

COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No 61: SEPTEMBER 2006

Programme for 2006 - 7

2006

September 1st

AGM and
'200 Years of the House of Correction'
Bruce McGovern and Jeff Alden
followed by fruit tart and sparkling wine

October 6th

'Six Pontypridd Anniversaries'
Brian Davies

November 3rd

'Mediaeval Life'
Nick Coles

November 24th

'Cowbridge on Film'
Big Screen in the Town Hall

December 1st

The Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture
'Wil Penybont – my great-grandfather'
Brenda Youde
followed by mince pies and punch

2007

January 5th

'Roman Iron-making in South Wales'
Tim Young

February 2nd

The Don Wallis Memorial Lecture
'The Reconstruction of St Teilo's Church,
Llandeilo Talybont'
Janet Wilding

March 2nd

'Where there's a Will' (History through wills)
Lilian Charles

April 13nd (**NB date)

'The Battle of St Fagans'
David Webb
followed by cheese and wine

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

Dick Tonkin has once again organised a varied and interesting programme. This takes a great deal of time, effort and care, and we are very appreciative of all that he is doing. Please note that the April meeting will be held on the **second** Friday in April, and not the usual first Friday of the month (because the Lesser Hall had been pre-booked by another organisation).

ALEC JONES

We were saddened to hear of the sudden death of Alec Jones, who was an enthusiastic member of the Society, and a regular contributor to the newsletter. I will miss his regular phone calls with ideas for articles, and thoughtful suggestions. It was typical of Alec that he had thought of supplying me with a number of what he called 'space-fillers', which I shall continue to use in the next few newsletters. Our sympathy goes out to Barbara and to the family.

SEPTEMBER MEETING: THE MUSEUM AND THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION

It is good to be able to include with this newsletter, the first Cowbridge Museum newsletter, in which Bruce has explained the details of our September meeting. After our short AGM, formal talks will be kept to minimum, to give people the chance to look at the developments in the museum as well as enjoy the sparkling wine and fruit tarts, and to get to know each other. Pamela Robson and the trustees have worked hard to make our museum a really interesting showcase of Cowbridge history. If you are not a Friend of the Museum, you should be!

ASPECTS OF 19TH CENTURY POLICING IN GLAMORGAN, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON COWBRIDGE

The Glamorgan Constabulary was formed in 1841; Captain Charles Napier of the Rifle Brigade was appointed as the first Chief Constable in August of that year. He immediately recruited four superintendents with police experience, and 34 men to serve as policemen. These 34 lived in the nearly empty, and new, Bridgend workhouse for the first month of their service, where they received basic training from Napier. Until Cowbridge Police station was built in 1862, the policeman in charge at Cowbridge lived in the Town Hall, on the ground floor near the cells which had been built for the House of Correction. There were three incidents in the nineteenth century which are of particular interest in the policing of Cowbridge, two of which assumed national importance. One of the first sergeants at Cowbridge, if not the first, was Sergeant Jarrett, whose name appears in the following account.

CRIME IN MERTHYR

Life in Glamorgan for the labouring classes, particularly in the rapidly developing industrial towns, was hard, rough and tough. Wages were low and employment insecure. Men often wandered the countryside, sometimes with their families, in search of work, and gravitated to the iron and mining towns. Their ranks were swollen by families driven from Ireland by the potato famines of the 1840s. There was not enough work for all and people were forced to live in squalid and verminous conditions.

In his first report of December 1842 Captain Napier, the first Chief Constable, said:-
"The County is infested with vagrants - - - and in consequence of this influx, the low lodging houses have been crowded to excess. In rooms of not more than 12 feet square, sometimes sleep indiscriminately four and twenty men, women and children, naked on straw, their clothes being detained for security of rent".

Merthyr Tydfil has been described as "a vision of hell" in the nineteenth century. It was then the iron capital of the world, with a population of 40,000 plus in 1841, with very poor housing and no adequate water supply or sanitation. In such conditions, brutality and lawlessness thrived, and "rogues, vagabonds and the idle and disorderly" tended to herd together and form gangs. Soon they had sections of the town to themselves, from which they sometimes made raids into the better districts. The lawless 'ghetto' in Merthyr was known as 'China'.

The introduction of the County Police Force in 1839 was the first real challenge to mob law, and although the minimum height standard set by the Home Office was 5ft 7ins, it soon became apparent in Glamorgan that policemen needed to be of superior height and build in order to deal with the criminals, and to have a chance of survival in the more turbulent districts. There is documented evidence that Captain Napier sent big men of a high physical standard to Merthyr, Dowlais and Aberdare.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF PC EDWARD JARRETT

Successive Superintendents at Merthyr were involved in what became known as the 'Battle for China'. Not only did they have to deal with the serious crime and civil disorder in 'China', the roughest district in Merthyr, but also with the agitation stemming from the Chartist Movement. Chartism was at its height between 1836 and 1848. It stood for radical reform of Parliament, the electoral system, and manhood suffrage. It also wanted the abolition of the new Police Force. It was very strong in Merthyr; frequent meetings were held in the town and there was a good deal

of agitation in support of the Movement. There was often confrontation between police and agitators.

In 1843 a particularly violent affray between soldiers, civilians and the police took place in Dowlais. Some soldiers of the 73rd Regiment stationed in the town, when drunk, attacked a workman with a bayonet. A Sergeant Wrenn attempted to arrest one of the soldiers whereupon he (the soldier) said that he would "rip the bloody guts out of Sergeant Wrenn". Fortunately help arrived and the soldiers were taken into custody. Later a gang of drunk soldiers assembled outside the police station and created a very ugly scene; Sergeant Wrenn armed himself and the only other policeman there, PC Jarrett, with cutlasses and swords, went outside and managed to disperse the crowd.

Sergeant Wrenn, a single man, lodged with PC Edward Jarrett and his wife at Dowlais Police Station. PC Jarrett was employed by the Iron Company as a "private company" man, and the station was provided by the Company as a lock-up. The County Police were allowed to use it. PC Jarrett had been a Sergeant at Cowbridge, but in 1842 he had been reduced in rank to constable for "misconduct". The reason is unknown, although it was probably for being drunk and disorderly on more than one occasion. He later became a Sergeant in the Ironworks at Rhymney and then Superintendent at the Tredegar Ironworks.

Sergeant Wrenn became Superintendent at Merthyr in 1846 and renewed the campaign against the 'China' trouble spot. Within 12 months more than 60 of the criminals from this district had been jailed.

(to be continued)

Don Gerrard

THE SANDWICH

Most of us will have a vague idea that this early form of 'takeaway' was invented by the Earl of Sandwich, who instructed his steward to supply him with a slice of salt beef between two pieces of bread, so that he could eat at the gaming table without stopping for a visit to the dining room. Not quite true.

From 1771 to 1782 John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, was First Lord of the Admiralty, probably the most important cabinet post of the time. During his time as First Lord he took two major decisions with far-reaching consequences. Firstly he brought into service with the fleet a new cannon, forged by the Carron Iron works in Scotland, of devastating short range firepower and known as the carronade, but more commonly called 'The Smasher'. Secondly, and even more importantly, he had the hulls of the fleet covered with sheet copper. Wooden hulls soon became encrusted with barnacles and seaweed, and in the tropics were extremely vulnerable to the wood-boring teredos slipworm. Coppering the hulls not only protected the ships' timbers but also improved their sailing qualities and, together with new carronades, meant that they could out-sail and out-gun their French and Spanish enemies.

John Montagu did indeed invent the sandwich, but only to sustain himself through the long hours at his Admiralty desk. So next time you take a sandwich, spare a thought for the man who helped lay the foundation for those many years when 'Britannia ruled the waves'.

Alec Jones

LLANBLETHIAN – MY CHILDHOOD HOME, 1940 -1945

Most members of the Local History Society will have seen, in the *Gem* or in the Parish magazine, some articles sent me by a lady who was evacuated to Llanblethian from Kent in 1940. June Wells, as she then was - she is now June Faulkner – stayed with Mary Jane Wyatt in Mill Cottage, near Llanblethian Mill. She has now sent me a further account of her childhood memories of life in Llanblethian, and though I may use excerpts elsewhere, I think it important as well as interesting to have the full account in the Local History newsletter.

I will begin my memoirs at Rose Cottage near the Church. I believe a family called Llewellyn lived there, I used to play with a little lad called Alan - known as 'Giggy' - he was in my class at school, my sister Georgina remembers the family and I believe a baby died there during the war.

In Picton House lived Mr & Mrs Chedzoy and I seem to remember a very elderly lady being there when I played with Brenda and Shirley. I do remember how sad we all were when their mother Lilian died, she was buried just over the wall in the churchyard. Much later Mr Edgar Chedzoy married the mother of my evacuee friend Mary Cunningham. She lived at Hill House and was the housekeeper, probably to Alan Gibbs. I often went to the annex where Mary and her mother lived. I used to go up to Hill House for tomatoes and other salad items - it was a nursery.

Later Brenda Chedzoy was engaged to the son of the then vicar, then she met Johnny at my Aunt's cottage. He was lodging with Mary Jane (after the war of course). Brenda fell in love with Johnny and they subsequently married and he took her back to Ireland where I believe they developed a good business growing tomatoes. Mary Jane loved telling me the story of this romance. I hope it had a happy ending. I really liked all involved in these two stories.

The Church: my sister Georgina used to pump the organ bellows for Sunday services - I regularly visited the church to put flowers on the graves of Mary and Frank Wyatt's parents. The stories of some of the plots will come to light as I proceed with my narrative.

Ron Harris was christened there when he was about nine or ten when his sister's babies were christened. Mary Jane was very fond of Enid Harris who became Mrs Drummond. One of her boys was named Kent. I loved him; he was such a bonnie baby with blond curly hair and he always came to find me when I spent my holidays with Mary Jane, he followed me everywhere. I remember some of the family: Audrey, Roy, and an older brother (name began with H - Hubert?). Mr Harris used to stand at his gate and tell us children wonderful stories of his time in the Great War.

I remember Peggy Jenkins getting married at the church to a very handsome airman. I think Mary Jane must have been involved with making the dresses because she took me to the house and I was allowed to go upstairs and see the bride in her wedding gown. I thought she looked quite beautiful. I remember that after the ceremony the front gate of the church was tied up and the bride and groom could not leave until the best man threw some coppers over the gate for the children to collect.

I also remember Mr Thomas of Beechcourt being buried in the churchyard. (He was a large jolly man with a white beard. I thought he was like Father Christmas). Lots of villagers stood in respect to him as the cortege passed through the village.

Near the church was Stallcourt House. I was told a farmer called Mr Davis lived there. The two boys who lived at Ger-y-nant, Clifford and Jimmy Denson, used to work at Stallcourt during school holidays. Lady Byass was living at The Cross and a group of evacuees stayed there, they were driven to school in a big black car.

I have already mentioned Hill House. Mary Cunningham and her widowed mother were there, they came from Dover. A brother and sister, Barbara and Brian Wilde, were evacuated to one of the cottages in the Causeway. They were very nice and I often wondered what happened to them - they went home quite early.

The upper part of the village I do not remember so well. Our postman, Mr Burnage, lived there, so did Mr & Mrs Carder from Sunday school and their son Vivian - they lived near Factory House and the Ford. Lilian Hopkins lived on the upper Duffryn road I remember. My teacher, Miss Miles, who became Mrs Buchalik, lived in one of the bungalows on Factory Rd. On the corner of the road leading to Brynhyfryd lived the Baker family, Colin was in my class and his sister Joey was friendly with my sister. Another family I remember well were Mr & Mrs James - son of the Mr & Mrs James who lived next to the Harrises at the bottom of Llanblethian Hill (the mountain as we children called it). They had a beautiful little girl, I think she was called Rosemary. I remember seeing a lovely lady - Dulcie Thomas - taking this little girl for walks. Dulcie was the daughter of the Thomas family who lived on the hill going to Cowbridge on the right. I think she married into the James family - she died very young, her grave is just inside the side entrance to the churchyard, a little group of graves I always visit. Bess Tucker - nee Batten - is nearby - also my best friend Margaret Evans (Williams). I will speak of this later but it is a very special corner where I can recall memories of the two beautiful young women who died so young.

Returning to the James family - an evacuee called Mary Adnams stayed with Mr & Mrs James the elder at the bottom of Llanblethian Hill. They were all very fond of her, she suddenly went home to London and was never heard of again. I kept in touch as you know and was always asked if I knew anything or heard what happened to her.

Another resident of the bungalows built where the Curland is in Factory Rd was the daughter of the Mr & Mrs James where my sister Georgina lived. She was married and had given up hope of having a child after 11 years and suddenly she had a girl and a boy.

I'm not sure which house she stayed in but another evacuee, Pat Maltby, lived in that area. I believe with a Mr & Mrs Watkins - he was a solicitor and he was also the man who chose us at the Town Hall in Cowbridge and took us in his car to Mary Jane and my sister to Bridge Farm.

Another evacuee called Mary Briggs stayed at a house next to Llanblethian House (Mr & Mrs Thomas lived at Llanblethian House) I used to go to a music club where Mary Briggs stayed and developed my love of the classics - I always think of this house whenever I hear Swan Lake. Mary must have gone home early because the visits here came to an abrupt end.

In later years Margaret Evans used to look after the little boy Thomas from Llanblethian House. She used to take him out in his pram and I would go with her when I was spending my holidays with Mary Jane. I met him some 8 years ago and I must have embarrassed him telling him of the walks and washing him when he fell in the mud. I was staying at the Vale of Glamorgan pub in Cowbridge and he was a customer there. I stayed at the Vale when I gave a talk to the schools.

I remember John Thomas the milkman who farmed New House farm, he came round the village and delivered milk from churns - my job was to put the milk jugs out on the table while he put a pint in one and half a pint in the other. I would put little lace covers over the jugs, they were held down with beads to stop flies getting in -and then return the jugs to the pantry. Mr Thomas was a lovely cheerful man, if we ran short of milk I would walk up to the farm through the fields by the Parish Hall. There was a long row of very tall pine trees by the road here and I recall thinking of them when Mary Jane taught me a lovely little poem

I remember, I remember
the fir trees tall and high,
I used to think their slender tops
were close against the sky
It was about remembering the house where she was born.

In Ger-y-nant cottage lived Mr & Mrs Shaw, friends of Mary Jane. They had two young boy evacuees from Gillingham and I see them to this day. Clifford and Jimmy (James) Denson. These two had been evacuated up the Rhondda somewhere and had been badly treated, they settled in with Mr & Mrs Shaw and loved it, to this day they speak very fondly of them. Mary

Jane was with Mrs Shaw when she died, it was Clifford Denson who put me in touch with you and lent me his books on Llanblethian and Cowbridge.

I now come to Mynydd and Hillside and I've already recalled the families who lived here, the James and Harris families. I spent many happy hours outside here. Mr Harris had a very spiteful white cockerel and we ran for our lives when I went with Anne Ashcroft to visit her grandmother and uncle who lived in a farm at the end of the lane going along the bottom of the mountain (The Kennels). We also got into the meadow along this lane to pick large kingcups. I remember Herbert James and the little ones and I have a vague memory of the scene shown on page 57 in *Llanblethian Buildings and People* (was Pauline the baby Dulcie Thomas loved so much and not Rosemary?)

(to be continued)

June Faulkner

EFFECTS OF REBECCA

In his interesting second part of the Rebecca Riots articles, Don Gerrard refers to the "state of panic" reigning in Carmarthenshire in 1843.

The following item reported in *The Cambrian* Swansea, throws light on one of their major effects:

“12th October 1844.

John Bennett's case heard at Bristol. His debts had arisen as a result of a fire at his premises "about five years ago", leaving him with an insolvency of 1000. He had worked to liquidate the debt, and had reduced it to £120, but in 1843 the Rebecca Riots brought a "general stagnation" in business, plus his creditors had pressed him. There was an execution on his property in 1843, and now he was working as a journeyman to maintain himself. Current assets, £ 2-10-6.”

Bennett was a cabinet-maker who had established himself in Castle Street and High Street, Swansea, in about 1833. He must have been possessed of much courage and tenacity, for despite this disaster, he was established again by 1850 in High Street, and sold out handsomely in 1868, his premises being the first occupied by Eddershaws.

Altogether, a striking example of the principles that in troubled times people stop spending money until the dangers pass, and they start again.

Luke Millar

COWBRIDGE ON FILM

I have had a good response to my request for cine films and video films taken in Cowbridge and district over the last fifty years or so, but it is still not too late to submit yours! If you do have any films containing pictures other than just family, then look them up to see if excerpts could be included. We intend to get these edited professionally so that they will not look just like someone's home videos, but will provide an entertaining and informative evening's entertainment. It is only when you study old films and photographs that you realise how much has changed in our area.

Mike Willcock, Dick Buswell and I are working on this project. Creative Rural Communities have generously given us a grant to get the programme under way, and we will produce a DVD which we will use to show the films on the Big Screen and which will be available free to schools, tourism enterprises and the general public. The public showing will be a ticket-only screening in the Town Hall on Friday 24th November: put the date in your diaries now.

Jeff Alden

Thanks to all contributors: comments and contributions, please, to Jeff Alden, 773373