th and 16th century were barques of between 16 and 30 tons burden. One, the Great Thomas was of 100 tons. Some were built in England on the other side of the Channel, and others constructed locally.

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"Some degree of shipbuilding was carried on during the 17th century at the Booth and Marsh House, where the business was mainly in the hands of local merchants --." (the Booth is now Thaw Cottage).

During the last century a dozen coasters traded out of Aberthaw carrying the limestone which the lighthouse builder, John Smeaton, had recognized as making the best waterproof mortar, and used for the Eddystone Lighthouse. It came, not from the quarries but from the beach whence it was collected in the form of 3-4 inch pebbles (also used later by the Aberthaw Lime Works which was served by the Cowbridge to Aberthaw branch-railway - see Newsletter 8). Some of these coasters also ran passenger services to and from Bristol and other English ports during the mid-1800s, in particular transporting harvest workers.

John Williams cited a few vessels which were named after Vale of Glamorgan villages and, in this context, it is interesting that two of these nineteenth century coasters working out of Aberthaw were the Fonmon Castle and the Barry Castle.

Various vessels are named in Moelwyn Williams' article, some built at Aberthaw, but no detail is given of shipbuilding in the later years as the port dwindled in importance. Do any members know more - when the last ships were built and the last vessels traded out of Aberthaw?

"WITHOUT A WORD OF A LIE" by John Etherington

In the last Newsletter, David Evan's letter concerning Len Mortimer reminded me of days long-past when Len used to bring his shooting clients to the Fox and Hounds for an

evening, each week in the season. They would often sit in the corner of the top bar near the fireplace and conversation was easily overheard by those of us standing by our pints.

More often than not a smile and chuckle would be exchanged as Len's raised voice came clearly above the general chatter, prefixing some story:- "Without a word of a lie ---". What would follow was probably the truth but with the embroidery and exaggeration that came with much repeated telling!

Another much-missed character, Bill Price of Little Flaxland, would use exactly the same phrase in the same context, and as a newcomer to Llancarfan, nearly 30 years ago, I came to believe that it was a Vale mannerism but later learned that Bill hailed from Breconshire.

If you asked Len how many foxes he had shot during the past year you could count on "Hundreds man!". No doubt, without a word of a lie, this was true but the number of foxes to be seen, day and night, at that time belied it and the results, for ground-nesting birds, other than game, were serious, suggesting that gamekeeping does not have much effect on numbers of foxes.

Len liked to be noticed and appreciated (don't we all) and, as editor of the Newsletter, one of my regrets is that I have not yet used a newspaper cutting which he gave me a few months before he died, recounting his part in foiling an attempted burglary by some young villains in Llanbethery. It was a larger than life exploit, like so much that he did. I remember telling him that it sounded more like the "wild west" than the sleepy Vale.

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Len - I'm sorry - you would so much have enjoyed knowing that your name was in print for the village to read again. You put on a performance for your clients and for all of us. Perhaps you should have been an actor. You were a singer, and now you are greatly missed.

#### MEMORIES OF A VILLAGE CHILDHOOD - 1942 TO 1945 by John Etherington

In Newsletter 70, I wrote about Mary Davies Parnell's books describing her childhood in the Rhondda Valleys. Her memories were so deeply reminiscent of my own wartime childhood in Kent that I jotted some notes of things which rang the loudest bells:- Sacks of sugar and flour on the grocer's floor, whole cheeses and slabs of butter on the marble counters, ration books and coupons, air raid shelters and gas masks, milk delivered from the "barrels", milk bottles with cardboard caps and push-out centres. Above all, roaming the countryside, as we all did from the age of five or six onward.

These years span a period when things were very different from the present but also unlike that earlier age of farming and village life which was ended by the railway train and motor

car. Though my memories are not of Llancarfan, it is likely that many will be shared by all who were children in those dangerous but strangely carefree years of the War.

The grocer's shop in the nearest town was stacked high with sacks and wooden tubs of flour, sugar, peanut butter and who knows what else. Crystals of sugar crunched on the wax-polished stripwood floor which was dark with age and perhaps a century of spilled foodstuffs. The grocer used to call for an order once a week - he came three miles on the bus and walked around the village and the outlying houses. Mum would collect the pre-packed order from the town a few days later or sometimes it would be delivered by van.

In the shop, despite the war, great chunks of Cheddar cheese and slabs of butter lay on grey-veined white marble slabs, littered with black-handled knives, blades shining and worn thin by repeated sharpening on a steel. The cheese was cut with a wire and toggle, attached to a sycamore board and the butter was slapped into half pound blocks with wood "bats" which imprinted a pattern on one side.

In the later years of the war, and just after, it was my job to collect the new ration books from the village school. The memory of their manilla covers and coloured coupons will be with me for ever. We queued for what seemed interminable hours after school - I was in those days a bit of a "mummy's boy" and remember becoming quite tearful about the lateness - I had almost two miles to walk home, uphill, along overgrown and woodland-girt lanes.

Air-raid shelters had been built in the school garden just before I went to the village school in 1941 - yellow London-clay bricks with a reinforced concrete slab roof, they were never much used for their real purpose, despite the fact that we were in the middle of "bomb alley". Later on they were the scene of many scary playtime games and the less sinister "kiss chase" of the older boys and girls (who remained until 14 in those far-off days). Sadly, some of those older boys also used the shelters as "torture chambers" to indulge in various physical and psychological bullying of the little ones. Today, I suppose, this would have made headlines but then it was just part of village life.

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At first I had a red "micky mouse" gas-mask before it was replaced by a grown-up one later on. Next door to the village butcher's shop, which I passed on the way to school, was a sloping grey-green board which, it was said, would change colour during a gas attack. As this was a mile away from school I remember wondering how we would know! At least the red and grey airraid siren on a pole just round the corner was audible for miles! We seemed to have heard it most nights for a while, followed by the explosions of antiaircraft shells which sounded like large timbers "clonking" against each other.

Milk was transported from the farms and around the village in shiny steel churns (I think this is what Mary Davies Parnell meant by barrels). I can remember the crash of these on cobbled yards or as they struck each other.

The sound is a vivid memory, now accurately reflected in the drayman's handling of modern aluminium beer kegs. Deliveries of milk might be by jug from a churn on the front of the milkman's tricycle or in bottles: he carried a couple of galvanized milk crates as well! These were quarts or pints and the school milk came in third-pints. All had waxed cardboard milk caps about one and a half inches in diameter with a push-out centre designed for pouring - ideal for a straw in the case of school-milk.

The milk caps carried coloured adverts for the various farms and dairies. They were avidly collected and used for a competitive game in which the winner was the boy who could flick his milk cap the furthest - winner takes all (for some reason girls did not seem to play this, or several of the other competitive games). I was more interested in collecting than competing and finally accumulated a hundred or more of the coloured, faintly milk-smelling discs. I wonder if there are any left - unlike aluminium milk caps they rotted away when discarded.

One local farm had a dairy which bottled and delivered its own milk. Quart bottles came in galvanized crates of twelve - they must have weighed more than 50lb but, by the time we were 15 we could stack them to head-height. To tell the truth I could only do this a few times but my best friend, nephew of the dairyman, seemed able to stack all morning as the bottles were filled, and then load them onto the little Morris delivery van. No pasteurising in those days, though the side of the van bore a notice saying that the herd was "Tuberculin tested". It was literally a cow to bottle operation.

From the time of going to school I walked the 2 miles back and forth, and when I was about 7, graduated to a bicycle. From that time we roamed further and further, very quickly getting to know all of the woodland and marshland within about 3 miles of home. When weekends and holidays came we extended the study to more miles and down to the last square inch. Fifty years on, I can still visualize individual tree trunks, bushes and stones, streams, farms and wild flowers in their precise setting. No one objected, so long as we did no damage and did not steal too many apples. No one worried about possible abduction or assault, neither did they worry about the bombs and missiles which rained from the skies. More than once, miles from home we watched the pattering V-1's speed overhead with their stabbing white exhaust flame just waiting to cut-out and blow us all to kingdom come - and still no one worried (or did parents protect us from their darker thoughts?).

By the summer of 1944 the sky was studded with silver barrage balloons - I lay on my back in the sun for hours, surrounded by the yellow hawkweed flowers of the uncut lawn, looking at the glittering pattern they made, but with no recollectable fear. I knew what the balloons were for: one day at playtime we saw a V-1 strike the mooring-cable of a balloon tethered in the

quarry below the school. The flying-bomb spun out of control toward the distant river Thames where it exploded and, for the next hour, the balloon gradually sagged to the ground. A loop of its cable short-circuited the electricity wires outside the playground with brilliant and exciting fireworks! No one told us how dangerous it was, or took us away from this alfresco show.

Today I still live in deep countryside but we see few children bicycling or roaming alone. We cycle quite often but meet only holidaymakers, rather than local people. Children of the farms live something of the old life but, once they can drive, the tractor and headphone oust the countryside. Safety regulations have ensured that the farmworker no longer smells the air or hears the birds. Because of this, we probably know more of the nooks and crannies of the fields which surround our home than the farmer who owns them. He probably never sees the peregrines and harriers, buzzards and kestrels with which we are blessed, nor hears the reeling of the grasshopper-warblers or the "scratchy" cries of the whitethroats. The spotted orchids in his drainage ditches would be a surprise, the polecats and their "kits" are longgone when a tractor approaches and the moss and pennywort-filled grottoes under the hedges are only seen by the walker.

Have we gained as much as we have lost? I for one, find that question very difficult to answer - but anaesthetics and medical care seem to be the greatest recommendation of the present time!

A footnote on milkcaps: I have never heard of or thought about cardboard milk caps from the time when they were replaced by foil-caps, to the present day. A week or two after I typed these recollections, the Independent carried an article "Pogs beat hi-tech rivals to be top toy". Pogs are coloured cardboard discs made by the games-firm, Waddingtons and they describe it as a "milkcap slamming game" which originated in Hawaii in the 1930's, played with cardboard milk and fruit-drink caps (Pog is an acronym for pineapple, orange & guava). It is already a best-seller in the U.S. and has so-far yielded Waddingtons £25 million! What a strange and coincidence-ridden world we live in.

## SCHOOL GAMES

Writing the article above I was reminded that several members have written about games played at school. With a few exceptions these mention only boys. Is this significant? Were girls excluded by boys - or did girls play different games, even in mixed schools - does anyone recollect?

## NEWS OF MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND PLACES

As noted in the account of the recent barbecue, we are looking for a new venue for this event, it being unfair to ask anyone to undertake all the necessary work for more than



three or four years. Anyone willing to volunteer? The barbecue needs a large garden and a larger supply of energy!

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The road to Llancarfan from the A48, via Whitwell, Abernant and Garnllwyd, has been blocked for some time recently by renewal of the water main.

Gwynne Liscombe tells us that he has planted about 200 trees of many different species in the field by the Tennis Court. They have established themselves successfully, despite planting bare-rooted in autumn '94 and the need to water throughout the drought of summer '95.

Barry Pathfinders recently visited St Cadoc's Church, Llancarfan (Barry & District News). After discussing the origin of the reredos and the apparent lack of early Christian masonry in the church, admiring the great north window and the medieval chest, the group of 35 visitors set-off on foot to visit Castle Ditches with its tremendous view of the valley below and the Bristol Channel.

The Newsletter recently featured Llancarfan during the time of St Cadoc. The second volume of Raymond Williams' posthumous and unfinished trilogy, *People of the Black Mountains*, has two chapters which vividly bring to life those same times in the Black Mountains of the upper Usk Valley. The two novels, published by Paladin, follow the pre-history and history of South Wales as a series of temporal vignettes

John Etherington has a copy of D. J. Francis (1975). *The Border Vale of Glamorgan*, Stewart Williams. A bargain, at £5.00 to the first caller (01348 837928). Good condition, with intact dust-jacket and ex-library protective cover. John is searching for volumes 2 to 8 of the *Glamorgan Historian*, Stewart Williams for which current secondhand price is offered. We have asked for these once before but with no luck - they are difficult to obtain secondhand.

The Western Mail recently announced the retirement of Dina Williams who has played the organ in St Mary's, Bonvilston for 54 years and asked whether readers thought this was a record. Society member, Megan Hamber, wrote to the Mail to point out that Ralph Smallridge had been organist and choirmaster of Porthkerry Road Methodist Church for longer than this. We could almost claim the record in

Llancarfan: Phil Watts wrote of his mother, Doris, that she "played the Church organ, off and on" for 70 years (Newsletter 11) but I dont know how long the "offs" lasted.

#### CAN YOU WRITE?

Once again we are running low on material for the Newsletters. I know that some folk are sitting on half-prepared items for publication and others have ideas for contributions. Any offerings will be gladly received or we shall have difficulty struggling on to our tenth birthday next year.