

COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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FUTURE MEETINGS

December 2nd
The Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture
'Princesses of Wales'
Debbie Fisher
Punch and mince pies after the talk!

January 6th, 2006
'Venta Silurum - Caerwent - Excavation of a Roman Town'
Richard Brewer

February 3rd
The Don Wallis Memorial Lecture
'Games and Pastimes'
Walter Jones

March 3rd
'Heraldry - the shorthand of history'
Anthony Jones

April 7th
'The Royal Mint'
Haydn Walters

All meetings are held in the Lesser Hall,
Cowbridge, on Fridays at 8.00pm

NEW BOOK ON COWBRIDGE

Cowbridge Record Society is launching its new publication, *How Well Do You Know Cowbridge?* by Jeff Alden, in the Lesser Hall on Tuesday 6th December at 7.30pm. This is a copiously illustrated volume - lots of colour photos - using what can be seen today as a basis for an explanation of the history of Cowbridge. Readers can test their knowledge of the town by looking at, and trying to identify, the pictures before reading the text. Just the thing for Christmas reading - or to occupy children and visitors when you are doing the Christmas washing-up!

The book costs £6, and can be obtained from Jeff Alden or from The Cowbridge Bookshop or Davies the Newsagent. Come to the launch for the introductory offer and you will have refreshments as well!

VISIT TO PORTHCAWL MUSEUM

Bruce McGovern has organised a visit, on Wednesday, 14th December, to Porthcawl Museum which currently has a very interesting and substantial exhibition about the Home Front. It is suggested that we meet at the Atlantic Hotel (on the sea front) at 12.30 for lunch, and this will be followed by the Museum visit. Gwyn Petty of the Porthcawl Society will be our guide. Will you please let Bruce know if you wish to come.

CHARTER DAY 2006

Arrangements are being made for a visit to Sker House on Thursday 13th March to celebrate the 752nd anniversary of the first borough charter. As usual, we hope to fix up a meal beforehand. Numbers will have to be limited; full details in our February meeting.

TOWN WALLS GROUP

A tremendous amount of work has already been done to clear vegetation from around the town walls prior to a survey to find out how much restoration work has to be done. The clearing has been done mainly, but not exclusively, by members of the Local History Society — and it is very satisfying, if hard, work. Many thanks to all concerned. For those who would like to get involved, turn up any morning, except Saturday, from 10 to 12!

Thanks to contributors . . .

to John Miles for the second part of the article on Llanblethian Woollen Mill
to Don Gerrard for the second part of his article on the Rebecca Riots
to David Evans for the reminiscences about Christmases at Carmel Chapel, Bonvilston in the 1870s

THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY OF LLANBLETHIAN (part II)

The Factory was part of the Earl of Dunraven's estates. Princess Mary of Teck while on a visit to Dunraven Castle visited the Factory and had a cup of tea with Mrs Howell while on a tour of the estate. It was sold by the Dunraven Estate to a Mr Jenkins in 1912.

When I wrote this article in 1975, there were three ladies who remembered the factory in production: Miss Mabel Morgan of Llanblethian, Miss Hopkins of Llanblethian and Miss Gunter of Cowbridge. Mr Carder who then lived in Cowbridge stated that his father-in-law bought the Factory in 1912: we presume that Mr Jenkins was Mr Carder's father-in-law.

Two looms were housed in the building across the brook. Both Miss Morgan and Miss Gunter remembered winding bobbins for the weavers. According to Miss Gunter there were two weavers and they came from north Wales. What has been classified as the 'cottage' section in the main building was one large room which housed two copper boilers. Here the yarn was dyed before it was woven. Miss Gunter remembered the yarn hanging outside to dry. According to Mr Carder there was a loft ladder leading upstairs where the fleeces were stored.

A variety of material was woven at the Factory. Apparently the weave was left to right which gave a diagonal effect. They made a very tough ginger-brown coloured tweed called Brethyn Lwyd which was used to make jackets and overcoats. There were several kinds of flannel, one being white with three thin black stripes and then a space. This was very fine. Another was a black flannel with fine red stripes. There was also a special sheeting flannel which was blue-grey in colour (Miss Hopkins still had some of this material which had been made into a hot-water bottle cover). The factory also produced blankets on a single loom, wide enough for a single bed. To fit a double bed, two were sewn together. When the double blankets were to be washed, they were unstitched to be easier to wash then restitched, sides to middle. The Factory also produced shawls, petticoats and aprons.

People in the village would buy material at the Factory and either make it up themselves or take it to one of the tailors in Cowbridge. The most popular tailor was said to be ST Evans of Cowbridge who employed seven men. Mr Carder remembered an overcoat that his father-in-law had had made. Fie wore it all his life and it never wore out. It was completely waterproof. On his death it was given to a cousin in Pencoed, to be used yet again.

Mrs Howells, the Factory owner, had a pony and trap and used to make a circular trip to Monknash, St Donats and Wick, getting orders for shirts. She would take the shirting flannel to the dressmakers in Llanblethian and they would make it up. They had proper cuffs and a collar and there were three buttons in the front to open it. The wealthier people had pearl buttons while the farmworkers had cloth-covered buttons. Mrs Howells also used to take bolts of material to Bridgend market and the cockle women of Penclawdd used to buy the flannel to make short flannel petticoats, shawls and flannel aprons. In the early twentieth century the stress was on durability rather than attractiveness.

No-one is quite sure when the factory actually ceased production. Mr Carder said that it was about 1908 but due to the fact that Mrs Howells had stock-piled material, she went on selling it until she died in 1912. All these people verified the fact that the Factory Brook was diverted to operate a water-wheel and this water was then diverted back into the brook. The looms lay idle in what was called the 'longhouse' for some time and eventually bits and pieces were used for firewood and other pieces were disposed of.

The Factory probably had to run down because it could not compete with the prices and variety of cloth produced by the factories of Yorkshire. It had obviously played an important role in the history of the parish, as the local farmers would bring their fleeces to the mill where they were spun into yarn and woven into cloth for the rural community. This cloth could then be made into garments by the wives, dressmakers or tailors of Llanblethian parish and Cowbridge.

John LS Miles

THE JACOBITE REBELLION OF 1745 - AN ASIDE

(having had my memory jogged by Alec Jones's article in the September magazine)

After the defeat of the Young Pretender at Culloden in April 1746 by William, Duke of Cumberland (son of George II), English troops carried out what came to be known as the 'Highland Clearances'. These were hardly a 'pacification' — they were thorough, vicious and vindictive, designed purely as revenge on those clans which had aided the Pretender. They were one of those events in history which have never been forgotten.

The flower the 'Sweet William' was named after the Duke of Cumberland. In the Highlands it is known to this day as the 'Stinking Billy', because of its association with the Duke. It is rarely, if ever, seen in the Highlands

Don Gerrard

THE REBECCA RIOTS (Part II)

By the summer of 1843 Carmarthenshire was in a state of panic. The magistrates had lost control and gates throughout the County were being destroyed. The Rebeccaites held a meeting in June 1843 listing their grievances. A crowd of about 4,000 marched on Carmarthen, but did not in fact deliver the grievances - instead they proceeded to demolish the hated 'Bastille' or workhouse. The 4th Dragoons arrived, scattered the mob and captured nearly a hundred of them. 'Rebecca' escaped, but the movement was by no means subdued by the events in Carmarthen. It now appeared that there were several groups of rioters operating independently, and soon gates were being destroyed all over Cardiganshire, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire.

Col. JF Love was now put in command of all troops in the area. He made a series of reports to the Home Secretary, explaining that the toll gates were a burden on the population that increased hardship. This led eventually to a Commission of Inquiry and an Act which removed the worst criticisms. TC Foster of *The Times* wrote a series of sympathetic articles which influenced the Chief Magistrate, Col. Trevor, to treat the disturbances based on an understanding of its causes.

However, in the short term 'Rebecca' continued with the destruction of gates and also the workhouses. During 1843 night-time meetings became increasingly common, some attended by Foster. He felt that the cause was just, serving only to relieve distress. The greatest 'Rebecca' meeting was held on Mynydd Selen on 25 August 1843, attended by about 3,000 people. The most important speech was made by Hugh Williams, a Carmarthen solicitor and a well known supporter of 'Rebecca'. His role in the 'Rebecca' story has always been controversial. Some regard him as the leader of the movement, although this is unlikely.

The vast majority of 'Rebecca' attacks were crimes never solved by the Authorities. To May 1843 there had been only two arrests and no convictions, mainly because of the lack of a police force in Dyfed (there was a small force in Carmarthen and a few Metropolitan Police).

The attacks continued in Carmarthenshire and began to assume an increasingly violent character. Attacks were made on gates in the industrial area towards Llanelli, and the miners began to join in. There were some serious injuries, and in September 1843 the riots in south east Carmarthenshire moved towards the bitter end with increasingly violent activity and successful intervention by the Authorities. Information reached the Magistrates that on 6 September 'Rebecca' would stake at the Pontardulais and Hendy gates. 40 soldiers were sent to defend Hendy, and Capt Napier of the Glamorgan Police went to Pontardulais with seven constables. 'Rebecca' reached Pontardulais with 150 'daughters' and an armed fight followed. The rioters fled in panic and 'Rebecca' and six others were captured. The Hendy force, only half a mile away, heard the shots and dispersed!!

This was the only time a 'Rebecca' was taken. He was John Hughes, known as Jac Ty Isha, a 24 year old farmer's son from Tumble. The prisoners were taken first to Swansea, then to trial in Cardiff- on the way being confined in the cells at Cowbridge overnight. Jac Ty Isha was found guilty, with a recommendation for mercy, but he was sentenced to 20 years transportation, and two others for seven years each. There was a great deal of popular support for Jac Ty Isha, and a petition for mercy was organised, which had no effect because there was a spate of hay licks being burnt and attacks on the property of the Magistrates. The toll house of the Hendy gate was burnt by 'Rebecca' and the gatekeeper (Sarah Williams, an elderly lady) was found dead. This was the first 'Rebecca' murder and events were now becoming increasingly violent

One of the 'Rebecca' gangs that was most active at this time was based at the Stag and Pheasant Inn at Five Roads, where the ringleaders were John James (Shoni Sgubor Fawr) and David Davies (Dai Cantwr). Shoni was a violent man, from Merthyr, where he had been a notorious street fighter and hardened drinker. Under him the riots became violent and motivated by self-interest rather than grievance. Dai Cantwr was from Llancarfan in the Vale of Glamorgan. He was less aggressive than Shoni, a farm labourer and a Methodist lay preacher, but also a heavy drinker. Under these two men the 'Rebecca' Movement was quite prepared to use guns and was often out to settle personal grievances. Sometimes farmers even paid them to destroy gates.

Shoni and Dai were both at Hendy when Sarah Williams, the gatekeeper, was killed, although both always denied being involved. The Stag and Pheasant gang proceeded to terrorise south east Carmarthenshire, targeting in particular the property of Magistrates. Then one of the gang, David Lewis, a collier, informed on them on 18 September, and the leaders were arrested Dai was captured that day in a public house in Pontyberem, and Shoni the next day in Tumble. They were tried together at Carmarthen and found guilty. Shoni was sentenced to transportation for life and Dai for 20 years. They left the dock laughing. They were kept overnight in Cowbridge on their way to the prison hulks at Portsmouth.

Shoni embarked on 8 March 1844, arming in Norfolk Island, in the Pacific, on 6 July. He was transferred to Tasmania where he continued his life of violence and crime, but after 1858 nothing more was heard of him. Dai Cantwi came to a sad end, drinking heavily. He was burnt to death sleeping in an outbuilding in 1874. John Hughes, (Jac Ty Isha), spent the rest of his life in Tasmania, dying in 1900.

The collapse of the Stag and Pheasant gang marked the end of serious rioting in south east Carmarthenshire, although there was some 'Rebecca' activity across South Wales in 1843 and 1844 - in Swansea, Fishguard, the Wye Valley and Mid Wales. But the main struggle was over and the disturbances petered out. During the riots the tollgates attacked and destroyed by 'Rebecca' were - Pembrokeshire 14, Cardiganshire 18, Carmarthenshire 35.

THE AFTERMATH OF 'REBECCA' - SUCCESS OR FAILURE ?

Why did the riots stop ?

1. The presence of troops had little effect. They had little success and there was no direct action. (There were 1800 regular soldiers, cavalry and artillery, 150 Metropolitan Police, special constables and the Carmarthenshire rural police force).
2. Some of the ringleaders were eventually captured. The seizure of Shoni and Dai removed the sting from the riots in Carmarthenshire.

3. The Authorities acted sensibly in the treatment of prisoners. Of 93 brought to trial only 13 were transported (this was when sheep stealing carried a penalty of 10 years transportation). Thus the creation of martyrs' was avoided
4. As 'Rebecca' became increasingly violent she lost the support of the respectable farmers. The movement became dominated by violent elements in the lower classes
5. Some of the Trusts, under pressure from 'Rebecca', began to remove some gates, and even reduce tolls.
6. October 1843 Commission of Inquiry into the Turnpike Trusts. The Turnpike Act of 1844 joined together all the Trusts in each County and County Road Boards took over their supervision. Tolls were standardised and reduced. Thus the worse complaints against the Turnpikes were removed. The troops were withdrawn and peace returned to West Wales. It would appear that 'Rebecca' had won a victory, but in fact many of the problems remained - the workhouses and tithes. Improvements only came with the passing of the "Hungry Forties" and the coming of the railways, which provided an easier market for produce and a safety valve for surplus population.

'Rebecca' had been a protest against those hardships that seemed to interfere with the old order of life in West Wales. It was a reaction against injustice, and at least for a time had been representative of natural justice, until a dangerous radical element appeared and presented a threat to society - at a time when Government was prepared to provide a moderate settlement of the worst abuses.

As a result, 'Rebecca' and "her daughters" disappeared from view to become a memory and a part of the Welsh heritage.

Don Gerrard

A NINETEENTH CENTURY CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS AT CARMEL CHAPEL, NEAR BONVILSTON

I have to tell you that everything was carried on in the Welsh language when I remember Carmel first, and for many years afterwards. The singing, reading, praying and preaching, and it was a rare thing to hear the text of a sermon given out in English. I don't think there was an English bible in the chapel.

There was a small fireplace on the south side of the chapel, and under each of the stairs a cupboard, one for coals, buckets, brushes, etc and the other for the Sabbath school books etc. From the centre of the ceiling was suspended a chandelier which held eight candles and it was not an unusual occurrence to see the people that sat underneath having to change their seats when something went wrong with the candles. Two candles gave light also on the pulpit.

It was the custom of the young people that attended Carmel to decorate and present candles every Christmastide to the chapel, and generally met on Xmas Eve in the chapel where most of the decorating was done, and dozens of candles were fixed on the top rail of the gallery, each one placed in a lump of clay about 6 or 8 inches apart which gave a pretty appearance when lit, but often when the decorations caught fire it caused much excitement and amusement among the young people on the gallery.

One custom which has died away this many years was the Plygain (dawn of day) which was a meeting at 5 o'clock on Christmas morning to offer thanksgiving and praise for the birth of our Saviour, several trudging with their lanterns through the dark and cold weather, returning home also in the dark with their hearts full of joy and gladness.

I recollect one Christmas morning when the caretaker forgot to bring the key of the chapel; but luckily the old minister and another old man had a lantern each, so it was agreed to hold the meeting in the stable. This, being small, proved inadequate to contain all the congregation, but several were content to stand outside the door. I shall never forget the hwyl on prayer and the singing by the choir on this Christmas morning.

Another custom in connection with the Sunday school was the amalgamation of Carmel, Bethesda and Nurston, on Christmas days to recite and sing, three services were held, one school for each service, each chapel was visited in turn. On one occasion when we met at Bethesda, Carmel school being conveyed in a wagon, kindly lent by Mr Jones Maesiward, it snowed nearly all day, and on the return journey we nearly came to grief through some carelessness of the haulier, but we all escaped unhurt through the care of Providence.

For some years an Eisteddfod was held annually on Christmas Day, the proceeds were given to the church. I find by looking over my books that in the year 1878 we had £27.10s in hand after paying all expenses in connection with the Eisteddfod.

James Price, 1918

Carmel was a Congregational chapel, founded in 1834, just south of the Aubrey Arms and the Old Post on the road to Llancarfan; it has recently been sold, having been disused for a number of years. When James Price wrote his reminiscences in 1918 he had already been a member of Carmel for 46 years, so his memories go back to the 1870s. We are grateful to Mr David Evans for allowing us to publish these memories.