

COWBRIDGE AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 66. April 2008

This is the last Newsletter of the current (2007-2008) season. It has been a year of highs and lows for the Society. An excellent programme was put together by Dick Tonkin, but the year was of course overshadowed by the untimely and tragic death of our Chairman, Jeff Alden.

Your new Committee has attempted to maintain the high standards that were set by Jeff. To this end it met in January, when it was suggested that we drop the word 'local' from the name of the Society, on the grounds that it is sometimes difficult to restrict both talks and contributions to the Newsletter to purely local matters. It was however felt that it would be administratively too formidable a task to undertake at this juncture, but that in future, the Society, although not actively pursuing such a policy, should embrace where appropriate both wider Welsh issues and indeed sometimes national (i.e. British) issues. With this in mind, in November it is hoped to arrange a talk on some aspects of the 90th Anniversary of the end of World War I. This may prove to be both a landmark for the Society, and any Remembrance issues the town of Cowbridge may have in mind for this important occasion.

There was also a discussion on whether the meeting evening might be changed, as it often clashes with other meetings. This too was shelved due to pressure on Lesser Hall bookings. Any feed back on both these issues from members would be welcome.

Our Joint Chairman, Prof. Buswell, is arranging a trip to Goodrich Castle. This will take place on Tuesday, 3rd June. Goodrich is in Herefordshire and an important Welsh Marcher Castle. Dick Buswell makes more detail available later in the Newsletter. A contribution on the Welsh Marches and Goodrich Castle follows.

D.Gerrard. March '08.

Chairman`s Notes::

Local History Study Room

This new facility was opened on Wednesday 19 March 2008. It is dedicated to the memory of Jeff Alden, former co-chairman of this Society. It has been generously funded by the Vale of Glamorgan Creative Rural Communities organisation and our thanks are extended in particular to Phil Chappell who worked tirelessly to furnish and decorate the room (Room 05 in Old Hall). It will be jointly managed by your Society, Cowbridge Records Society and the management of Old Hall.

It will contain archival material collected over many years by the Cowbridge Records Society and others. It will be open to members of both societies and members of the general public at times to be agreed.

Study visit

Following the very successful Charter Day visit to Tredegar House organised by Beverly Tonkin and attended by 36 members and friends, the next visit will be on Tuesday 3 June 2008 to Goodrich Castle, just across the border in Herefordshire (www.english-heritage.org.uk and type in 'goodrich' in the search box). This will be an all day visit including a conducted tour of the Castle, lunch and possibly a short visit to Ross on Wye, leaving Cowbridge Town Hall at 9.30am and returning by about 5.30pm. Please read Don Gerrard's informative articles below.

Names and other details of those intending to come will be collected at the meeting on 4th April when the cost will be known.

Anyone wishing to come on this trip should ensure that their details, including lunch requirements, and payment is made to Dick Buswell (9 The Limes Cowbridge; 01446 771929; profbuswell@onetel.com) by Friday April 18th at the latest.

Newsletter

Members will be aware that since the sad loss of Jeff Alden the Society's Newsletter has been produced by Don Gerrard. The Society extends its considerable thanks and appreciation to him. However, Don is no longer able to continue in this role and your Committee is currently discussing the future of the Newsletter. Anyone with any useful suggestions should contact Dick Buswell (01446 771929; profbuswell@onetel.com) or Beverly Tonkin (01446 772704; beverlytonkin@btinternet.com)

Vale of Glamorgan Conservation Advisory Committee

George Haynes continues to represent the Society on this committee. He does sterling work on your behalf in relation to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. He has recently given a great deal of attention to the contentious issue of the demolition of buildings and to what often appears to be the deliberate neglect of buildings in the Conservation Area by potential developers. This has included writing many detailed letters to the relevant ministries in the Assembly, the Vale Planning Department and other organisations concerned with the historic built fabric of our area. George can be contacted on 01446 772415.

Cowbridge Record Society

The AGM of the Record Society will be held on Wednesday May 7th at 7.30pm in the Lesser Hall.

THE WELSH MARCHES

'Marches' are border areas between centres of power. The word comes from the Frankish word MARKA, the German word MARK and the Anglo-Saxon word MEAARC, all meaning a boundary. The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of MERCA also means boundary people (and 'Welsh' was an Anglo-Saxon word for foreigner).

In British history the Welsh marches are the border areas between Norman (conquered) England and lawless (unconquered) Wales. The Romans had built legionary fortresses at Chester, Gloucester and Caerleon, and the Anglo-Saxon King Offa had built Offa's Dyke, in order to protect his string of fortified market towns from the lawless Welsh. The Normans established powerful marcher Lordships – the Earldoms of Shrewsbury, Chester, Hereford and Gloucester. One of them was always pre-eminent and given the title of Earl of March. Royal writ did not obtain and the Marcher Lords ruled by their own law – SICUT REGALE (in place of the King). They were very powerful, although, because they also held lands in England, they owed allegiance to the King. They extended some control over much of Wales and although Edward I had officially conquered Wales in 1283, as late as the reign of Henry VIII the Marcher Lords still governed the two-thirds of Wales that was not part of the Principality. When the Marcher Lordships were abolished by the Acts of Union (1536-42), the centre of administration for Wales was established at Ludlow.

The Marches contain the greatest concentration of motte and bailey castles in England and Wales. Besides establishing main Marcher centres at Chester, Shrewsbury, Hereford and Gloucester, the Normans built 26 major castles in the Marches, of which Goodrich is arguably the most picturesque and, strategically, very important.

Don Gerrard.

GOODRICH CASTLE

Colonel John Birch wrote to Parliament in 1646 about Goodrich Castle: "I humbly conceive it is useless, and a great burden on the country". He was all in favour of having the castle pulled down.

We may be thankful his advice was not followed. Goodrich stands today perched above the River Wye in Herefordshire, both impressive and picturesque, and well worth a visit. Unusual for a castle of its antiquity is not only its strong walls but a wealth of 'luxury' accommodation crammed within them.

At the same time, you have to sympathise with Birch's destructive urges, for in 1646 the castle had given him a great deal of trouble. That year had seen the conclusion of the First Civil War, during which the Colonel and his Parliamentary forces had spent a great deal of time and effort seeking to wrest control of Goodrich from the hands of the Royalists.

During the siege of Goodrich Birch had not only been forced to deploy the usual array of trenches, tunnels and cannon, but had also been obliged to bring into play a new weapon nicknamed 'Roaring Meg'. This was a mortar - piece designed to lob 200lb grenades over the castle walls. Once she began to be used, unsurprisingly, the garrison at Goodrich soon decided to surrender.

Having experienced such difficulty at the siege of Goodrich (and other castles), Birch and his Parliamentary colleagues were anxious not to repeat the process, and saw pulling down castles as the answer to the problem. However, outright demolition proved to be out of the question, due to the time and costs involved. In the end, the Parliamentarians had to content themselves with partial destruction - a process called 'slighting'. Castles that were slighted had their defensible parts knocked down or undermined, to prevent any use in the future. Such was the fate of Goodrich.

Of course Goodrich's story began long before 1646. Building began soon after the Norman Conquest, and the original structure may have been only a wooden motte and bailey castle, begun possibly soon after 1075. How the castle acquired its name is pretty clear. A document dated 1102 reveals that it was once 'Godric's Castle', and Godric is named as the local landowner in the Domesday Book of 1086. Who Godric was is not known, and nothing survives of the castle's original structure. For a short while in the Anarchy of Stephen (1135-1154) the castle was in the hands of Gilbert de Clare.

The castle today is chiefly the work of William de Valence, one of the most powerful and indeed controversial noblemen in 11th century England.

After the death of King John, in 1216, his wife Isabella of Angouleme, abandoned England and returned to France with her children. There she re-married and had more children, of whom Valence was the youngest.

In 1247 Henry III, John's son, invited his young half-brother to come to England, gave him the hand of a rich heiress, and vast estates, including Goodrich Castle. Unfortunately, the King's indulgence also extended to turning a blind eye to Valence's violent behaviour which so angered the rest of the aristocracy that it helped trigger a constitutional crisis, the one usually associated with Simon de Montfort. Indeed in 1258 de Montfort told Valence "Make no mistake about it, either you lose your castles or you lose your head".

So, Valence chose to forsake Goodrich Castle and fled into exile. Later, however, Valence was saved by his friendship with Henry III's son, Edward (later to become Edward I). Valence fought with Edward at the Battle of Evesham (1265) in the Second Barons' War, helping to defeat the forces of Simon de Montfort, who was killed. The battle restored royal autonomy. Valence also accompanied Edward on a crusade in 1269, and assisted the new King in perhaps the most successful military enterprise of his reign - the conquest of Wales.

Soon after his accession in 1272, Edward I began to build a string of castles, particularly in North Wales, assisted again by Valence, who was given the title of 1st Earl of Pembroke. His association with Goodrich appears to end there, and he operated from his new base in Pembrokeshire until his death in Bayonne in 1296 on one of his periodic visits to France.

In or about 1323 the castle passed by marriage into the hands of the Talbot family, who were made Earls of Shrewsbury in the 15th century.

Following the Wars of the Roses, in 1460, on the defeat of the Lancastrians and the forfeiture of the castle, Goodrich was granted to the Yorkist William Herbert. However, John, 3rd Earl of Shrewsbury, made his peace with King Henry VI and regained control of his lands. In 1616 the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury died with no male heir and Goodrich passed into the hands of Henry Grey, Earl of Kent. After this the castle was no longer occupied. We know of the desperate siege of the castle during the First Civil War, and after the 'slighting' of the castle in 1647 it remained with the Earls of Kent until 1740, when it was sold to Admiral Thomas Griffin. It passed through various hands until 1920 when it was placed with the Commissioner of Works, and today it is in the care of English Heritage.

Goodrich is now known, therefore, not so much for its strong stone walls as the wealth of luxury accommodation contained within them. There are many more window seats, fireplaces and toilets than arrow slits. In fact Goodrich possessed one of the best preserved interiors of any 13th century English castle.

In 2003 'Roaring Meg' returned to Goodrich. The last surviving mortar piece of the Civil War sits in the courtyard.

The castle is believed to be haunted by the spirits of two lovers, Alice Birch and Charles Gifford. They were caught in the castle when the siege began, and while fleeing they were drowned in the River Wye as they tried to cross the ford. During stormy nights it is said that the ghostly figures of the couple can be seen attempting to complete their tragic crossing.

Don Gerrard.

DID YOU KNOW ?

"BITE THE BULLET"

The origin may have been one of the following:-

1. In the days before effective anaesthetics soldiers were given bullets to bite on to help them endure pain.
2. One of the alleged causes of the Indian Mutiny.

In the Army of the East India Company (which ruled British India until 1857), the SEPOYS, or native soldiers were drawn into a controversy in 1857 over the introduction of the new Enfield Rifle. It added substance to the alarming rumours circulating about their imminent forced conversion to Christianity. To load the rifle the sepoys had to bite the cartridge open. It was believed that the cartridges that were standard issue with the rifle were greased with lard (pork fat), which was regarded as unclean by Muslims, or tallow (beef fat) which was regarded as sacred to Hindus.

"FACE THE MUSIC"

This may originate from the tradition of disgrace and army officers being 'drummed out' of their regiment. The origin may well be American mid 19th century. There was a roll of drums while the charge was read out.

"BEYOND THE PALE"

Dates from the 14th century – the Latin PALUS or stake, one used to make a fence or border, so to be outside the pale was to be outside the area accepted as home. There are two well known examples – the Pale of Dublin was the area settled or 'civilised' By the English after the conquest by Richard de Clare or 'Strongbow', so to be outside this area was to be in a so-called uncivilised region. Catherine the Great of Russia (1762-96) created a Pale of Settlement in Russia in 1791. This was a western border area in which Jews were allowed to live. Some Jews, as a concession, were allowed to live 'beyond the pale'.

Don Gerrard.