

# BRITAIN'S OLDEST HUNTSMAN

Tragic End of "Old  
John of the Vale"

FOUND HANGING

Cowbridge Veteran's  
Farewell Note

A painful sensation was caused in the Cowbridge district to-day, when John John, the veteran huntsman of the Vale of Glamorgan, the oldest huntsman in the kingdom, was found hanging from a beam in the outhouse of the rear of his residence in Cowbridge.

The tragic discovery was made by Mrs. Carter, and a note was found on him in which he wrote: "Good-bye, I cannot stand it any longer, John."

Mr. John had not been the same since the death of his wife a few months ago, and his bereavement appeared to have affected him greatly.

He was 92 years of age and was a well-known local character and was familiarly known as "The Mayor."

He was until recently of a very genial disposition and had a fund of interesting reminiscences regarding the Vale of Glamorgan. All his life he had been an enthusiastic follower of the Glamorgan Hounds, and for many years was employed by them as a terrier man.

## Kennel Boy at 13

Despite his advanced age, Mr. John maintained an interest in hunting up to the last, and was always to be seen with the Wye Valley Otter hounds when they visited the Vale of Glamorgan.

"Old John of the Vale," as he was also known, resided in a cottage near the ancient South Gate, a relic of the days when Cowbridge was a walled town, and in his room are trophies of the chase, fox and other masks, and photographs of favourite horses and dogs.

He began as a kennel boy with the local hunt in 1854 when he was 13 years of age, and had served under many masters of the Glamorgan Hunt, including the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, Mr. Talbot, of Margam Castle, and Colonel Homfray, of Penllyn Castle.

Two years ago he gave up the post of terrier man, but still continued to follow the hounds, and did not miss a single meet last season.

It was his proud boast that there could be no chase without a fox and no kill without "Old John of the Vale."

Mr. and Mrs. John were married nearly 57 years, and they celebrated their golden wedding in August, 1925.

Mr. John was a native of Cowbridge.



Mr. JOHN JOHN.

SOUTH WALES

ECHO

11 JULY 1932

# MEMORIES OF A JAUNTY COWBRIDGE CHARACTER - JOHNNY 'GRAS-Y'

by **JEFF ALDEN**  
of Cowbridge Historical Society - formerly head of the sixth form at Cowbridge Comprehensive School

MANY readers will recognise the photograph (far right) which appeared on the cover of *Cowbridge: Buildings and People*. It was taken about 1905 and shows six children standing on the corner of High Street and Church Street in Cowbridge, outside what is today En Vogue and Quills.

During the summer, I fell into conversation with a gentleman standing in Church Street. He turned out to be Mr Arthur John from Cardiff, the grandfather of Miranda and Jodie John, two charming girls it had been my pleasure to teach some years ago.

On finding out that I had edited the *Buildings and People* book, he asked if I knew who the cover girls and boy were - and of course I did not.

Mr John was delighted to be able to tell me that they were all members of the John family, with his mother Blanche, being the fourth from the left. The complete list is

Martha; Mary; Elvira; Blanche; Margaret and finally David John.

These were six of the ten children of Johnny and Miriam John, and lived in the left-hand cottage of the pair facing the church in Church Street (so they did not have far to walk to have their photograph taken!).

Johnny was born in 1840, and lived in the cottage on the Aberthin Road, next to the Edmond's Arms. He had been brought up by his uncle John and aunt Grace (or Gras in Welsh). He was always known as Johnny 'Gras-y' (or Grassy), as a result.

Johnny Grassy had seven daughters and



Johnny John - a great horseman.

three sons, and died in 1932 at the age of 92. He was quite short, but a jaunty character and a great horseman. He rode frequently and attended all the hunt meets. When not on horseback, he used a thumbstick, and always wore a bowler hat and breeches.

He was also well-known for taking part in the Mari Lwyd celebrations. Until the custom was revived in recent years, Johnny had been considered to

have been the last person to have gone around from house to house 'under the horse's head'.

It was he who wore the horse's skull set in a dark cloak. This was at a time when the challenges were sung in Welsh - and he used to sing the responses in the Glamorgan dialect of Welsh.

When in the New Year, you see Bill Lewis, George Crabb, Steve Harkett and the others going the rounds

with the Mari Lwyd, think of Johnny Grassy!

It was a lucky coincidence to meet Arthur John, and I was delighted to find out the names of the people on the cover of our first book. There will be no problem with the cover of our *Llanblethian: Buildings and People* book, which is due out towards the end of November - we know it is Walter Stone and his sister, Connie Taylor, on the cover of that one.



Circa 1906: Family line-up in the High Street, Cowbridge.

# Sad tale of John John

**THE Glamorgan Hunt dates from 1873 and in the July of 1932, one of its oldest huntsmen, John John, was found hanging in the outhouse at the rear of his residence in Cowbridge, writes BRIAN LEE.**

Old John of the Vale, as he was popularly known, lived in a cottage near the ancient South Gate, a reminder of the days when Cowbridge was a walled town.

Ninety-two-year-old Mr John had lost his wife a few months earlier and on his possession, a note which read: "Goodbye, I cannot stand it any longer" was found.

In one of the rooms of his cottage could be found all his hunting trophies; fox and other masks, and photographs of favourite horses and hounds.

He had begun his days with the Glamorgan Hunt at the age of 13 as a kennel boy and it was said that he had served under the following Masters of Hunt - the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, Mr Talbot, Mr R H

Williams and Colonel Homfray.

The Mackintosh of Mackintosh, who owned thousands of acres of land in Scotland and who died at the Cottrells, near Cowbridge, in 1941, also owned a lot of land in Cardiff where Harriet Street, May Street, Arabella Street and Mackintosh Place are all named after members of his family.

The Mackintosh of Mackintosh was a keen horseman and in 1901 at the Glamorgan fixture at Waun, Penylan, Cowbridge, he won the heavyweight race with his black gelding, Magpie.

## John John's tragic end

Dear Editor

**I** WAS delighted to learn more about one of Cowbridge's characters John John, after reading Jeff Alden's fascinating article (The GEM, November 1).

Some years ago, when I was doing research in Newport library, I came across an item in a local newspaper which told of the sad end of John John.

Old John of the Vale, as he was popularly known, was reported to have lived in a cottage near the ancient South Gate, a reminder of the days when Cowbridge was a walled town.

The report went on to say that 92-year-old Mr John had been found hanging in the outhouse at the rear of his cottage in July of 1932.

On his possession, was a note which read: "Goodbye, I cannot stand it any longer." Apparently, his wife had died a few months earlier.

In one of the rooms of his cottage, were all his hunting trophies, fox and other masks, and stacks of photographs of his beloved horses and hounds.

John John had begun his hunting days at the age of 13 and had served under the following Masters of the Hunt: the Mackintosh of Mackintosh; Mr Talbot; Mr RH Williams and Colonel Homfray.

The first named was a keen horseman and in 1901 at the Glamorgan Hunt Point-to-point Steeplechases at Waun, Penylan, Cowbridge, had won the heavyweight race with his black gelding, Magpie.

Yours sincerely  
Brian Lee, Cardiff