

# COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No 45 : APRIL 2001



## Next Meeting

April 6th: Neville Granville, speaking on **Mid Glamorgan Colliery communities, 1900-1920**

We are looking forward to this talk, which is based on his father's reminiscences. This will be the last meeting until September.

Our September meeting will be on September 7th, when Don Gerrard, another of our members will talk on **The History of Bridgend**. It is good to get member participation! Don's talk will follow our (usually short) AGM.

## This Issue

Thanks to Liam Ginn, Keith Jones and Nigel Williams for their contributions to this newsletter. All articles for the next issue (September) to me by August 10th please.

## The Grammar School

Although I haven't seen anything official yet (I am typing this on March 18th) it seems that at last something is moving with the ongoing saga between the Vale and the Charity Commissioners.

It appears that The Vale Council has approached the Commissioners for permission to alter the terms of the Cowbridge Comprehensive School Trust. The Council is proposing an exchange of properties on the Aberthin Road site with those in town; should this be agreed by the commissioners, then the school sites in town would be available for sale.

I would be delighted to see a development of the Grammar School building, as long as the Church Street facade remained. I would be pleased to see the replacement of the Lower School with houses. A subsequent article in this newsletter ('*Planned and Unplanned*') shows that I feel that the 'covered playground' / carpark area needs attention. However, there is still the question of the Cricket Field. This fine green space in the middle of the town should be preserved. A carpark for Waitrose, or another 60 houses, just mean more problems - and Cowbridge would lose a bit more of its character.

## NEWS FROM COWBRIDGE MUSEUM

The museum trustees are currently negotiating with the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust in an effort to find a home for the mass of material recovered during the excavations in Cowbridge between 1977 and 1988. These artefacts are part of the town's heritage and their return from storage in Swansea seems highly appropriate. Unfortunately, there is insufficient space in the Town Hall to store these items and the search continues for a suitable repository in the town.

The staff at Cowbridge library have generously allowed the museum to make use of their display facilities to introduce new acquisitions to the public. The displays have generated interest in the museum and it is intended to change exhibits fairly regularly. Recent additions have included two glass bottles from Lewis Jenkins' Brewery, kindly donated by Glenda Bell. A fine Bronze Age axe head found in the Ystradowen area will be exhibited in the near future.

The Council of Museums in Wales is developing a new website which will include information about the museum and it is hoped that this will attract new visitors. The museum has also become associated with Channel 4 Television's Time Team Club which has a large following among young archaeologists.

The curator is now seeking new stewards for the museum's Saturday openings (first in each month) and volunteers, even if their availability is limited to an hour or two, would be most welcome. The duties are not onerous and anyone interested is asked to contact Keith Jones on (01446) 775139.

## ONLINE and IN PRINT

Those of you who are accustomed to surfing the net may have already come across our web page. It's a page on the Cardiff University site - and the university have asked us to be the 'guinea pigs' among local history societies in putting information in. So far, all I've done is to give the basic information about the society - and in the summer I'll be able to add next year's programme - but if anyone has any ideas on how to develop the site, or would like to take responsibility for it, please get in touch! The address, by the way, is [www.cf.ac.uk/learn/history/cdlhs.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/learn/history/cdlhs.html)

There is also a page for the Cowbridge Record Society - same address except that instead of *cdlhs* you have to type *crs*. That site will have details of the books we have published or are publishing, as there are hopes that this year we will bring out two new local history books. The autumn will probably see *Llanblethian Buildings and People*, in much the same vein as our Cowbridge book. Earlier - in the summer - look out for *At Cowbridge Grammar School 1949 - 1966*. This is written by Peter Cobb, who was my predecessor as senior Geography master at the school (and then went on to enter the Church, where he was Vicar of Penmark, and latterly Magor). Peter was a boarding master at the school, and so his memoir is of a way of life which has now disappeared - that of a boarding house in a country grammar school. Those who knew the school, masters and boys, at that time will find it brings back many happy(?) memories; others will find his descriptions both evocative and revealing.

# YOB CULTURE IN GLAMORGAN

## JUVENILE CRIME IN COWBRIDGE DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

Juvenile crime in the Victorian period conjures up a Dickensian picture of a London inhabited by numerous Artful Dodgers and Oliver Twists all "picking a pocket or two". In many ways it would not be difficult to transfer that picture to Cardiff for the same period. It was a rapidly expanding town, with grossly overcrowded houses (for example, 10 Stanley Street, a two-up two-down terraced property had 65 occupants in 1851) and a fledgling police force.

However the Quarter Session papers for the period (G.R.O. Q/S J/C 1) tell a different story. True, the twelve year-old William Wallace was sentenced to 14 days hard labour and a whipping on 21st April 1851 for stealing 15 sovereigns and a purse, worth 6d, from Elizabeth Richards, but the majority of the cases which came to court in Cardiff involved commodities which would have taxed Fagin's abilities! Sarah Taylor, aged 13, was sentenced on 4th October 1847 to 3 months hard labour for stealing 100lbs of iron, value 5s, the property of the TVR. Other children had been caught stealing coal, scrap metal and rope - hardly glamorous deeds.

Cowbridge was not immune to such activities. During 1851 and 1852, Richard Norton, aged 13, appeared at the Quarter Sessions three times. On the first occasion he was found guilty of stealing 2 bevels, value 2s, the property of Thomas Hay, and sentenced to a whipping. On the second, he was found guilty of stealing a coal scuttle, value 2s, and was sentenced to 3 months hard labour. On the final occasion he was found guilty of stealing a teaspoon, value 3s, the property of Eliza Thomas, and was sentenced to a further 3 months hard labour. Eliza Thomas was a jeweller and lodging house keeper and occupied 56 High Street.

Norton seems to have been somewhat of a tearaway, but there may have been extenuating circumstances. He was the eldest son of Christopher and Mary Norton and he lived with three other children in Walters Court (or Ballard's Court, at the back of 'Quills', and just around the corner from No 56). According to the 1851 census Christopher was a 57 year old journeyman tailor and Hopkin James in "Old Cowbridge" noted that in 1857 he was the town crier but was unable to make himself a uniform due to his poor eyesight. It may have been that Richard felt obliged to support the family by whatever means possible.

Also in 1851, John Knapp, aged 12, was sentenced to a whipping for stealing a purse, value 1s, a half crown, three shillings and three sixpences from Martha Evans. John was the second son of William Knapp, a journeyman miller and the family, seven in number, lived in Church Street. Martha Evans was 32 and a domestic servant living with her parents in West Village.

A third boy, Isaac Morgan aged 14, was convicted at Cowbridge and at Cardiff. In October 1852, he received a month's hard labour for stealing handkerchiefs in Cowbridge but his freedom was short-lived, being found guilty on December 6th of stealing a coat in Cardiff for which he received 14 days hard labour and a whipping.

*Nigel Williams*

## CHARTER DAY AT LLANSANNOR

The granting of the first charter to Cowbridge (on March 13th 1254) was this year commemorated by a visit to Llansannor Court, the home of Mr and Mrs Michael Eddershaw.

Mr Eddershaw gave us a most informative tour of the house, which had been the home of the Gwyn family for many years.

We noted the solid limestone of the main walls of the house, with Sutton stone being used for the detailed work of doorways, mullions and finials. The relieving arches above the Elizabethan windows were clearly visible. The windows themselves showed a nice change of scale upwards, with four lights on the ground floor, three-lighters above and small two-lighters in the gables. The wing on the south-west of the house was the oldest part; this had a first floor hall, but from the outside the height of the building and the style of the windows matched perfectly the remaining 16th part of the building.

Francis Gwyn, the last of the Gwyns to live permanently at Llansannor Court, had been a mayor of Cowbridge, a MP for over 50 years and Secretary of War under Queen Anne. His move to Forde Abbey in Somerset, on his marriage into the Prideaux family, meant that Llansannor Court was occupied by tenant farmers for centuries. They had little reason or incentive to alter the house - and thus helped to preserve the wonderful Elizabethan building.

(The discovery of an original Cowbridge charter - which recited the date of the original charter - in a solicitor's office in Chard, Somerset, has been linked to the Gwyns, in that Francis may well have taken this with him when he moved out of Wales. Thus our visit to Llansannor on Charter Day was particularly appropriate.)

Victorian entrepreneurs did bring about some changes. Chief of these were wrought by Sir Joseph Spearman, who rebuilt the rear of the house, changing the staircase and putting in a magnificent billiard room.

He also raised the ceiling of the dining room in the wing, thereby reducing the height of the original first floor hall in the oldest, 15th century, part of the house.

Today the house is an exciting mixture of styles and periods. The panelled downstairs hall is still essentially Elizabethan, with fine original panelling on one wall (which once formed part of the screens passage), and some matching not-quite-as-old panels on the other walls, original beams and fingered ceiling plaster, and an Elizabethan fireplace. The former kitchen was converted in the early 19th century into an elegant Regency sitting room, while behind it is the solid late-19th century billiard room.

Upstairs, the sitting room is spacious and comfortable, with many of the original doorways, and all the original windows, and a fine fireplace. The bedrooms reflect a number of periods, with one having a Tudor door in an oak doorway, and early panelling around the upper half of the room.

The tour of the house was followed by a visit to the adjacent church, where our attention was drawn to the sundial on the porch, an excellent copy of the original 18th century one, now preserved inside the church; and to the carved stone effigy of a man in the chancel, the chain mail on the figure dating the memorial to about the time of Agincourt. Fragments of wall-paintings, the medieval roof to the nave, and a number of incised tablets added to the interest.

An excellent tea, provided by Cynthia Palmer, rounded off a memorable visit. Our thanks are due, not only to Mr and Mrs Eddershaw for their warm welcome and for their generosity in allowing us to wander through their beautiful house, but also to Sue Collier who organised the afternoon so efficiently and unobtrusively.

*JA*

## Becky Jenkins's reminiscences

I was born on 11th June 1909 at 3 Greenfield Terrace, Llanblethian. Mother had 13 children; two died young (George at 6 months, Mary at three years). The others were Ernest, Bill, Dick, John, Tom, Bert, Ada, Rachel, Peg, Dora, and of course, me.

My father, Thomas W Jenkins, like his father, was a 'horse man'. He worked in Dynevor Cottage with Dr and Mrs Shepherd, in the Verlands (with the Johns) and then moved to the Glamorgan Hunt stables as a head groom. Mr Chappell was the other head groom. Mr and Mrs Chappell drove into Cowbridge in a donkey cart from the Stables. There was a lot of work there - hunting, as well as hiring out horses. Hunting was for the elite then; the Boxing Day meet on the Downs was especially popular. Father worked a long day - he didn't come home till 6 or 7pm. My mother did the washing for the stable boys. Father made liniment for horses, and it was used for the Jenkins children as well!

My grandmother on mother's side was Rachel Fenimore. She married one of the Johns, so mother's name was Ada Johns. She had been in service with Lady Franklen at St Hilary.

My father's parents lived in a cottage opposite Cowbridge church (No 6 Church St). Grandpa was a Crimean war veteran; he had been wounded, and was decorated for his service there. He had a little beard; I never kissed him - I was afraid of him! In their house, there was always a fire, banked well up, winter or summer. There was a row of brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and an old clock on the wall with looped chains. There was also a settle where I would sit and tell Gran the news. Gran used to clean the church, and grandfather cleaned the churchyard, as a labour of love. Gran used to place bread on the offerings board for the poor in the church, and I used to help her.

Another link with the church was that all six brothers used to blow the organ in Llanblethian church, for 2/6d a year! We all went to church regularly; I've had the same seat in Llanblethian church since I was three. All 13 children were christened: Revd Isaiah Roberts christened me, at the same time as Harry Thomas, Stallcourt.

I went to school on Broadway, Cowbridge; the school drew in children from Llandough, Aberthin and some from Ystradowen. Mr Sloman was the teacher - we called him the German Jew, and we were all scared of him. One of the teachers, Mr Phillips, used to shout and throw chalk - he was a madman! Mr Roberts was much calmer; he eventually became head, but he was first of all a class teacher, under Mr Sloman. Other teachers were Miss Lewis, Miss Ralls, Miss Mary Tutton, Miss Escott.

We grew up in Greenfield Terrace. The first house was occupied by Johnny John, then next-door were the Vaughans (Mrs Hilda Vaughan, large family, 10 children), then us, then the Dixons in a 1-up, 1-down cottage. When Mrs Dixon died, and Violet Dixon left, father bought that cottage to give us more room. Upstairs in No 3, the big bedroom was like a dormitory. The house had a paved front, which was kept all scrubbed right up to the gate. We grew vegetables in the garden, and at the top of the garden was the privy. This had a tin roof - my brothers used to throw stones onto the roof when it was occupied.

### Becky Jenkins's reminiscences *contd*

Near us in Llanblethian were the almshouses, one of which was occupied by Ma Haig. She was an old Irish woman, who used to laugh and joke with children who were playing on the bridge. When she went in, boys would play tricks on her - tying a button onto cotton and using it to tap on the window - because they knew she'd rush out swearing. Next door was Mr Groom, a dear old man who looked like a tramp. He used to catch rabbits and skin them, and he slept on the floor. We used to love looking in through the windows to see him lying on his pile of sacks. Mother used to make cake for him, which we children would take round.

The small cottage near them (now a garden) was later known as Em Royal's cottage. That also had a tin roof, on which boys loved to throw stones - because of the noise - just to annoy the occupants. Ted and Mary Surrey lived there, with their crippled daughter Mary Jane, who did a lot of sewing. Ted and Mary were always quarrelling.

In the other direction from our house were the Bakehouse and the Mill. Johnny and Jane Thomas lived in the bakehouse, with their daughters, Mabel and Flossie. The kitchen was always warm, as the bakehouse was off the kitchen. Johnny used to take bread in their trap (pulled by Polly, the horse) around Penllyn. As children, we went round with them - I remember going out with Mabel in the cart; she was always singing. She would stop at the entrance to the drive to Penllyn Castle, and I'd walk up to the castle with the bread. There were two sorts of bread - a tin loaf and a bottom loaf. The latter could be peeled off in layers and I remember doing just that on my walk to the Castle. Mr Spencer lived in the Mill. One of his sons, Gomer Spencer, lived in the cottage opposite - Brook House. The mill was still working, and they had a bakehouse too. We used to get our drinking water from the pump near the mill (or if that was frozen, we would have to go to the spring at Bowman's Well, which always flowed).

Today, Piccadilly is much altered from what it was in my childhood. People who lived there when I was young were old Mrs Chisell, Mrs Boobyer, Lil Jones and Mary Ann Williams. Mary Ann used to keep cows near the castle - she used to go up there every day with a bucket to milk them. Old man Jenkins had a sweet shop - boys always used to make him get jars from the top shelf just to see him go up and down.

Factory house also contained a sweet shop, run by the Jenkins family: Vivian, Olive and Cissie. Viv was killed on a motor bike; Olive became unwell; Cissie became Mrs Carder and eventually lived up near the Castle.

I worked at Kingscombe farm for a short time, but when I was 17 I went to London ("only if your older sister goes too" said Father) to work for the daughter of the Byasses of Llandough Castle. Miss Mollie had been my guide leader at Llandough; she became Mrs Capt Hone, 160 Gloucester Terrace, London, and I was house parlour maid. I then went to the Harry Lewises in Penarth (Mrs Joanna Cory was a daughter, and she gave me a party for my 90th birthday). I also worked with the Edwardses at Llandow (Cwrt Newydd) but I was with the Llewellyns (Sir Harry Llewellyn, of 'Foxhunter' fame) for 34 years, mostly at Gobion Manor. Roddy Llewellyn is still a friend.

*Sue Collier is co-ordinating our efforts in recording the reminiscences of residents of Cowbridge, Llanblethian and places round about. If you would like to join in this programme, please let her know. We would like to write these down in the Newsletter, as a means of recording them for posterity. Things change, and we forget...*

## FURTHER FAMILY HISTORY SNIPPETS

I offer these as a follow-up to my earlier article on *Tracing One's Family* and also because such little bits and pieces help to illustrate aspects of life at the particular time when the record was made.

Since I knew from his birth certificate that my great-grandfather DAVID LEYSHON was born in Llangan in 1840, I searched the Parish Register of Llangan.

On November 11th 1833, 'Thomas Leyson, bachelor, of the Parish of St Mary Hill married Ann Bryant of this parish'. Ages, occupations, residences at the time of marriage of the two parties, and names and occupations of the fathers are not entered in such parish records. So these tell us a lot less than the full modern registration certificates. Both Thomas and Ann signed with their mark (X); both the witnesses signed their names in full. It is reasonable to assume that one of them, David Bryant, was a relative of Ann. Ann was the third generation of the Bryant family to have lived in the village of Llangan. David had moved there from a neighbouring parish, according to family tradition working as a farm labourer. As far as literacy was concerned, of course there was no state provision of schools at that time. What proportion of poorer people was still illiterate?

My next source was the 1841 census for Llangan, cross-checked with the Mormon Register Extracts. The family of Thomas and Ann had grown greatly, having had four children in the seven years since their marriage. It now consisted of:

Thomas and Ann Leyson, age 35/30, married at Llangan 11/11/1833

Mary Leyson, age 7, christened at Llangan 3/2/1834

Jane Leyson, age 5, christened at Llangan, 27/12/1835

John Leyson, age 4, christened at Llangan, 18/8/1837

David Leyson, age 1, christened at Llangan, 4/6/1840.

You will note that we do not have the dates of birth of these children, although it would be possible to trace those of the later ones from the General Register Office. In the case of David, his birth certificate, registered by his mother on June 15, tells us that he was born on May 24th, 1840 in Llangan. His father is described as a farmer. In those days, because of high infant mortality, it was customary to have a child christened soon after the birth. It was thus clear that Ann was heavily pregnant with her first child Mary at the time of her marriage. Again, how common was this in rural Glamorgan at that time? A detailed examination of parish registers might give us a partial answer, if not as accurate as that afforded by modern statistics. Certainly the number of births out of wedlock would not be as high as today's pattern. The birth rate then was much higher than now - more like a modern third world country. They did not marry in their teens. He was about 28 years old and she 23 at the time of their marriage. This is very much like the present pattern of average ages on first marriage.

By the time his second son, David, was married in Cardiff on 14th December 1865, Thomas Leyshon is described on the wedding certificate as a coal agent. He had thus established himself in some sort of business linked to the then booming coal industry. His address is not of course shown, but it was almost certainly in the Pontypridd area.

***Liam Leyshon Ginn***

*(to be continued)*

## PLANNED AND UNPLANNED

The main recent planning issue has been the decisions made by the Inspector appointed by the Welsh Office to consider the objections to the Vale Council's Unitary Development Plan. He rejected proposals to establish a cattle market at Ruthin, because of its intrusion into the countryside and also because of traffic problems. Accordingly, he felt it premature to make any decision on Cowbridge Cattle Market site.

His controversial decisions were to agree to appeals from builders on the area which could be zoned for housing. The Inspector considered that Cowbridge could extend northwards as far as the by-pass, thereby stating that the boggy land between the leisure centre and Middlegate Court was an appropriate site for houses. The other area was that to the west of Darren Close, on land currently farmed from Darren Farm. It was considered that a road could extend from the Nash-Cowbridge road to the A48, and that 145 houses could be built on the land between this road and the town.

The big advantage for the council, of course, as well as for the long-suffering residents of Llysworney, would be a reduction in the need for a Llysworney by-pass if the proposed road were to be built. However, the road would create further traffic hazards at Nash corner, and no doubt also on the A48.

I feel that there are serious defects in the Inspector's ruling. Cowbridge at the moment is confined to the 'bowl' of the Thaw valley. Any housing extending beyond Darren Close would then mean that urban sprawl could occur unchecked to the west of Cowbridge. The Inspector's suggestion that the road could act as the boundary of settlement would seem to be ludicrously naive: pressures for building on the other side of the road would be enormous, and hard to resist in planning terms. In terms of services, it is unlikely that Cowbridge could cope with such an increase in population; schools, sewers, and traffic in town are just three aspects of this problem.

Perhaps most importantly, any urbanisation would now seem to pose great problems connected with flooding. In recent years we have become much more aware of the vulnerability of buildings sited on flood plains. The rapid run-off of rainwater from built-up areas would mean that rain would get to the river far more quickly than it would do on fields or woods - so the river Thaw would show higher peaks and a more rapid response to rainfall. That means that those who have been flooded before, will be flooded again - and perhaps more houses will be put at risk. Although there have been claims that a drainage scheme would be instituted, water would have to be taken down to the Thaw south of Llanblethian to obviate the chance of flooding. In so far as the wetland site near the by-pass is concerned, these fields now act as a most effective sponge for rainfall. Building here would indeed be foolish.

I must stress that there is not, as yet, any planning application for these two sites, but the Vale Council must now consider its response to the Inspector's words. If you are concerned, letters to the Vale, to our MP and AM, as well as local councillors, may be useful.

Now for the non-planning bit. Cowbridge is looking tattier by the minute. I had obviously been over-hopeful in the last issue when I conjectured that there might be some plans afoot



## PLANNED AND UNPLANNED *contd*

with the Master Brewer building, as that still stands forlorn and unloved in the middle of the town.

But, poor old Church Street! The Grammar School is still looking dreadful, with its windows either boarded-up or shattered, and with the tally court invaded with buddleia (at least that looks pretty) and cans and bottles and other litter (not quite so attractive). The Grammar School kitchen garden is distinguished by the brambles and branches hanging over the wall into Church Street, and indeed the jungle inside - with hundreds of spindly trees all stretching for the light - is no advert for the Arboriculture department of the Council. How will the felled trees - as felled they must be, one day - be taken out of there? The 'covered playground area, now used as a school car park and night-watchman's quarters, is adorned with abandoned furniture, litter, and more brambles and branches.

Through the South Gate, the 'lawns' of the Lower School look as if the History teachers are re-creating their own Flanders mud, while around the corner, towards the Butts, around the paper- and bottle- banks, litter abounds. Nearly all of these properties are in some form of Council control. It does not seem too much to hope for, that they should take some responsibility and some pride in their property.

At least, one good point with which to end. It is good to see that the surface of the Cattle Market and nearby car park is being improved - in time to stop me fulminating about that. Well done!

*The opinions expressed above, and in all of the unsigned articles, are those of the editor alone!*

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