

NEWSLETTER

December 1982

No 17



PROGRAMME 1983

January 7th

Thomas Andrew Walker and the Building of the Severn Tunnel

Mr. L.N.A. Davies.

February 4th

Dinas Powys - A Village in The Vale.

Dr. Chrystal Tilney.

March 4th

The Nicholl Family of Merthyr Mawr.

Miss Hilary Thomas.

April 1st

*Re-erecting Buildings at the Welsh Folk Museum*Dr. Eurwyn Wiliam
Keeper, Dept. of Buildings, Welsh
Folk Museum, St. Fagans.

May 6th

*Glamorgan Maps for the Local Historian*Mrs. Patricia Moore.
Glamorgan County Archivist.

All meetings are held on Fridays at
8pm in the Lesser Hall.

CONGRATULATIONS!

I am sure that all members of the Society would like to congratulate our President, Mr Norman Williams, who is to be ordained in Llandaff Cathedral on Saturday, December 18th. Norman is to continue in his present employment after ordination, so he will no doubt be even busier than he is now. We wish him strength, fulfilment and happiness in the future.

OFFICERS 1982 - 1983

President: Mr Norman Williams, C2107
Chairman: Mrs Yvonne Weeding, C 2878
Hon. Secretary: Mr John Miles, C 2270
Hon- Treasurer: Mr Simon Nicoll, C 3842
Programme Sec: Mrs Gwynneth Keay, C 2879
Excursions Sec: Mrs Barbara Toogood,
Bridgend 5236
Museum Curator: Mrs Marion Eveleigh, C 2495
Newsletter: Mr Jeff Alden, C 3373

Committee: Mr Geoff Burrows, Mrs Pat
Coxhead, Mr Len Davies, Mrs Valerie Nicoll,
Mrs Dorothy Sewell, Mrs Viv Whythe.

THE YEAR OF THE CASTLE



1983 has been designated 'The Year of the Castle' by the Welsh Tourist Board. Every area which has a castle has been asked to put on some festivity or activity linked with it. (No doubt you have read that Porthcawl is trying to buy a castle to do just this.) Your society has been asked by the Town Council if something could be organized, and thanks to two of our members we have two events planned.

On Friday, 24th June at Talygarn, Pat Coxhead is producing an evening of 'Upstairs and Downstairs Castle Fashions' together with a buffet supper. Talygarn, now a rehabilitation centre, was formerly the home of G.T. Clark, the engineer and historian. The house was rebuilt by him in the mid-nineteenth century, and has a lovely room with a painted ceiling, looking out onto a terrace with beautiful views. It is hoped if the weather is kind to hold the function outside. I'm sure many of us will welcome a chance to visit a house which is unknown to us, in addition to seeing a most unusual show. The profits from this will go the work of the rehabilitation centre.

On Friday, 30th September at the Town Hall, the Mayor and Mayoress and Councillors will receive guests for sherry in the Mayor's Parlour and Council Chambers, after which they will go to the main hall where Ray Toogood is putting on an audio-visual presentation of aspects of the history of Cowbridge. Following that, punch and pate will be served downstairs.

I am sure that you would welcome an opportunity to note these dates now.

Yvonne Weeding.

P.S. Another date to remember - Charter Day in 1983 is on Saturday, March 12th, in the Town Hall.

A PLAQUE ON ALL YOUR HOUSES?

On 27th October, 1982, Cowbridge with Llanblethian Town Council informed the Society that the Civic Trust for Wales proposes to place plaques on appropriate buildings throughout Wales, recording the names of distinguished earlier residents; the Society was invited to submit suitable names. Any suggestions to John Miles.

The Rotary Club of Cowbridge has invited the society to aid them with suggestions and advice, in collaboration with the Civic Trust for Wales, in the placing of plaques on suitable buildings and sites of historical importance in the area. Your Hon. Secretary replied on 1st November, 1982, with the Committee's firm recommendation that Rotary might consider placing such a plaque on the front of the Duke of Wellington, recording that in close proximity once stood the medieval cross and guildhall.

The Society's Committee wonders if Cowbridge Rotary might wish to concern itself with the fate of one of our most important historic sites, the remains of Llanblethian Castle (commonly known as St Quentin's Castle). This structure, dating from at least the fourteenth century, is in private ownership and has been totally neglected for many years. Its rescue would be a great achievement, and 1983 has been declared in Wales the Year of the Castle, so that such a project would be urgent, timely and worth-while. In Dinas Powys, the Civic Trust has purchased the site and remains of Dinas Powys Castle for posterity. The Cowbridge and District Local History Society is confident that Cowbridge Rotary's advocacy would be of paramount importance in securing the preservation of such an important site.

We await their comments with interest.

John Miles.

WOODLANDS IN GLAMORGAN

(A summary of the lecture given in the November meeting by William Linnard.
All errors are my responsibility, however - - J.A.)

Our knowledge of the make-up of early woodlands comes from two sources - a study of charcoal in archaeological sites, and especially from palynological studies - pollen analysis. As temperatures rose after the Ice Age, trees gradually spread over Wales so that by the time of the climatic optimum, 90% of Wales was forested - up to a height of about 2000 feet (and this height is the upper limit of Forestry Commission plantings today.)

Man did not start to have a strong influence on the forests until the shifting cultivation of the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and later. The Mabinogion gives us a picture of the slash-and-burn techniques of this kind of farming - and that was in the Dark Ages. This apparently wasteful type of farming, which involved forest clearance, followed by cultivation and then abandonment of the land as the soils became exhausted, did in fact allow an ecological balance as the forest was able to regenerate in the abandoned clearings. There is no documentary evidence of Roman forest clearance, but archaeological and pollen evidence - as from the fort at Coelbren - showed that oak and birch were used in the construction of forts; and the forests were cleared along the routeways as well.

Despite this, forests were still extensive at the time of the Norman Conquest - and they dictated the strategy of the conquest; there were two centuries of forest guerrilla warfare. The first national forest policy was formulated by the Normans - and it involved the elimination of forest to make safe the passes and roads. The Normans recruited hundreds or thousands of woodcutters and charcoal burners: 'flame and axes were just as important as lance and bow' in the conquest. Subsequently, management of the forest was necessary to build and supply the castles.

The Welsh laws of the Middle Ages gives some insight into the value of different trees: the most valuable were oak at 120d., churchyard yew at 100d., beech between 60 and 120d., and apple at 60d.

To the Medieval peasant, the woods were of very great importance and were used not only for fuel but also for raw materials (timber for building and bark for tanning), for fodder for the livestock, and for hunting and collecting (honey and wax from wild bees, hawks for falconry, and deer). Thus by Elizabethan times, woodland was in short supply, with only 10 to 20% remaining forested, because in addition to the demands of the peasants had come the demands of the shipbuilders and metal smelters. The Navy wanted oak in particular, in special shapes and sizes; at least for charcoal smelting the requirements for shape were not stringent. Some charcoal 'platforms' are still traceable on Mynydd Garth Maelwg near Llantrisant, where there has been a long tradition of iron smelting.

After the industrial revolution came the demand for more bark for tanning, and also the exploitation of alder trees for clogs.

The eighteenth century however had seen a fundamental change - the introduction of conifers, originally for ornamental purposes. A Margam Park survey of 1738 valued fir at 30/- a ton (compared with oak at 20/- a ton), and conifers were planted in the Gnoll Estate at Neath in the mid eighteenth century, though not on the scale of Thomas Johnes' estate at Hafod in Cardiganshire where five million trees, especially European larch and Scots pine, were planted in the early nineteenth century. A number of Scots foresters were particularly influential at this time - Pettigrew, Forrest, Robson and Muir - and it was largely because of these men that the conifers became fashionable. And to think that we complain about the serried ranks of Forestry Commission plantings!



THE SOUTH GATE

My comments about the South Gate in the last newsletter were obviously a little premature, as work stopped as soon as I wrote!

That work was carried out by the Vale of Glamorgan Council to make the arch safe, but now the question of ownership has arisen. This point was not sorted out in the 1974 reorganisation of local government, when the South Gate should have been specifically included on a schedule of transfer - but it wasn't. Negotiations between the Town and the Borough are under way, and every effort is being made to settle it as soon as possible'. The costs will be high if a really satisfactory job is to be done.

LLANBLETHIAN CHURCH

The repair of the tower is now complete (apart from a window which is to be taken out in the spring). This was the only part of the church not renovated by the Victorians, and restoration was first considered in 1940. The tower is now in a much healthier state than it has been for a long time.

Still to be tackled is the repair of the windows in the crypt.

another Letter & another plaque

We

have received a suggestion from a member of the Cromwell Association in Barry that a special plaque might be set up in Pennark Church to commemorate Colonel Philip Jones of Fonmon Castle, who was Oliver Cromwell's Comptroller and is buried in Penmark Church. Your Secretary has written to the Revd John Richards, Vicar of Penmark, with a copy of the letter from Barry; any decision on this is of course the prerogative of the incumbent, the PCC and the diocese.

Merry Christmas!

- 7. Richard Hoare Jenkins of Llanharan.
- 8. Sir John Nicholl.
- 9. Henry Wood.
- 10. A room.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

A few questions on topics which are in some way related to what we have seen and heard in the Society over the last year.

1. What do Ronnie Barker, Tom Sawyer and the Carpenters have in common?
2. Which Jenkins was Secretary of State to Charles II?
3. Which Jenkins was taken prisoner in Hereford and charged with High Treason in the Civil War?
4. Which manor was granted to Horton's Brigade after the battle of St Fagans and was then purchased by Col Jones of Fonmon?
5. Which manorhouse once belonged to the Nerbers, then the Berkerolles, and still has a ruined hall, chapel and square dove-cot?
6. 'A turpentine walk through a scrubbery is a very nice reproach to a house'. What has this to do with Llanharan House?
7. Which 'sporting' High Sheriff of Glamorgan had to arrange the execution of Dic Penderyn?
8. Which Old Bavian became Judge of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Dean of Arches (1809-34)?
9. Which architect did he engage for Merthyr Mawr House?
10. What was formerly to be found on top of the South Gate, according to the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust?

1. They all have 'occupational' surnames linked with the exploitation of woods.
2. Sir Leoline.
3. Judge David.
4. West Orchard.
5. East Orchard.
6. According to David Jones of Wallingford, the wife of the Revd Gervase Powell of Llanharan House was the original Mrs Malaprop - and this quote is attributed to her.

Answers to the Quiz.