

'Christmas Cottages' get coveted blue plaque



The new plaque is in place.

YET another building in Cowbridge has received a blue plaque – further evidence of the uniquely fascinating history of the town.

The latest plaque has been placed on Nos 6 and 7, Church Street – and the timing is appropriate, because the properties were known for many years as the 'Christmas Cottages'.

The awarding of a blue plaque owes a great deal to work by members of the Cowbridge Record Society, and in particular Robert Cope, who lives in No 6.

Robert, and his wife Marylyn bought the property and moved in 10 years ago, and its history was a major factor in that decision.

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'Oldest house in town' receives blue plaque



ABOVE, left to right: Karen Gibson, Liz Gibson, Canon Derek Belcher, Coun Nicola Thomas, the Mayor of Cowbridge with Llanblethian, and Robert Cope. (Photograph by Mike Wilcock).

The upstairs 15th Century fireplace, with the Georgian four-bar grate.

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Robert said: "Before we moved to Cowbridge, we had restored an old house in Brecon. We were keen to do something similar with this house as well."

The first discovery he made was that there were two huge hidden fireplaces, one on the ground floor and one upstairs.

They had been covered up many years ago, but Robert's training as a chartered engineer made him well qualified to let them see the light of day.

When they were revealed, he was surprised by how substantial they were. The ground floor fireplace has a span of seven feet, while the smaller upstairs fireplace had a Georgian four-bar grate, dating back to the 1700s, which is still in place.

Together with Brian James, another member of the Cowbridge Record Society, Mr Cope researched the history of the cottages.

Records revealed that it had been owned by the Cowbridge Corporation in the early 1700s (it later passed to the town council and was finally auctioned off in 1974).

It was in the 1700s that it was converted to

two cottages. Before that, Robert Cope believes, it was one house, and the evidence now indicates that it is the oldest house in Cowbridge.

Incidentally, the name 'Christmas Cottages' derives from the fact that the Mari Lwyd, the horse's skull that is festooned with ribbons and plays a part in New Year celebrations, was stored in No 7.

The research which has been done has established that, as the blue plaque says, the house was built as a church house, and was the residence of a newly-appointed Cowbridge chaplain.

It appears that Cowbridge had campaigned for some years for Holy Cross Church to have its own chaplaincy.

This it would appear, was resisted by Llanblethian. The argument went all the way to King Richard III, who was asked to rule on the matter soon after he took the throne.

He ruled that Cowbridge should have its own chaplain, and the blue plaque says that the building of the chaplain's house was 'sanctioned' by the King in 1484.

It was built by the Cowbridge



The larger fireplace, which dates back to the 15th Century.

Corporation, and the chaplain's main residence was the half of the house now occupied by Mr and Mrs Cope (No 6). There are historical records that refer to it as the 'Church House'.

Part of No 7 was also lived in, but part was a stable for the chaplain's horse - a 15th Century company car and garage!

At one time, said Mr Cope, there were other houses in the same street, all facing the church, but they are long gone.

There is evidence of a pebble path that led

to Holy Cross Church, and at one time, the area behind the house would have been home to small units for weavers and other tradesmen.

A full explanation of the house's history can be found in a book published by the Cowbridge Record Society, *Echoes of Old Cowbridge*, which is available in the Cowbridge Book Shop, and from the Cowbridge Record Society, which is open in Old Hall Community College, Wednesdays, 10am-12 noon.

A simple ceremony to mark the installation of the blue plaque took place yesterday (Wednesday).

Also at the ceremony were members of the Gibson family, who own No 7, the other half of the building. Robert Cope said that Glyn and Liz Gibson had been very supportive throughout the project.

The story that Robert Cope has illustrated with his restoration project just goes to confirm the fascinating history of so many homes in Cowbridge.

The town has the potential to be one large museum.

All we have to do is persuade the people living in the houses to move out!