

# NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

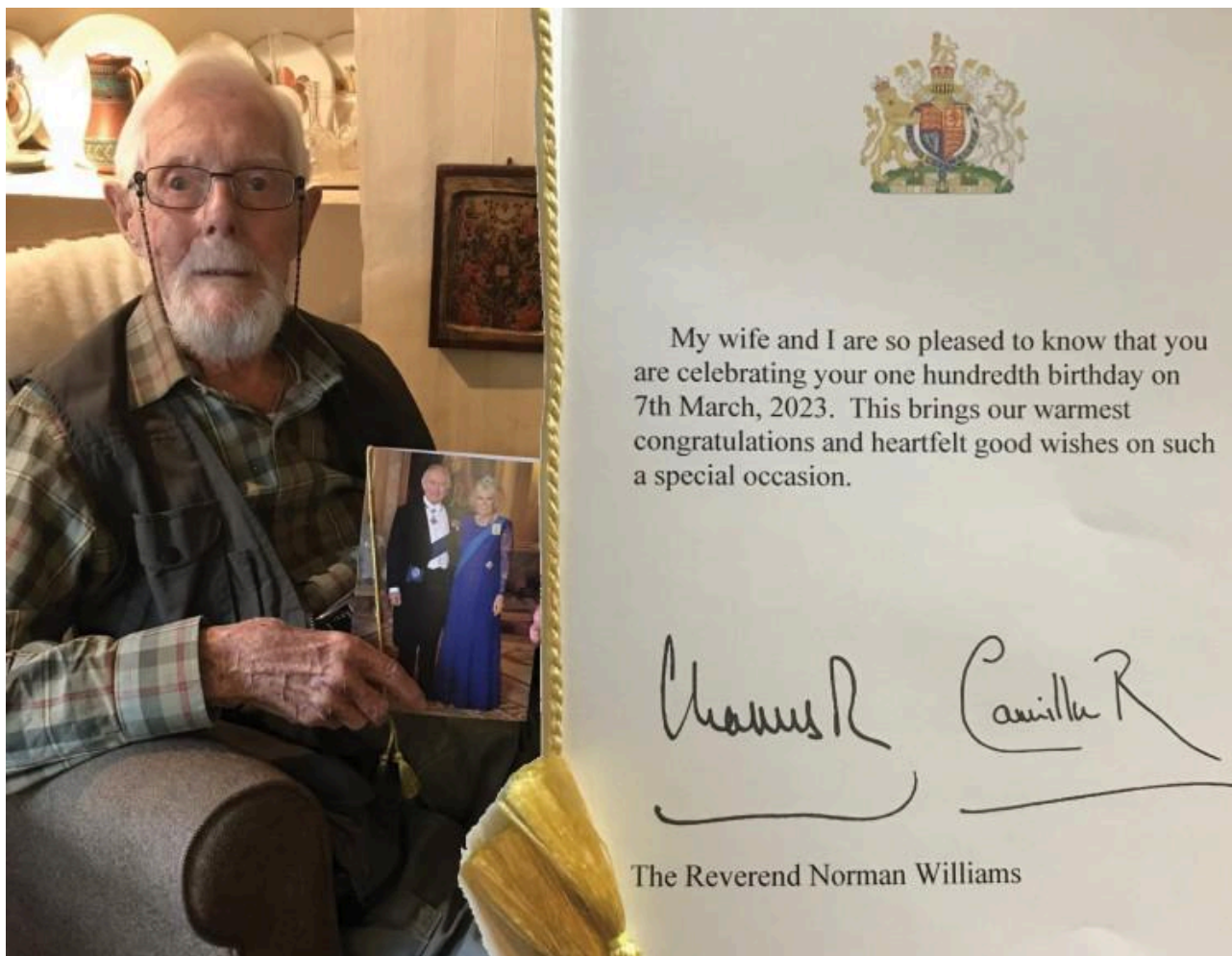
*50th anniversary edition*



*A special year*

Welcome to a bumper edition of the Cowbridge History Society newsletter. As you will all be aware, this is a year of great celebration combined with some sadness, as one of the Society's two joint Presidents passed away on 15th February.

## Norman Williams: a man for all seasons



In 1974 Cowbridge was experiencing a wave of change in its schools, in the extent of its housing provision and in the character of its High Street. Norman Williams was the Mayor of Cowbridge at the time, and keenly appreciated the urgent need for the formation of a community society which could foster the understanding of Cowbridge's unique and long history and to secure its historical record. On 25th October 1974 Norman and forty supporters met in the Council Chamber at Cowbridge Town Hall and founded the Cowbridge and District Local History Society.

The Society was both popular and successful in fulfilling its objectives and membership quickly grew past 100 members. Norman, as its first President, remained ever an enthusiastic and active member of the Society. Cowbridge Record Society was subsequently formed from local extra-mural classes to publish material on Cowbridge and its district. The two societies merged to form the Cowbridge History Society at an inaugural meeting on 10th July 2013 and Norman was unanimously welcomed, in partnership with Brian Ll. James, as Joint President of the new Society. Norman continued, when possible, to attend the programme of talks, to welcome members to the

Annual General Meetings and to enjoy the on-going success of the society his forethought and inspired efforts helped to create.

His service and great contribution to our vibrant and ancient community were duly recognised by the society on the occasion of Norman's 100th birthday on 7th March 2023. Not long after this, he moved out of his long-time house in Cowbridge to the Manor House Care Home in St Hilary, where he enjoyed the final year of his life. His well-attended funeral took place on 29th February at Llanblethian Church.

Norman was born in Whitchurch, Cardiff, and was working at Cardiff's docks as a trainee electrician when the Second World War broke out in 1939. At the age of 18, he joined up and eventually became a Petty Officer in the Royal Navy. When peace came, he trained as an engineer, in which capacity he returned to Wales with a company called Tuscan Engineering, and moved



to Cowbridge with his wife, Betty. Among other activities, he soon became a founding member, and the secretary, of Cowbridge Rotary Club. In 1970, he became a member of Cowbridge Borough Council, which took up much of his time and energy. It is largely to him that we owe the existence of the prestigious Cowbridge Comprehensive School, as he campaigned against plans to transfer all local secondary education to Llantwit Major. Following the reorganisation of local government in 1974, he ensured the survival of a Town Council which still exists. He was its first mayor.

In the same year, Norman was instrumental in founding Cowbridge & District Local History Society. He was involved in the planning and opening of the Health Centre and Cowbridge Library on their original site in Old Hall Gardens. Not content with everything he had already done in the service of the local public, he trained to become an Anglican priest, and was ordained in 1983.

Committee member Don Gerrard says "He was certainly always very interested in Cowbridge past and keen to talk to me and pick up what he could from my limited knowledge, and also of course to Jeff [Alden]. We also always had a little chat about our common past in H M Forces, he the Navy and me the Army. He served at the latter end of the War and always had an interesting tale to tell. He also had some amusing anecdotes about his time as a trainee priest, some of which was spent in Cowbridge, where he was supervised and watched take services by the Bishop."

## 50th Anniversary plans

Plans for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Cowbridge & District Local History Society, one of the two former societies that merged to create Cowbridge History Society, are continuing apace. Our first offering will be a new publication - a reprinting of a work first published in serial form in the *Glamorgan Gazette* in the 1930s. E W Miles's memoir of his youth in the Cowbridge area is acknowledged as an important historical source, but will also make entertaining reading because Mr Miles was a man of strong opinions (most of which nowadays sound rather old-fashioned) who did not hesitate to express them!

On 16th November, there will be a day of talks and activities for CHS members and the general public, to be held at the Town Hall. This is expected to include lectures from popular local historians, a short play, and a video presentation, not to mention a bookstall and other interesting items. On the back page of this issue we have included further details, and we suggest, if you have a printer, that you print out that page for reference so that you don't miss anything! Alternatively, it is not expensive to photocopy a single page at Cowbridge Library.

One of the items originally planned in the programme of celebrations was to have been a guest lecture by Professor Chris Williams, BA, PhD, FRHist Soc, FSLW, of Cork University. Sadly, Professor Williams passed away suddenly on 5th April, aged 61. An obituary appears later in this issue.

You will know from previous newsletters that we have plans to revise both *Cowbridge Buildings and People* and *Llanblethian Buildings and People*, but this takes time. Already on our publishing schedule is a new publication focusing on Westgate - the first instalment in a series of new editions - which we hope to publish later in 2024 or in 2025.

## Talks of the season

Fittingly, our spring meetings began with several lively talks that received compliments from all those present. The phrase "I wasn't expecting it to be so interesting" was heard multiple times over tea and coffee on dark evenings at the start of the year.

Tongwynlais Tollhouse might, at first, not have sounded like the most glamorous location as the subject of a talk, but in January Glen and Marion Sweeney quickly demonstrated what makes it a fascinating subject for study, both archaeological and historical. The restoration work carried out by the local history society makes it a spot well worth visiting, and the Sweeneys' work on identifying the tollhouse's occupants over the years is not only worthy of Sherlock Holmes, but raises further questions still to be explored.

In February Terry Kane spoke on *The Ragged Schools Movement in Cardiff*, and shed light on the little-known fact that Cardiff in the 19th century was home to large numbers of Irish immigrants. The enlightened approach of local philanthropists to the problem of keeping the children out of trouble, giving them an education, and even feeding them, was a revelation to our audience, as were the memorable images shown by Terry during his talk.

Those present at March's meeting heard Bill Jones talk about the correspondence exchanged between Wales and America by Welsh emigrants who had travelled there, generally to escape poverty and/or find employment. They both missed, and were missed by, their loved ones back in Wales, and Professor Jones showed many examples of real letters that have been preserved for posterity.

April's talk, given by Dr Ed Cloutman, focused on the clockmaker Henry Williams of Llanccarfan, and was based on the years of research carried out by Ed and his collaborator, Bill Linnard, for their book, *Henry Williams Llanccarfan* (Tathan Books, 2003). Both Williams himself and the history of clockmaking proved a story well worth telling, and once again the hall saw a capacity audience who went away very satisfied.

The final talk of the 2023-24 season, after the AGM, was given by our Publications Officer, Deborah Fisher, after the original speaker dropped out. The subject was "The Travels of Frank Brangwyn", and briefly covered the long life and career of the artist Frank Brangwyn, born in Bruges to Welsh parents and best known for the "Empire Panels" that decorate the Brangwyn Hall in Swansea.

*Dick Tonkin*  
*Programme Secretary*

## Charter Day Trip to Porthcawl Museum 2024

Every 13th March the Society commemorates the granting of a charter to the newly formed Borough of Cowbridge by Richard de Clare the Lord of Glamorgan in 1254 with a visit to a local venue with historic significance and interest. This year's visit was to Porthcawl Museum, which occupies what was until 1972 the town's Police Station and lies centrally in the town in the pedestrianised area. The Museum has been given a major facelift over the winter of 2023/24 with new displays, curation of the display materials in terms of cleaning and repairs and a top to bottom refurbishment. The Museum was due to open to the public following this work on or around 18th March, but the management very kindly agreed to open up a few days earlier for the History Society's Charter Day visit which thirty members signed up for.

It had been planned that the visit should start with a talk on Porthcawl's long and complex history but unfortunately, illness in her family prevented the speaker from attending. Instead, we immediately divided into small groups to visit the many rooms and former cells each of which had a volunteer primed to talk us through the excellent and varied exhibits.

**A Police Cell** (complete with very realistic model prisoner). The Police Station was opened in 1882 to deal with a rise in drunkenness and crime attributed to dockside sailors. From that start the station grew from one policeman to 36 in 1972. The cell and its exhibits captures that history.

**Wartime.** The displays in a number of rooms commemorate the part Porthcawl and its citizens played in the First and Second World Wars: times of scarcity and innovation that nevertheless ensured life went on as far as possible along accustomed lines. Four battalions of the Welsh Regiment and one of the Royal Engineers were formed at Porthcawl in the First World War and the St John's Auxiliary Hospital cared for some 2,500 soldiers before reverting to a convalescent home and in 2013 being re-developed as apartments. Porthcawl contributed in many ways to the WW2 war effort including the formation in 1942 of the Reconnaissance Regiment "C" Squadron which played its part in Europe's liberation.

**Stormy Down.** This room commemorates the huge impact that RAF Stormy Down (formerly RAF Porthcawl) made on the provision of trained personnel. Some 50,000 service men and women were trained as gunners, navigators and observers before being posted to other RAF bases throughout Great Britain. Also recalled in this room was the Cold War which ran from Russia's explosion of its first atom bomb until the USSR passed into history and how this tense period affected local people.

**Samtampa.** A former cell features the sinking of the *Samtampa* (often misspelled) after it ran aground on 23rd April 1947 with the loss of 47 lives, despite the heroism of the Porthcawl Coastguard personnel. Many artefacts from the wreck are displayed and tell the story. This is just one of the many wrecks that have occurred along the nearby coast.

**Victorian Classroom.** The school opened in 1874 and continued through to 1952 when pupils and staff moved to Nottage Primary School in Suffolk Place. The desks, from The National



School (now the Co-op), were furnished with ink pots with sliding lids and in the corner stood a well modelled child with a Welsh NOT around her neck to remind us of that oppressive policy.

A number of rooms were furnished to recall various aspects of Porthcawl's development and success during Victorian times and between the World Wars when the population almost doubled and its seaside

attracted investment in accommodation, retail and sport. A key part of that whole story was the creation of Porthcawl Dock in 1865 at a cost of £250,000. A Victorian Parlour was another popular display in which James and Mary Brogden, key to the town's development on the 1890s, are remembered amongst other things by their daughter Lucy's sewing machine. Elsewhere Victorian clothing and headwear were available for those inclined to try them on with displays telling the story of how Victorian women dealt with birth, marriage and death.

There is so much to see and so many memories are triggered by the Museum's exhibits and descriptions inside and out that it was difficult to leave. However, our lunch date at The Grove Golf Club began to beckon.

The Club is modern and set, as one might expect, in rolling grounds just outside Porthcawl and being adjacent to the Pyle Road is easy to find. We had our own very light room, having windows on three sides including over the course and were well served by charming young ladies with our prior selections with the bar open for liquid refreshment.

Our Chairman Dick Buswell proposed a vote of thanks to Beverly Tonkin for planning the day with all that entailed and presented her with a hydrangea as a token of the Society's appreciation and it was clear that everyone had enjoyed the visit. In fact it was so comfortable with conversation flowing freely and the visit to the Museum having been so successful that it was only with difficulty that members tore themselves away for the journey home.

As part of Ogwr History Month, the Museum will be having an open day on **Saturday 28th September.**

*Dick Tonkin  
Programme Secretary*

# The Dictionary of Cowbridge Biography

The dictionary is a compendium of people born before 1900 who have a significant connection to Cowbridge and its district or who have made an important contribution to the life of the town or surrounding area.

Suggestions for inclusion are welcome and can be submitted to Chris Turner ([chrisbturner@live.com](mailto:chrisbturner@live.com)), who edits the Dictionary. Chris can also provide advice on relevance and word limits, but by way of example see earlier issues.

*Chris Turner*

## Subscriptions

For those who have not yet paid their subs for 2024, we would appreciate it if you could either send a cheque, payable to "Cowbridge History Society", to Beverly Tonkin at Porth y Felin, Town Mill Road, Cowbridge, CF71 7BE, or transfer the fees by BACS to Cowbridge History Society account no.00034614 at Barclays Bank UK PLC, sort code 20-12-25, using their surname and first initial as a reference. A standing order could be set up if preferred. At the 2023 AGM, it was agreed to raise the annual subscription rate from £7.50 to £10, and this change has now been implemented.

## Patricia Price (1932-2024)

Not many people would know that Pat was a Scot, born in Glasgow in 1932. A graduate in English from Bristol University, on coming to Cowbridge she soon became an active member of CHS. I worked with her on a few occasions when her interests and mine overlapped.

She had become very interested, while at university, in the Romantic poets of the late 18th century, especially Byron, Keats and Shelley, and the influence of their work on English society, it being radical at a time of great social upheaval. The Society will remember for a long while her talk on Byron, which she entitled (after Lady Caroline Lamb) "Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know". She was also interested in Wellington and his campaigns, and she and I worked together on "Britain, Europe and Waterloo ", for which she did much of the intricate research.



Pat lived quietly off the St Athan Road, a member of a small family group, and unbeknown to many, kept a close eye on local planning matters. Those of us who knew her well, will miss her wisdom and ready smile.

*Don Gerrard*

## Congratulations, Cowbridge Museum!

On 10th August, the Accreditation Approvals Panel visited Cowbridge Museum, and have recommended that its fully accredited status should continue. Their verbal report was very positive. David Pierce thanks everyone for advice and support during the re-accreditation process, especially curator Alex Latham. The new Chair of the Museum Trustees is Malcolm Wilson.

## Professor Chris Williams (1963-2024)

Members of the Cowbridge History Society will be shocked and saddened at the death of Chris Williams, a leading historian of Wales and a good friend of the Society. Chris Williams graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1985 with a first class degree in Modern History. He then completed his doctoral thesis at University College Cardiff, on *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885-1951*. In 1988 he was appointed to a lectureship in nineteenth century British history at Cardiff. In 2001 he was appointed Professor of Modern History at the University of Glamorgan and in 2005 was Professor of Welsh History at Swansea University before returning to Cardiff University in 2013 as Professor of History and Head of the School of History, Archaeology and Religion. In 2017 he became Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences at University College Cork.



Chris wrote widely on Welsh and labour history including contributions to books on *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000*, (2000) *Robert Owen and his legacy* (2011) and *The Gwent County History* (volumes 4&5) (2011 and 2013). He also authored books on *BL Coombes* (1999) and *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947* (1998). In 2012 he famously edited the Richard Burton Diaries to great acclaim. More recently he had been researching the history of cartooning and political caricature and had given a talk to CHS in 2016 on *Cartooning the First World War*, with a particular focus on the *Western Mail* cartoonist J M Staniforth.

His recognition as a fine historian was acknowledged by his appointment as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the Learned Society of Wales. Amongst many other appointments he was also Advisory Editor for Wales of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and contributed to that Dictionary and to the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

In his recent University appointments Chris had demonstrated to great effect his administrative and managerial skills as a successful head of several large schools in Welsh universities and a college within University College Cork. He supervised many research students and was widely acknowledged as a supportive and inspiring mentor, generous both with his time and his insights. I can personally testify to this as he edited my contribution to the Gwent County History series, unearthing wonderfully appropriate photographs to go with my text which he was also able to improve with a number of pertinent suggestions.

Chris had kindly agreed to be the keynote speaker at our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in October. His untimely passing has robbed us of a loyal and generous friend with a genuine attachment to Cowbridge, and Wales has lost one of its best known and most productive historians. He will be greatly missed by all his friends and colleagues, myself included, who will remember him as a warm, witty and supportive friend in everything he did. Our sincere condolences go to Sara his wife, his two sons, and of course to his mother Jo, a resident of Cowbridge and member of CHS.

*Chris Turner*

## Cowbridge on the eve of the Great War

The year 1914 began pretty miserably for Cowbridge, as it did for the rest of Britain, certainly in terms of the weather. Floods ravaged East Anglia, gales battered Cornwall and South Wales, and London experienced the wettest winter on record. But as March progressed, things started to look up. The sun came out, and Britons, as they always do, dared to hope that they might be in for a good summer. Well-to-do Edwardian society all over Britain looked forward to the Boat Race, Royal Ascot, Wimbledon, and the County Cricket season (there was no Touring Team that year, although the English team in South Africa 1913-14 played a few representative matches.)

In Cowbridge, thoughts turned to the Annual March Fair and perhaps (for those who could afford it) a trip to the seaside, maybe with the Sunday School, by train to Aberthaw or Barry Island.

Before World War One, Cowbridge was a small market town of some 2,300 inhabitants. It had not embraced the 'progress' of the industrial age (as had its neighbours Pontypridd and Bridgend), largely because of the delay in the coming of the railway (as late as 1865), although this was mostly due to the opposition of the Corporation and local residents. Thus the Cowbridge of 1914 differs little from the Cowbridge of the 1841 Tithe Map. True, the East and West toll gates have vanished and the River Thaw was culverted in 1911. Also, the railways have arrived. The town had obviously progressed since 1775 when Francis Grose found "the major part only thatched cottages like an Irish town."<sup>1</sup> Yet Donovan in 1804 saw "a place of business and some respectability"<sup>2</sup>.

"It is certain that Cowbridge was a Roman settlement of some significance"<sup>3</sup> Where the Via Julia Maritima crossed the Thaw a settlement grew and archaeological 'digs' have revealed evidence of civil and military buildings associated with the Second Augustan Legion before its transfer to Hadrian's Wall in the third century, although the pattern of the Roman settlement is not clear. But it is also certain that "after the end of Roman occupation the town faded away"<sup>4</sup>.

The Normans arrived in South Wales soon after 1066. By then the so-called 'Dark Ages' had affected the settlement of Cowbridge so that probably only a few houses existed. The main settlement was Llanblethian. By 1245 Richard De Clare acquired extensive lands in Glamorgan, and in his manor of Llanblethian he planted, in line fashion, the 'new town' of Cowbridge, and granted its first Borough Charter in 1254 to "our beloved burgesses of Longa Villa."

Some historians have, however, suggested that there is no foundation charter extant, and that for the existence of such one has to rely on a 1570 Survey: "Sir Richard De Clare did grant unto Cowbridge all such liberties as were had by a Charter bearing date 13 day of March in 38th year of Henry III."<sup>5</sup> The burgesses possessed by this charter extensive freedoms in trade, and the town soon flourished. Successive monarchs confirmed and extended these – on eight separate occasions (1340, 1358, 1397, 1421, 1538, 1559, 1570, 1576) until an important confirmatory charter was granted by Charles II in 1682.<sup>6</sup>

John Leland observed between 1536 and 1539: "The waulle of Cowbridge is 3 quarters of a mile --- there be 2 gates --- the est, the west and Part Meline by south." (He was a Royal Commissioner for the Visitation of the Monasteries.) The site of the North Gate may well have run from the old Town Cross (at the junction of Church Street and High Street). The Town Cross,

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<sup>1</sup> Grose F. 1778

<sup>2</sup> Donovan (ed.) 1804

<sup>3</sup> Alden J. 2005

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Hopkin-James - Old Cowbridge 1922

<sup>6</sup> People's Collection Wales – Cowbridge Borough Charters – Glamorgan Archives

Guildhall and Market Place were removed c1830; West Gate in 1754 and East Gate in 1715<sup>7</sup>.

The population of Cowbridge grew rapidly in the medieval period. At first it was mainly Anglo-Norman, but after the Black Death (1348-9) there began to emerge a class of wealthy and influential people – the gentry – who built large 'town houses', e.g. The Carnes, Wyndhams, Edmondess. By the 18th Century they controlled the town by concentrating their power in the Court of Common Council, and together with successful businessmen, they also controlled the offices of Mayor and Alderman. It was not until 1887 that a more representative charter of incorporation was granted.

Lawlessness had not been uncommon in the 16th century and Cowbridge, being one of the most important towns in Glamorgan, held its own Quarter Sessions, and from 1768 to 1788 the Court Session (or Assizes). The gallows were on Stalling Down, and bodies were 'gibbeted' (or hung in chains) on Gibbets Hill. By 1850 all trials except Petty Sessions had ceased, also imprisonment in the Town Hall.

Such was the situation in Cowbridge at the beginning of the 20th century, in the last halcyon years of the Edwardians.

A great deal of information about the structure, population and physical make-up of the town before World War One is gained from the 1914 OS Map and Kelly's Directories, together with some personal reminiscences which cannot always be accurate. At the 1891 census, Cowbridge had a mere 1377 inhabitants, 691 male and 686 female. In 1901, this had dropped to 1202, but the population of Llanblethian is recorded as 683, making a total of 1885. By 1911, both populations had risen, Cowbridge to 1542 (made up of 773 males and 769 females) and Llanblethian to 780; a total of 2322.

In 1905 there were 270 houses in Cowbridge and Llanblethian, and 206 voters on the Parliamentary Register. The area of the Cowbridge Parish was 85 acres while that of Llanblethian was 326 acres. (Kelly's Directory, 1926) After the First Great Reform Act of 1832 Cowbridge was still popularly known as a burgh borough, while the Third Parliamentary Reform Act (1884) gave men possessing property of rental value £10 p.a. the vote (still 40% of men and all women were unable to vote). After 1837 a new charter of incorporation meant that the town was governed by a mayor, four aldermen, and twelve councillors. This was underpinned by the Cowbridge Rural District Council. For Parliamentary purposes Cowbridge was part of the Cardiff Boroughs Constituency together with Cardiff and Llantrisant.

From the inception of political parties in the reign of Charles II, Cardiff Boroughs and thus Cowbridge, had been strongly Tory. From 1790 until 1859 there had been a close connection with the Crichton-Stuart family (the Butes, whose ancestor had been a minister of George III). However, from 1857 until late 1910 a Whig had been returned. In January-December 1910 this was D.A. Thomas, Liberal (Whig). In December 1910 James Cory, Conservative (Tory) was elected. With a total vote of 12181 for the Conservatives, compared with 11882 for the Liberals, the Tories took the seat with a majority of 299 on a turnout of 84.1%. The total electorate was 28,600, 206 of them from Cowbridge

There are two almost contemporary accounts of what Cowbridge may have been like before 1914, but they are inevitably flawed due to the passage of time. Messrs Selwyn Davies and E.W. Miles are at one when they describe the social makeup of the town, and indeed almost concur with the scale conceived by the Registrar General in 1911:

1. "the county types" local squires: the Homfrays of Penllyn; the Carnes of Nash; the Bassetts of Crossways; the Edmondess of Old Hall.  
*"they were known to us youths as 'the nob's' ( or 'toffs')"*
2. the Middle Class: (a) e.g. lawyers, doctors, builders; (b) e.g. grocers, chemists, drapers; (c) painters, decorators, carpenters.

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis S. 1840

3. the Working Class: employed by the above, e.g. labourers, odd-job men

*“the working class were the object of charity and hardly, if ever left Cowbridge.” (E.W. Miles)*

A careful study of Kelly's Directories of 1906-26 reveals in detail the occupation and usage of every building in Cowbridge and District, both residential and commercial. This shows that there were, for example, 3 banks in High Street, 45 retail outlets in total (23 in High Street, 12 in Eastgate and 10 in Westgate). In addition, there were 33 service providers (13 each in High Street and Eastgate, and 7 in Westgate).

The number of public houses in Cowbridge has always been of great interest to both the inhabitants and visitors to the town: “Cowbridge was famed for its inns – the 1891 census showed 25 operating in the town, and 44 different sites of inns have been identified,” wrote Jeff Alden<sup>8</sup>. As can be seen, memories vary. Mrs Joyce Tonkin, speaking of 1914, said “an Irish R.S.M, billeted with my mother (in Town Mill Road), made great use of the 22 public houses.”<sup>9</sup> Probably the most precise calculation of the number of inns in Cowbridge was done by Stephenson and Alexander, who operated as auctioneers and chartered surveyors across Wales and Southern England from about 1740. For many years they were the pre-eminent auctioneers in South Wales, with offices in Pontypridd and Cardiff, and carried out work for a wide variety of customers in Cowbridge, including, they claimed, all the inns<sup>10</sup>. The first mention of an inn appears to have been in 1780, and could have been the Masons Arms, but there are other buildings claiming to be older than that, possibly from as early as the 16th century. A tallow factory existed behind the Vale of Glamorgan Inn.<sup>11</sup>

Two breweries existed in Cowbridge: The Old Brewery on High Street near the bridge over River Thaw, opposite The Limes, established in 1880 by Lewis Jenkins of the Horse and Groom; and The Vale of Glamorgan Brewery, 1-3 High Street, established in the late 19th century by Thomas Morgan, who also owned the Edmondes Arms and the Hare and Hounds. He supplied The Bear and produced about 100 barrels per week.

There were few cars, no buses, and train travel was inconvenient. The first car in Cowbridge was owned by Col. Homfray, and was a blue Daimler.

Sport was a strong feature of Cowbridge life. Cricket, rugby and football were all played to a good standard before 1914. Indeed, Cowbridge has produced as many as five England cricketers, and Douglas Jardine (an England captain) played as a guest in the 1920s. There is evidence of matches being played in 1838, and the club was formally founded in 1840. The present cricket ground was acquired in 1895. A report in the *Glamorgan Gazette* of 10th July 1914, of a match played on 4th July between Cowbridge and Ferndale, lists the Cowbridge team as B Bird; H A Dunn; F W Dunn; D P Evans; F E Dunn; A P Thomas; Rev Owen Jones; A T Dunn; J R Dunn; T J Williams; and a professional called Pell.

Soon after, the famous poem appeared, when the Cowbridge team, or most of them, volunteered for service in World War I. The poem was by “Velox”, William Rickard of Watts and Morgan, who also wrote for the *“Glamorgan Gazette”*. (see Appendices D and E).

Both rugby and football were well established: football was played in the Bear Field, and rugby appears to have been played on Cae Stumpie and also on the Mill Field, near the Town Mill.

In the early 19th century there were private schools in existence in Cowbridge, of some distinction, the Eagle Academy and the Great House School. After the 1870 Education Act the first Board School was established in Cowbridge, Ysgol Iolo Morgannwg (1876). Cowbridge Grammar School had been in existence since 1608, and had moved into its newer buildings in 1847-52. After

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<sup>8</sup> *Old Inns and Alehouses*, 2003

<sup>9</sup> *Cowbridge and District Remembered*, 2002

<sup>10</sup> (Stephenson and Alexander Records 1710-2012 (Glamorgan Archives)

<sup>11</sup> Betty Alden, Notes on Old Cowbridge (People's Collection Wales)

the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, the Girls' High School came into being, and the Grammar School was later subsumed into the state system.

Churches and chapels had a great effect on life in the town. At the Religious Census of 1851, attendances were estimated as follows:-

Holy Cross (founded late 13th century): 200

Methodist Chapel (1780): 46 for morning service, 49 for evening

Ramoth (1816): 100 morning service, 250 evening

Calvinistic Methodist (1828): 21 morning service, 94 evening

Congregational (1749): 150 morning service, 350 evening

### **Spring and summer 1914**

In the first few months of 1914 there was little change in the pattern of everyday life in Britain. People continued to work each day in office, factory or farm, and enjoyed the same social activities they had always done, "perhaps go to the cinema where Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford were all the rage".<sup>12</sup> In July 1914 the Henley Regatta opened with perfect weather. The seaside resorts were crowded, "even though the country was a seething mass of social tension"<sup>13</sup> – strikes in the mines and on the railways, the Suffragette Movement at its height, and the problem of Home Rule for Ireland.

In Cowbridge, life really was, in comparison, very quiet and peaceful. Life on the farms and in the shops was supplemented by the infrequent social occasion in the church or chapel, and rarely in the Town Hall, with maybe a trip now and then to the seaside. In 1913 one early film shown in the Town Hall, by cinematograph, was *Quo Vadis*.<sup>14</sup>

The vast majority of people did not give a moment's thought to events unfolding on the Continent. The countdown to war had begun, but for now the August Bank Holiday was approaching (at the beginning of August), and everyone was looking forward to it, the weather being of immediate concern. Again it refused to co-operate: the end of July was miserable, with rain and wind awaiting the holiday makers. No-one could conceive that it would be the last weekend of peace for four years.

Tensions in the Balkans between Austria-Hungary and Serbia had been steadily growing worse for years and had exploded on 28 June, when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian Nationalist. The Great Powers immediately took sides.

Monday 3 August was Bank Holiday. The seaside resorts were, nevertheless, packed with visitors. During the day various ultimatums flew to and fro between Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, Paris, and London. They were to expire at 11pm on 4 August. On 4 August, Germany invaded Belgium and at 11pm Britain declared war on Germany, as an ally of the Belgians. "*The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.*"<sup>15</sup>

Mobilisation Orders were posted outside Post Offices all over Britain. On Wednesday 5 August, Cowbridge woke as a town at war. The residents discovered this when the newspapers arrived at the Post Office. Within weeks thousands volunteered, 750,000 from all over Britain by the end of September. It has been estimated that there were at least 30 from Cowbridge, including the whole of the Cricket Club 1st XI.

Almost immediately the Government took wide-ranging powers, under the Defence of the Realm Act, including censorship of the Press, control of roads and railways, and law and order.

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<sup>12</sup> *Daily Telegraph* June 8th 1914

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Selwyn Davies, *Some Memories of Cowbridge* (pamphlet, 1978)

<sup>15</sup> Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary 4 August, 1914

Rapid action was taken to acquire half a million horses for service at the Front and in the Empire. In Cowbridge they were marshalled on Stalling Down and in horse pens in the town. It was important to control all lighting, and all this information was published in the *London Gazette* as early as 14 August 1914.

*“Between half an hour after sunset and half an hour before sunrise, no light of any description shall be visible from the outside of any building of any description.”*

*“Any person striking matches --- or using any light source --- in a public place is liable to be arrested.”*

On 7th August the first British troops (BEF) landed in France. In Cowbridge the pace of life quickened somewhat, mainly to help provide some funds for the War and ‘comforts’ for the troops. Entertainments in the church and chapels were more frequent, as were fund raising events. The Cowbridge Minstrels, who before the war had performed in the Town Hall twice a year, came much more often, perhaps six times in 1914-15 alone, and regularly thereafter. The Recruiting Committee met each Tuesday in the Town Hall.

There were 16 Belgian Refugees in Cowbridge by 1915.<sup>16</sup> As at the Front, the autumn weather was poor, rain and gales battered the coast, the early battles of the war in 1914 resulted in stalemate (August Mons and November Ypres) and with the armies then embedded in the trenches.

At Christmas 1914 there took place the famous Christmas Truce, in which troops from some five nations took part, but after only a few hours both sides returned to their trenches to continue the war. Just after Christmas, a soldier in the Hertfordshire Regiment, Reg Evans, wrote home to his mother in Hemel Hempstead.

*“On Christmas Eve I was on guard and not 30 yards from the German trench. I could hear them talking quite distinctly. We had a Christmas Card from the King and Queen, and a box of cigarettes and tobacco and also a Christmas Card from Princess Mary. We are in the trenches until after New Year, so you will not hear from me for a little while. It will be a long war.”<sup>17</sup>*

*Don Gerrard*

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<sup>16</sup> Betty Alden, Notes on Old Cowbridge, People’s Collection Wales 2005

<sup>17</sup> Chapman, Isabel - The Great War: a Nation’s Story (Arrow, 2014), pp 89-90

## **PROGRAMME FOR Autumn 2024**

**Talks take place on the first Friday of each month at 7.30pm (unless otherwise advised) in person at Maendy Hall, Ramoth Chapel**

### **Friday 11th October**

STEVE THOMPSON: *'In Place of Fear': Wales and the advent of the NHS*

### **Friday 1st November**

JEFF GROSVENOR: *Newport Transporter Bridge - The 1906 Iconic Design*

### **Saturday 16th November**

Celebration of the Society's 50th anniversary - Open Day at Cowbridge Town Hall.

*Further details on back page.*

### **Friday 6th December**

KISHLI LAISTER: *Here be Vikings? The Evidence from South Wales*

*(pre-Christmas meeting, with mince pies and wine)*

TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS, PLEASE attend in-person meetings ONLY if you have no Covid-19 symptoms (e.g. cough, temperature, loss of sense of taste/smell etc.) and you have been vaccinated.

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to [cowbridgehistsoc@gmail.com](mailto:cowbridgehistsoc@gmail.com) for potential publication in the next newsletter.

## **ADDITIONAL EVENT**

We are pleased to inform members that, in addition to the above, Cowbridge History Society will be participating in the launch of **Gareth Thomas's new novel, *The Flying Soprano***, in recognition of the relevance of the subject matter. The launch will take place **at Cowbridge Library at 2.30pm on Thursday 25th October.**

Admission is free, and refreshments will be provided by the Society.

# Local History Exhibition

## Cant a Mil Pop-up

## Welsh Book Shop

**Saturday 28 September 10-00 to 4-00**

**Tabernacl Hall, Elder Lane  
off Adair St, Bridgend**

**Owain Glyndŵr and Coety Castle**

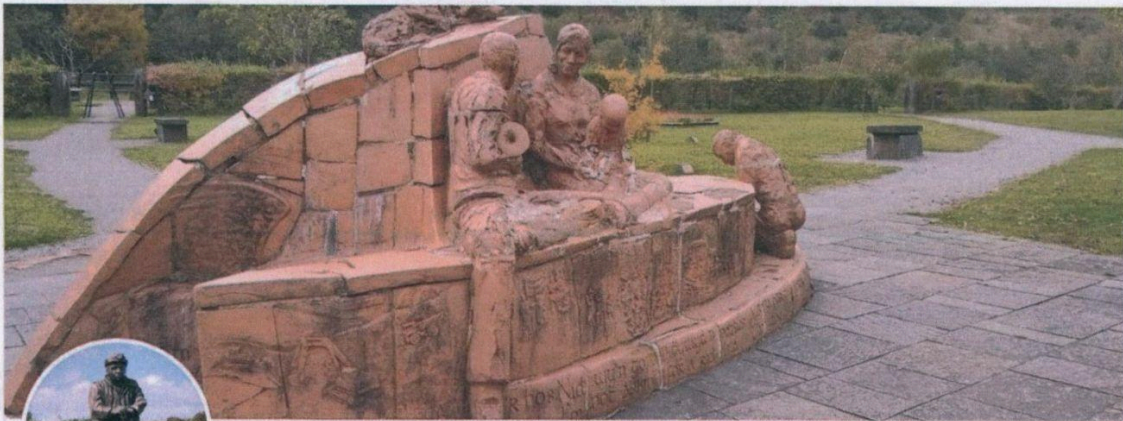
**Island Farm - Christopher Williams, Maesteg Artist**

**Ysgol Bro Ogwr - Menter - Porthcawl in the 1930s**

**Living History - Historical Crafts - The Old Signal Box**

### **Refreshments**

Talks in Welsh on Welsh History and Culture for Welsh Speakers and Learners -  
2nd Monday at 7-30 each month - [www.facebook.com/CymdeithasHanesBroOgwr](http://www.facebook.com/CymdeithasHanesBroOgwr)



**Cymdeithas Hanes Bro Ogwr History Society**

You're invited to celebrate  
**50 years of Cowbridge History Society**  
at Cowbridge Town Hall  
Saturday 16th November 2024  
**10am till 4.30pm - Entry free to all**

## Events

**10.30 to 11.15 am** - First showing of 'Cowbridge on Film'

**11.30 am to 12.30 pm**

Talk: Graham Loveluck-Edwards:

"Cowbridge and the Missing Roman Fort"

**12.40 to approx. 1.00pm**

"A light-hearted look at the History of Cowbridge" by Dick Buswell, performed by Peter Knapp and Geoff Grist of CADS with a multitude of hats

**2 pm to 3 pm**

Talk: Professor Martin Johnes:

"Wales and the Second World War"

**3 pm** Launch of new CHS publication:

*Cowbridge and District 1860-1930* by E W Miles, edited by Brian Ll. James

**3.30 to 4.15 pm** - First showing of 'Cowbridge on Film'

## All day

- Photo exhibition
- Quiz
- Bookstall
- Refreshments from 10am (except during talks)