

# COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No 55 : September 2004

## PROGRAMME FOR THE COMING YEAR

### September 3rd

'The 16th Century Wreck on Margam Beach'  
Dr Mark Redknapp  
*followed by cheese and wine*

### September 28th

'30 years of the C & D LHS': a visit to Sutton,  
Llandow, followed by a meal at the Cross Inn

### October 1st

'Bridge of Beauty'  
Brian Davies

### November 5th

(Starting with the AGM at 7.45pm)  
'The Tonypandy Riots, 1910-11'  
David Maddox

### December 3rd

*The Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture*  
'Women in Mediaeval Art'  
Arthur Peplow (Vice President)

### January 7th, 2005

'The Ham: the Family, the House, the Garden'  
Hilary Thomas

### February 4th

'The Battle of St Fagans, 1648'  
Dr C Tilney-Davies

### March 4th

'Shipping in the Bristol Channel'  
Allan Cook

**March 13th** is Charter Day: there will be a  
celebration near this date

### April 1st

'In Search of Kenfig'  
Dr Terry Robbins

'Lecture meetings' are held in the Lesser Hall of  
Cowbridge Town Hall on Fridays at 8.00pm (but  
see Nov 5th)

Editor of the newsletter: Jeff Alden, 773373

You will note that we have once again a very interesting lecture programme: many thanks to Dick Tonkin for his most efficient work as Programme Secretary.

Please note that the AGM will be in November, at 7.45pm, ie a quarter of an hour earlier than usual. The September meeting will conclude with cheese and wine (for which we will ask for a contribution of 50p) This will be a chance to get together - and to get to know new members.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Local History Society, and the 750th anniversary of the first Charter of the town, Yvonne has organised what will be an excellent evening out on Tuesday, 28th September. We will visit Sutton, near Llandow, at 5pm for a tour of the fine old house which has been lovingly restored by Mr and Mrs Gluck. A meal has been booked at the Cross Inn, Llanblethian for 7pm and Cecil England has kindly agreed to give a short talk on the foundation of the Local History Society. Numbers are limited to 32. The total cost for the evening will be £15; please bring your cash/cheque books to the first meeting. Menus are on page 8.

### R.I.P. - Don Wallis and David Beech

We have been saddened to learn of the death of two members of the society during the summer. Don Wallis was a valued committee member, responsible for publicity, and we will miss his informed comments, his willingness to help and to propose votes of thanks, and his real enthusiasm for local history. David Beech attended meetings regularly, was another cheerful enthusiast and was a mine of information on a very wide range of topics. Our sympathies go to both families, and particularly to Pam Wallis and Joan Beech.

## THE SOCIETY LIBRARY

Cecil England has very kindly donated to the Society a copy of the much sought-after *Old Cowbridge* by Lemuel Hopkin-James. This is a must for students of Cowbridge history! Many thanks, Cecil.

We have also had several anonymous donations, for which we are very grateful, with the result that we now have a very respectable library of books which are available for members to borrow; we also need a Librarian to look after them. (This is not an onerous task; a volunteer would be welcomed). The library now includes the following books:

1. *Excavations in Cowbridge 1977-88*; GGAT
2. *Glamorgan - the Greater Houses*; RCHM
3. *Glamorgan - Mediaeval Secular Monuments*; RCHM
4. *Old Cowbridge* - Hopkin James (2)
5. *Cowbridge* - Robinson; GGAT
6. *Cowbridge and Llanblethian Past and Present* - James and Francis
7. *The Border Vale of Glamorgan* - Francis
8. *Vale of Glamorgan Series, Vols 1 to 4*; Stewart Williams
9. *Glamorgan Historian, Vols 1, 6, 9, 11*; Stewart Williams
10. *Annals of South Glamorgan* - Spencer (reprint)
11. *Castles of the Lordship of Glamorgan* - Homfray (reprint)
- 12-14. *Glamorgan County History, Vols III, IV and V*

### Books for Sale

*Vale of Glamorgan Series, Vols 1 to 4* (Two sets) and Vol 3. These informative and well-illustrated books are available at £5 per book, well below the second-hand market price.

*Centenary Bovian*, just published by the CGS Old Boys Association - a very readable book which will awaken many memories of the Grammar school. Price £5.

All books available from Jeff Alden

## 'OUR TOWN'

CADS are presenting the Thornton Wilder classic play, *Our Town*, in the Market Theatre on October 7 to 9 (at 7.30pm, bar open at 7pm!)

The play is particularly appropriate for Charter 750 year, for it is a celebration of small town life about the year 1900. Wilder's small town was in the USA, but CADS are substituting details and events of Cowbridge for the original, so that this will really be about 'our town'. We have been able to advise CADS about the historical accuracy of the local allusions - and would now recommend all members to go to see what promises to be a most interesting production.

### TRAVEL IN 1847

[John Lyons from Narberth has supplied this extract from a letter written in Gileston in 1847]

"...I was obliged to wait for the half past twelve train from Paddington which reached Bristol at five, and immediately went down to the docks to sleep near where the Packet sailed from. I had to wake my son from sleep soon after five yesterday morning, but we had a very fine and quick passage from Bristol to Cardiff. We were not quite three hours, the wind and tide being in our favour. We had occasion to wait in Cardiff more than two hours for the coach and we were glad to get on to Cowbridge, where we found my nephew had come to meet us. We enjoyed the drive in the gig tremendously.

This is a most lovely morning and I am quite anxious to take my boy down close to the sea but I must write a few lines and take the letters to the village Post office by twelve o'clock, and after my doing this they will not leave Cowbridge the Post town before tomorrow morning, for a man comes round the village every day for the letters but he has so many places to call at that he does not get back to Cowbridge till night. This is the way matters and things are managed in the country - how different to London."

## STEPHENSON, BRUNEL AND THE "BATTLE OF THE GAUGES"

[In response to some issues raised as a result of my article on the South Wales Railway]

2004 is being celebrated by all railway enthusiasts as the two hundredth anniversary of the coming of the railways. People from all over the world are visiting special exhibitions at the railway museums in York, Crewe and Swindon. We often think of railways as starting with the first steam locomotives like George Stephenson's "Rocket", but in fact the evolution of the trackway and the locomotive were quite separate, although both were closely connected with coal mining, particularly in the north-east of England.

From the 16th century it had been the practice to lay down baulks of wood to facilitate the movement of coal to the rivers and then the ports. In the early 18th century plates of cast iron were fixed at curves in the 'road' or at other points of friction - thus a railway track worker is called a 'platelayer'. A breakthrough occurred when in 1767 Richard Reynolds constructed a track of cast iron rails with a flange which held the wheels on the line, and in 1789 John Smeaton improved it by transferring the flange to the wheel. On all these early railroads the traction was by horses, and we know that the Oystermouth railway, pulled by horses, carried passengers as early as 1807.

Watt's steam engine with rotary motion (1782) seemed the answer to driving vehicles, but proved to be too large and too heavy. Stationary engines were tried but were slow and clumsy. In 1801 Richard Trevithick made a steam road carriage, and in 1804 an improved version, his "Catch Me Who Can", hauled ten tons of iron on the tramway from the Penyarden Ironworks to Abercynon, a distance of 9¼ miles in 4 hours 5 minutes. This was the first steam locomotive to run on a specially constructed track, and thus 1804 is regarded as the birth of the modern railway. (On Christmas Eve 1803 Trevithick had run his locomotive on the road in his native

Cornwall and had so frightened the local vicar that he had a heart attack.)

The progress of the locomotive was slow, largely due to the curious belief that a smooth wheel would not 'bite' on a smooth rail, but William Hedley's 'Puffing Billy' demonstrated the practicability of the locomotive in 1813. George Stephenson was the enginewright (chief mechanic) at Wylam Colliery in Northumberland and was responsible for many of the early improvements in locomotive design, such as improving the draught to the fire-box. He was also responsible for the standard gauge of 4ft 8½ ins. In 1821, he measured a hundred farm carts in Northumberland and took the average - and used this as the standard gauge.

Brunel, however, favoured the broad gauge of 7 ft, arguing also that higher speeds could be obtained where the 'road' was straight and level. This always set the GWR apart, and its trains proved to be safer with more powerful engines and smoother travel. All that Brunel claimed for the 7ft gauge was achieved, but it came too late, because it was not finally adopted by the GWR until 1835, by which time the Stockton-Darlington (1825) and the Liverpool-Manchester (1829) lines had consolidated the standard gauge, soon to be adopted all over Europe. The broad gauge, however, lasted until 1892.

It is interesting to note that Cowbridge was not the only town by-passed by the railway. Two notable examples are Yeovil in Somerset, which soon realised its mistake and within ten years had commissioned a branch from the main line; and Cambridge, which would not allow a railway anywhere near its ancient colleges. To this day the station is some three miles from the city centre.

*Don Gerrard*

## BRUNEL AND THE BRITISH SOLDIER'S FIREARM

The name Isambard Kingdom Brunel means to most people the builder of the Great Western Railway, magnificent bridges (Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Tamar Bridge) and mighty ships (the Great Western, the Great Eastern and the Great Britain). Brunel however had other interests, including the design of a prefabricated hospital for use in the Crimean War. This was erected at Renkioi and in many respects was well in advance of any hospital in the UK. It had a reflective roof to reduce summer temperatures, and insulated walls to maintain heat in winter, for example.

Towards the end of his career, Brunel also took an interest in firearm design. From the time of the Civil War, the British soldier's personal weapon was the muzzle-loading smooth-bore musket. Initially a simple weapon fired by a slow match, it evolved in the early 1700s into the .75in calibre flintlock musket which became known as the Brown Bess - perhaps from the German *Busche* for gun and because the barrel and wooden stock were brown in colour. By 1850 the UK had fallen behind France and Prussia in the development of military firearms and although the Duke of Wellington, as Commander-in-chief of the Army, kept a close watch on major changes of every kind, it was the Marquess of Anglesey, as Master General of the Ordnance, who was in direct control of the Army's weapons. At this time the Ordnance Department was the largest department of State.

Small-bore muskets were notoriously inaccurate and although the principle of rifling had long been known - spiral grooves cur into the bore of the barrel to impart a spin to the bullet which greatly improved its accuracy - it was only with the coming of the Industrial Revolution that machines were produced which could make such barrels in quantity and with consistent quality.

In the mid-nineteenth century the subject of the Army's firearms aroused as much public interest as did nuclear weapons in the second part of the twentieth century and many people of scientific bent felt able to make a contribution to their improvement. The spate of inventions reached such great proportions that the authorities were hard-pushed to cope with it.

This is the background to Brunel's brief foray into firearm development. His design was for a rifle with a spiral octagonal bore which imparted the necessary spin to the bullet. He had a prototype weapon built by the firm of Westley Richards who are today still renowned for the manufacture of big-game rifles. This rifle was extremely accurate but at the end of a long series of trials involving a number of different designs the Board of Ordnance chose spiral groove rifling of the type still in use today. This, in the shape of the short Lee Enfield magazine rifle, will have been carefully cleaned, day after day, by some members of the Society in their youth!

There is no record of Brunel taking any further interest in firearms and presumably he returned to what he knew best.

*Alec Jones*

### (VERY BRIEF) EDITORIAL

Many thanks to all our contributors for this month's bumper bundle: Alec Jones, Don Gerrard, Bruce McGovern, John Lyons and Robert and Marilyn Cope. Keep the next contributions rolling in - the closing date for the next newsletter is November 15th.

## THE LAST POST

On Sunday 14th November, in towns and cities throughout the country, ceremonies will be held to mark Remembrance Day. If you are watching the parade in Cowbridge, or the Whitehall parade on TV you will hear at some point a bugler sounding the Last Post: but why the 'Last Post'?

The origin of the name, if not the call itself, goes back some three hundred years. The English Civil War brought about an increase in the size of the army, and initially the troops were housed wherever room could be found - in private houses, farm buildings, warehouses and the like. This influx of the 'brutal and licentious soldiery' caused much unrest and by the beginning of the 1700s most troops were billeted in "inns, livery stables, alehouses, victualling houses and all houses selling brandy, strong waters, cyder or metheglin by retail to be drunk upon the premises, and no other". These words, from the annual Mutiny Acts, enshrined one of an Englishman's inalienable rights: that soldiers could not be billeted in his private house unless he had given prior consent and received appropriate payment.

From this time, army units would send out at the end of the day, an armed party with a drummer who would beat tattoo. This was a signal to those selling drink to soldiers to 'taptoe' and close the taps of their casks, and to the soldiers to return to their quarters. The armed party would have several recognised posts in the district; at the first and subsequent posts the drummer would give a warning beat and at the last post a valedictory drum roll.

A programme of barrack building commenced after the end of King William's campaign in Ireland in 1691 with the aim of securing the country against a potential Jacobite rising. Over the years more and more troops were housed in barracks but the practice continued of sending out a regimental watch to patrol the town from post

to post, partly to keep the peace in the absence of a civilian police force but primarily to round up the troops after 'stop tap'. Once the final drum roll had been played at the last post the watch would lead the way back to barracks with the drummer beating 'Retreat', thus marking the end of the military day.

At some stage the final drum roll was replaced by a bugle call and that is how the most haunting call in the military repertoire became known as the 'Last Post'.

*Alec Jones*

[For those readers wondering what metheglin was, my Collins dictionary states: 'spiced or medicated mead (from Welsh *meddyg* healer (from Latin *medicus* medical) + *llyn* liquor)']

## PLANNING MATTERS

We are concerned about the condition of the town walls, and have written to the Council offering our help. The most recent response states "The walls were last surveyed in March 1999 and I agree that there is an urgent need to update the content of that record, together with the associated costs of repair. A new survey will help to provide a focus on the problem to be addressed. I am continuing to consider ways in which a new survey may be achieved." ***Put pressure on. please!***

I don't know what is happening to the Grammar School; the council tells me that only essential repairs are being carried out; the workmen say they are gutting the place. The fact that this is a Grade II\* listed building and that no planning application has been posted does not seem to bother the council nor the owner. I am of course glad that something is being done to this most important part of our history and our townscape.

## *Friends of Cowbridge and District Museum*

*Bruce McGovern*

*First of all a confession! Though, as one of your Joint Chairmen, I have been much involved with the History Society for many years I have not until very recently been a "Friend" of our excellent Museum. I have of course visited periodically but for one reason or another never became involved with its activities.*

*When the Cowbridge Charter Trust was created in 2003 to recognise the then forthcoming 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of our first Charter in 1254 it established a number of objectives. These initially included the wish to promote an awareness of the history of Cowbridge and District together with the hope that links between social groups and organisations in the community could be strengthened.*

*I know that many members of the History Society have been Friends of the Museum since its early days. However I think – and this is very much a personal view – that the two organisations need now to work much more closely together for the common good and to protect our common interests. After all would any member of the History Society not want to acknowledge and support that central element which is contained in the literature of the "Friends" :-*

*" The Cowbridge and District Museum is currently the only museum in the Vale of Glamorgan and we want it to continue as an important community resource and to make sure that the history of our beautiful and unique county survives for future generations to enjoy".*

*As membership of the History Society has changed and increased in recent years it might be useful to provide some details relating to the development of the museum. In the beginning there was a History Society in Cowbridge! In the early years of its existence it regularly arranged exhibitions for various events in and around the town. For two or three years it held an exhibition in three cells of the Town Hall during Carnival Week. In 1980 the Mayor of the day approached Yvonne Weeding our Chairman at the time with the suggestion that the Society establish a permanent display in the three cells. Yvonne asked Marion Eveleigh if she would head a committee to take the matter forward. Despite feeling that she had no experience for such a task Marion developed a committee, canvassed and badgered anyone who might be able to help. As a result of a tremendous amount of work by all concerned it was possible to create a display on Charter Day – March 13<sup>th</sup> 1981 for members of the History Society and their friends. There were many expressions of interest and with the agreement of the Town Council the Cowbridge Museum was officially opened to the public on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1981.*

*For a few years the museum operated with the three cells but as people became more aware of the facility and as more material became available Marion felt that it would be appropriate to approach the Council to see if more space could be made available. The Council willingly agreed and a further three cells in the second corridor were released to the museum. By this stage it was clear that external funding was going to be required to develop display facilities, showcases etc:- To do this it was necessary to become a member of the Council of Museums in Wales and beyond that either a charitable trust or a limited company.*

*Up until this time the History Society and the Museum were effectively a single entity. However because of the need to change the legal status of the Museum it was agreed*

*that there had to be a formal parting of the ways. The History Society was fully supportive and helped to establish a steering committee for the Museum. In 1986 the Museum became a charity and known officially as the Cowbridge and District Museum Trust. In the same year the Friends of the Museum established themselves to support the museum, co-ordinate fundraising efforts and establish a vital link between the museum and the local community.*

*In 1990 the Museum became a full member of the Council of Museums in Wales (CMW) and it was hoped then by those doing the work that they could rest on their laurels for a while. However it was not to be as to remain a member of CMW the museum had to be accepted onto the newly formed Register of Museums. This meant that all the paperwork and museum practices had to conform to a common code. This involved a lot more work but by 1994 the museum became fully registered.*

*I hope that the above, very limited description, provides some idea of the energy and dedication of the founding members of our museum. Having only recently become involved with the museum it may not be appropriate for me to suggest any form of change. However I feel that there is a need to go back to those early days when we had essentially a common ownership. Is there really any reason why for instance every member of the History Society should not also be a "Friend"? If this were to be the case it could only help to ensure that the museum would thrive well into the future as a testimonial to the efforts of those who created it. We need of course to keep our separate legal identities but by sharing more fully our interest in our local history we surely benefit both organisations?*

#### *WHAT CAN YOU DO?*

- 1. If not already one – become a Friend of the Museum.  
Annual membership - £3 or £5 for family.*
- 2. Visit the Museum – Open first Saturday in every month from 11.00am until 4.00pm*
- 3. Volunteer an hour or two whenever you can to help with stewarding, exhibit arrangement and maintenance etc. If you cannot manage anything else just come in for a chat to demonstrate your support and perhaps buy one of our books.*
- 4. Come along to the annual meeting of the Friends on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm in the Lesser Hall to hear an interesting talk, partake of some light refreshments and get a better idea of what we do and what we could perhaps do in the future.*

*If you need any further information please contact any of the Trustees listed below – all of whom are members of the History Society – as is our very new Curator Pamela Robson.*

<i>John Jones</i>	<i>Chairman</i>	<i>775233</i>
<i>Sue Cox</i>		<i>773637</i>
<i>Bruce McGovern</i>		<i>773611</i>
<i>Hilary Thomas</i>		<i>772720</i>
<i>Marion Eveleigh</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>772495</i>

## A PHYSIC GARDEN FOR COWBRIDGE

Today in the heart of Cowbridge, and within an area bounded on the south and west by the medieval town walls, lie Old Hall gardens, now the site of the Health Centre and the Library. By the eighteenth century, Old Hall was the home of the Edmondson family who laid out the gardens there, and members of that family lived at Old Hall until the 1920s. From the 1930s until the 1960s Old Hall provided classrooms and other facilities, including a kitchen garden, for the Grammar School, but in 1964 the house was declared unsafe and the School departed. Part of the house was saved and refurbished by the County Council and is now an adult education centre, while the Old Hall garden provides a pleasant public amenity.

It is remarkable that this garden should have survived as an open space within the town. Even more remarkable is the survival of the walled garden in the south-east corner of the Old Hall site. Having been used as a tree nursery by the Council it was abandoned some fifteen years ago and is now totally overgrown. In the year when Cowbridge celebrates the 750th anniversary of its foundation charter, the Mid and South Glamorgan branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust proposes to restore this walled garden, create a Physic Garden within its walls, and provide a new, free, public garden for the people of Cowbridge and the Vale.

The design will utilise the path structure shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1879, a formal layout which owes its origin to an earlier century. It will take the form of a parterre garden, and as the patterns of such gardens are best viewed from above, a 'mount' or raised walkway will be incorporated into the design. The planting plan for the Cowbridge Physic Garden will take its inspiration from the famous Chelsea Physic Garden where plants with medicinal properties have been grown and studied since the seventeenth century.

The Cowbridge Physic Garden will have an educational and scientific value, and it will provide a colourful, fragrant and tranquil oasis in the heart of the town.

Further information from Dan Clayton-Jones [Email: [dan.clayton-jones@talk21.com](mailto:dan.clayton-jones@talk21.com)]

Val Caple [[val.t.caple@care4free.net](mailto:val.t.caple@care4free.net)]

David Wright, 20 Bessant Close [[wright6338@hotmail.com](mailto:wright6338@hotmail.com)]

or from Robert and Marilyn Cope, 6 Church Street, Cowbridge.

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### MENU FOR CROSS INN, 28 SEPTEMBER

#### *Starters*

- A. Seasonal melon served with fruits and strawberry coulis
- B. Homemade carrot and coriander soup with crusty roll
- C. Salad of Norwegian prawns with Marie Rose sauce

#### *Main course*

- 1. Home-made gratinated lasagne with rich tomato pasata
  - 2. Warm salad of chicken and mushrooms
  - 3. Chicken Madras served with basmati rice and poppadom
  - 4. Vegetarian canelloni topped with gratinated aubergine in a rich tomato sauce
  - 5. Roast topside of Welsh beef with Yorkshire pudding and a rich beer gravy
- all the above served with roast and boiled potatoes and a selection of fresh seasonal vegetables.

#### *Dessert to be chosen on the day*

**Please specify your choice of starter and main course and give this, together with £15 (to cover the evening excursion and the meal), to Betty Alden on September 3rd**