

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

Spring 2018



Work in progress on cutting down trees near The Twt

Fond Farewells

The illustration on the front cover shows the cutting down of two venerable trees near Twt Park. The age of the trees has been estimated at 250 years, and it's great to see that the stump of the beech tree has been left behind as a reminder. One cannot help wonder what historical incidents may have taken place in Cowbridge within sight of the trees in those 250 years.

They won't have seen the horses at the race meeting that took place in 1770, because that was held at Stalling Down a few miles away. However, we do know the name of a horse that ran in one of the races: Gimcrack, named on a race list that was found under the floorboards of Llandough Castle when renovation work was being carried out there in 1970.

They might, perhaps, have seen the first printing press in Glamorgan, established in Cowbridge by Rhys Thomas in 1770. Here, Thomas published the first volume of an English-Welsh dictionary (the final volume did not appear for another thirteen years!) This might have been with the encouragement of John Walters, the lexicographer who lived at Llandough, where Rhys Thomas was buried in 1790. Following his death, the press was sold to the Bird family of Cardiff.

A House of Correction was already present in Cowbridge, and its original cells were eventually incorporated into a newer building, now the Town Hall. You can still see them if you go along to Cowbridge Museum, open on the first and third Saturdays of every month.

At The Bear Hotel, several local bigwigs met in August 1772 to form a society that would become the Glamorgan Agricultural Society. Out of this arose the Cowbridge Show, which developed into The Vale of Glamorgan Show. It was held at Penllyn from 1953 to 1997. In 1998 it moved to the grounds of Fonmon Castle.

At 14 High Street, where Costa Coffee now stands, Iolo Morganwg ran a bookshop (which also sold food). Iolo was a well-known local character. He made up verses and songs about local residents, and even a song that he composed in order to advertise the business. (We'd love to hear from anyone who knows the words!) Iolo's reputation has fluctuated up and down in the centuries since his death.

A letter written to Iolo by the noted antiquarian William Owen Pughe in 1800 is addressed to "Mr Edward Williams, Marble Mason, Flimston near Cowbridge, S. Wales", and reads "Phillips of St Pauls' Church Yard carries on a yearly volume of very extensive circulation, called *Public Characters*. He wants much to have you in it, connecting with a sketch of your life an account of the bardic institute and Welsh literature in general. I wish you would furnish as much as would fill a dozen 8vo pages, in the third person, of such an account. It would be of service to the cause, but it should be done soon."

Cowbridge History is collaborating with publisher Y Lolfa to launch Gareth Thomas's historical novel, *I, Iolo*, in English. The launch will take place at Cowbridge Library on Monday 30th April at 6.45 for 7pm and will be in a similar format to the very entertaining launch of the Welsh-language version, which took place at The Bear last year, with dramatised readings by professional actors. There will be a question-and-answer session after the main talk. We would like to know how many are planning to attend, in order to ensure that we have enough chairs and enough refreshments to go round. Please give your names to the Secretary, Dick Tonkin, either at the April meeting or to chsoc@hotmail.co.uk or 01446 772704 by Monday 23rd April. **Please note** that this is between our April and May meetings and is on a Monday night.

While on the subject of farewells, we were very sad to hear of the deaths in January and February of two of Cowbridge History Society's longest-serving and most dedicated members: Jo Rawlins and Yvonne Weeding. For many years next-door neighbours, they both made outstanding contributions to the cause of local history in Cowbridge, and both will be very much missed.

Obituary: Josephine Rawlins (1928-2018)

Jo was born in Cardiff, and educated at Howell's School, Llandaff, but her family came from the Llanybydder area of Carmarthenshire, and she spent years researching their history and writing a much-treasured book for her children and grandchildren. She later became a Vice-President of the "Hywelians" (former pupils of Howells School). It was at Aberystwyth, where she graduated in Geography, that she met her husband Ken. She worked in the Monmouthshire town planning department until she was forced, on marriage, to give up this job – the local authority policy for married women at the time. With their two sons, Alun and Brian, the family lived for many years on the Isle of Wight, moving to Cowbridge in 1967 when Ken took up a lectureship post at Barry College of Education. Jo became involved in the Cowbridge community from the start. She set up and ran the local Cub pack before becoming the Group Scout Leader, and she helped get a Scout Hall established in the market place. She was employed at the time as a science laboratory technician at the Comprehensive School. Later, she looked after her infirm mother, drove Ken (then the county's Science Adviser) around the schools when his health prevented him from driving himself, and regularly delivered meals on wheels.

Jo was the secretary of the Cowbridge Record Society (a predecessor of the History Society) and took an active part in the production of several of our publications, which started with *Cowbridge Buildings & People* in 1999. Her book, *The Great War: Memorials in Cowbridge and Llanblethian*, published by Cowbridge Record Society in 2008, was a work of real and valuable scholarship, in which she methodically and meticulously recorded the histories of all those named (at the time) on the local war memorials. She also wrote articles for



the History Society newsletter, such as one on rationing in the Second World War. For many years, she supplemented her History Society activities by being a regular volunteer steward at Cowbridge Museum.

World-wide travel featured high on her agenda. With son Brian and family based in South Africa, for example, Jo and Ken travelled around the southern African continent, using different routes and methods of transport, and after Ken died Jo continued to visit Brian's family on her own.

Her remarkable brain ensured she was in the winning Record Society team year after year at the Rotary Club quiz night (the photo shows Jo on one of these occasions, with her husband Ken and the late Jeff Alden). I myself recall several years of quizzing with her and Ken, together with my late husband Jeff and others, in various Brains pubs on a Sunday evening. Jo, and her family, have been good friends and neighbours of mine ever since the 1960s, and it is good to know that her life ended peacefully in her Cardiff nursing home, close to family and enjoying her baby great grandson.

Betty Alden, March 2018

Obituary: Yvonne Weeding (1929-2018)

Yvonne, who died peacefully in February, has been a staunch member of the Cowbridge History Society since its formation and was co-founder of one of its predecessor societies, Cowbridge & District Local History Society.

Born in Newbury, Berkshire in 1929, Yvonne spent her early years living on her grandparents' farm in Hermitage before moving to Loddon Bridge into the house her grandfather built, and there she developed a love of horses and riding. She read history at Reading University, undertook teacher training and joined the RAF as an education officer. During her married life, she moved frequently within the RAF, spending two years in Singapore and raising her three children, Mark, Fiona and Paul.

It was in 1970 that Yvonne moved to Cowbridge, followed here by her parents whom she looked after for a number of years. The founding of the society in 1974 enabled her to expand her life-long love of the subject. In 1976, as the excursions secretary, she organised outings to the Bridgend Police Museum, the Dunraven Iron Age fort, the Maesteg-Porthcawl tramway, to Beaupre Castle for a family picnic and also a day trip to Penrice and Oxwich castles, Gower. She handed this task on to her dear friend Gwynneth Keay when she became the society's chairman in 1977.

Yvonne at this time was teaching a variety of subjects at Bridgend college, and she also ran 'local history on wheels' classes for the education authority. She arranged visits to numerous historic houses all around the Vale, driving the group herself in a minibus, and organised excursions and group holidays, usually with a historic theme, both further afield in the UK and sometimes abroad.

1979 saw the beginnings of a museum for Cowbridge, following a visit by members of the society to the one in Porthcawl. Yvonne and others bent the ear of a sympathetic Cowbridge Town Council, a Town Hall cell was given over for exhibits and Porthcawl's unwanted showcases were purchased with the proceeds of a second-hand book sale.

It was Yvonne who was instrumental in holding a Victorian Day in the town in September 1986; in fact the event occupied the whole weekend. So many people, including schoolchildren, banks, building societies, shopkeepers, local organisations, dressed in costume to parade and join together with stalls and activities; the sun shone, and the town had great fun. Yvonne and the late John Miles led historical walkabouts, and Yvonne gave a talk on the history of Holy Cross church. Mugs marking the occasion sold well for £1.50 each. On the Saturday evening, there were musical events, ballet performances, poetry readings, a barber's shop quartet, a splendid buffet and a Victorian ball. On the Sunday, a tea party was held in the old Grammar School garden, with yet more musical items.

Under Yvonne's chairmanship, the Local History Society established its annual Charter Day celebrations, continued to this day. In the early days they took the form of a lunch or supper, with food and home-made wine provided by members, and all the year's guest speakers were invited along. It was in 1997, after some twenty years as the society's chairman, that Yvonne approached Jeff Alden with a view to handing the task over, though she retained the vice-chairman post for some time to come.

Yvonne never lost her energy, determination or her sense of humour, despite the distressing lack of her sight in recent months. She will be remembered by many here for keeping active with walking (and regularly with the Ramblers), with tackling the Himalayas and frequent camping under canvas whilst at pensionable age,



with celebrating her 70th at a beach picnic for all at Southerndown, with her love of wearing pink and purple, and with her strong attachment to Holy Cross church. Her children and grandchildren will never forget the regular family holiday gatherings she organised – Yvonne was able to enjoy the latest one only this past summer.

Betty Alden, March 2018

New Year - 1838-style

Did you enjoy the Christmas and New Year celebrations? Did you get a bit fed up with people wishing you the compliments of the season, or did you enter into the spirit of things fully?

Either way, you might be surprised at how residents of Cowbridge 180 years ago reacted to the festive season. On 6th January 1838, *The Cambrian* reported “disgraceful outrages” taking place in the town. These seem to have been mainly in the form of pranks, including knocking on people’s doors late at night and running away, destroying flower beds, and stealing signs. Several of these were perpetrated against widows and elderly ladies living alone, something rightly decried by the newspaper.

More serious was the discovery of a still-born child in the outside toilet of a house in High Street. The mother, a Sarah Morgan, was unable to be questioned because of her state of health. One cannot help but wonder what led to this situation, and we can only be thankful that this type of incident has become much less common in the 21st century.

These and other newspaper reports from the same period have been recorded by Betty Alden and are available for consultation in the “History Room” at Old Hall, a local history studies archive funded by Cowbridge History Society. The room is open 10 am-12 noon most Wednesdays.

*Deb Fisher
Publications Officer*

Talks for 2018

The March meeting, at which Dick Buswell was scheduled to speak, unfortunately had to be cancelled because of the adverse weather. I’m sure members will agree that this was a sensible decision. However, we can announce that, in addition to the two remaining monthly meetings of the 2017-18 season, there will be a special event on Monday 30 April, which you are all invited to attend. See page 1 for details.

April’s meeting, on Friday 6th, will feature Mark Davies talking about an early ballooning pioneer, James Sadler, and the May meeting, on Friday 4th May, will be our AGM, followed by a talk given by committee member Chris Turner on the subject of “The Welsh Religious Revival of 1904/05”. **Please note** that the AGM begins at 7 pm, earlier than our usual time!

Books, books and more books

Many of you will recall the fascinating talk given by Chris Young last autumn, on the subject of the Thaw Valley. It’s good to note that Chris and her colleagues, including Betty Alden, are working on the manuscript of a potential publication on this subject.

Another forthcoming publication I’ve heard about will be a monograph by Cowbridge Record Society co-founder Hilary Thomas, on the subject of 19th-century artist John Petherick. More news on this will follow when it is available.

The Charter Day trip 2018

Once more Beverly Tonkin arranged a most splendid Charter Day trip for about forty members of the Society. We were blessed by the most marvellous Springtime sunshine with recent snow rapidly melting in the fields. This year the destination was Castle Farm at St George's super Ely. Few of us had ever visited this house, perhaps because for so long it lay in a much neglected state. It formed part of the estate of the Trahernes, who had little use for it over the past 300 years. Its most recent occupants were tenant farmers. In many ways this neglect helped preserve it and its many distinctive architectural features. It is a largely medieval house that was built against the remains of the original castle. Its main feature is the first floor hall, almost unique in Wales and especially in the south. The roof of this part of the building would originally have had stone slates, but these have been replaced by more modern, presumably Welsh, ones. Beneath them was some amazing structural timbers, five in number and mostly medieval but with some restoration. The remainder of the house is a network of smaller rooms on both levels, all of which are adorned with original timbers and in many cases stone-surrounded fireplaces. A more detailed account of its history was given to us in the form of a handout by Dick Tonkin from detailed notes compiled from research by the Llantrisant History Society.

Our hosts were Simon Cooper and his family. They have devoted enormous energy and personal enthusiasm to conserving this building. In an introductory talk Simon explained his philosophy towards this project, namely, to be led by the house and not by his own desires. Expert advisers had recommended massive investment in man and



materials to bring it up nearer to modern standards. He had rightly resisted these blandishments and decided

upon a low key conservation policy which consists of small scale repairs and replacements over many years; this, he felt, fitted his personality, his energy and his budget. The results so far have been remarkable.

The house has twice been of interest to television producers, once as part of the *Restoration Man* series led by George Clark, which can now be found on Youtube, and by the *Time Team* programme on Channel Four. The latter group conducted wide ranging "geophys" surveys of the land immediately around the house. The results showed that buried beneath about three metres of the current field levels there lie the remains of considerable 13th century structures that



formed part of the original castle and its associated buildings.

Following a tour of the house with our host, thanks were given for his kindness in letting us into his home and presentations to a charity of his choice made. We all wished him well with what is clearly a lifelong project.

It was then on to the Sportsman's Rest at nearby Peterston super Ely for an excellent home cooked lunch. Thanks were proffered to Beverly Tonkin for all her hard work in planning and arranging a most memorable day.

Dick Buswell

Chair

With photos by John Sherwood

An invitation

Insole Court is holding an open day on Saturday 9th June 2018. This will be the first Heritage and Local History event to be held following the house's restoration. Insole Court is located in Fairwater Road, Llandaff, Cardiff CF5 2LN. Local societies, associations, organisations, are being cordially invited to take part in this event.

If you would like to visit with Cowbridge History Society, please let Dick Tonkin know on chsoc@hotmail.co.uk or 01446 772704. Further details will be available at a later date.

Town Wall Markers

As you will recall from a previous newsletter, the question of the missing Town Wall markers was raised with Waitrose a few months ago. Since Waitrose had failed to act on this or let us know what they were doing, our Chair wrote to them again in January and they have responded that they will be replacing the markers shortly. Prior to doing so, they are looking into the method of installation in the hope that the replacements will remain more firmly attached to the road.

WarGen follow-up

Following our encouragement to members to participate in this project, at least one has sent in her wartime memories which can now be seen on the website <http://www.wargen.org>. Even if you don't have anything to contribute, you may like to read what others have written, throwing further light on a period of history that will soon pass from the nation's collective memory.

Archaeology in Cowbridge

Many of you will have observed archaeological excavations being carried out on the building site (right) at the back of Westgate Street. We will of course keep you updated, as and when we receive further information.



MONTHLY PROGRAMME FOR 2018

**Cowbridge History Society meetings take place in the Lesser Hall, Town Hall, Cowbridge
Talks start at 7.30pm on the first Friday of each month unless otherwise shown.**

PLEASE NOTE that visitors and guests are always welcome to attend the monthly meeting on payment of a one-off fee of £1.50 per meeting.

Any member who has not yet paid for the 2017 - 18 season may do so at any time. The membership fees are unchanged at £7.50 per person, offering exceptionally good value. Any cheques should be made payable to "Cowbridge History Society" and can be sent to the Treasurer at Stallcourt Mews, Llanblethian, Cowbridge CF71 7JU.

Spring 2018

- 13th March** CHARTER DAY TRIP
A report on the Charter Day trip can be seen on page 5 of this newsletter
- 6th April** *"King of all Balloons": The First Aerial Crossing of the Bristol Channel and Other Early Aerial Adventures over Wales*
Mark Davies
- 4th May** ***AGM of Cowbridge History Society***
Followed by:
The Welsh Religious Revival of 1904-05
Chris Turner

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to the Secretary at dicktonkin@btinternet.com for potential publication in the next newsletter, or may be brought along to the next monthly meeting.

April 2018

Dear Member(s),

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's 6th Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.00 p.m. on Friday 4th May 2018 in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge Town Hall; doors will be open from 6.30. The AGM will be followed at 7.30 by a talk on The Welsh Religious Revival of 1904/5 by Chris Turner.

The AGM agenda is:

1. Welcome and Introduction by Rev. Norman Williams, Joint President

2. Apologies for absence

3. Approval of the minutes of the AGM of 5th May 2017

4. Officers' Annual Report for the year ending 5th April 2018 by Chairperson Dick Buswell.

5. Presentation and Adoption of the accounts for the year ending 5th April 2018 by Joint Honorary Treasurer Beverly Tonkin.

6. Election of the Committee of the Society's officers

The present Executive Committee consists of one of the Society's Joint Presidents, the Chairperson, the Secretary/ Programme Secretary, the Joint Treasurers, the Publications Officer and three ordinary, i.e. non-officer, members (of which there could be five). These positions are currently occupied by Brian James, Dick Buswell, Dick Tonkin, Beverly Tonkin and Keith Jones, Deborah Fisher, Betty Alden, Don Gerrard and Chris Turner all of whom have agreed to stand for election and have been provisionally nominated by the Executive Committee. These positions, save that of Joint President, are open to any fully paid-up member of the Society. Any further nominations for membership of the committee must be received by the Secretary not less than ten days before the date of the Annual General Meeting; such nominations being signed by a member of the Society and by the person therein nominated. All elections for which there is more than one nominee for a single position shall be by secret ballot of the members present at the Annual General Meeting.

7. Presentation of Award to David Francis by Chairperson Dick Buswell.

8. Conduct of such other business as may be necessary; ten days' notice of such business being given in writing to the Secretary.

Yours sincerely,

Dick Tonkin, Hon. Sec.

N.B. Please bring this agenda with you; the draft minutes of last year's AGM are overleaf. Copies of the draft accounts will be available to view at the AGM.

Cowbridge History Society

Registered Charity 1094061

Minutes of the 5th AGM held at 7.00pm on 5th May 2017 in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge.

1. Introduction. The Rev. Norman Williams, the Society's Joint President, started the meeting by welcoming all those present. He complimented the Society's members, committee and officers on another successful year; the 43rd since the pre-cursor Cowbridge and District Local History Society was formed. He revealed that it had followed earlier but short-lived attempts in the C19th and C20th to have a successful history society in the town. As a founding member he had had no expectation it would do so well. He opined that it is no small achievement that the Society continues to grow in strength and support. He then handed over the proceedings to Dick Buswell as Chairperson.

2. Apologies for Absence. Apologies from Betty Alden and Chris Turner

3. Approval of Minutes of the AGM of 6th May 2016 The draft minutes of the 2016 AGM had been distributed with the AGM Notice. As no amendments were suggested the Chair proposed they be approved; passed without objection.

4. Officers' Report. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee's Officers, reported on the past year's activities. He commenced by drawing attention to the strong membership of over 100 which is surprising for a town with so small a population and went on to thank individual members of the committee for the splendid support they have given and for the hard work they have put in on the Society's behalf. The Chair then moved onto the new addition to our range of publications, *Cowbridge and Llanblethian: An Historical Medley*. This book of essays was edited by Brian Ll. James and printed by Keith Brown and Sons Ltd. He reported that the committee has approved the idea of an Occasional Publications series to be edited by Deborah Fisher who will oversee their publication. These will be shorter than our usual books; the first will be David Francis's book "Llanharry, Llanannor and District: A Memoir".

Betty Alden came in for special mention for her management of the History Room in Old Hall dealing with an increasing number of enquiries, donations and visitors with the assistance of her three helpers. The digitisation project was reported to continue to make good progress with the end possibly in sight. The team is close to being able to set up a demonstration of the capabilities of the project in the near future.

The showing of *Paths of Glory* was not a success. The Chair reported that before future showings of films the support of the membership will be gauged.

Finally, the Chair reported that the Society has continued to respond, where appropriate, to planning matters that may affect the historic environment of Cowbridge.

5. Presentation and Adoption of Accounts.

Beverly Tonkin drew members' attention to copies of the accounts that had been put out on the seats for inspection. She reported that the past year has been successful with membership fees of £802.50, net income from the Charter Day trip of £212.82, Gift Aid of £152.52 and £78.08 from catering, largely because the cakes are provided either at no cost or very low cost by the volunteers. A spontaneous and vigorous round of applause was given by the meeting at this point to the catering team.

The film expenses as they appear in the accounts includes payment of £105.00 for the previous year's film the invoice for which wasn't received until this financial year so two performance licence fees appear in this year's accounts.

Expenses include printing the Newsletters; Robert Cope's research on the window at Holy Cross and postage, only £95 went to speakers due to the generosity of those Members who gave talks without taking payment for them.

The largest outgoing this year was the publication of the "Medley". Publishing costs were £2,654.20 and sales total £1,167.98. The shortfall will reduce as copies are sold although it is unlikely that the total expenditure will be recouped and this was recognised by the Committee. However, the publication of material relevant to the history of the area is one of the charitable objects of the Society. The Committee will be exploring less expensive publishing options. The Society still has a healthy £5,812.03 in hand.

The History Room continues to provide a resource for members and the public. The annual rental is £120 but, two annual rents were invoiced to the Society in this year. It is hoped that when the Digitising Project goes live, a small amount of income will be generated by sales of copies of documents. Although there is a deficit of £1,490.38, had the Society not published the Medley, paid two annual rents for the History Room or had two film performance licences to pay we would have made a profit of about £220! Overall, the Society is being run within its means and is employing its funds to further the Society's charitable objects to publish information and provide value to the membership.

Beverly Tonkin invited questions; as there were none the Chair proposed that the accounts be adopted, seconded by Colin Ryland and passed unopposed with a show of hands.

6. Elections to the Committee. Dick Tonkin confirmed that all current members of the committee were willing to continue, that the nomination of Chris Turner will leave the number of committee members unchanged from last year and that no further nominations for the Committee had been received. He proposed that the current committee members together with Chris Turner be elected en bloc as the committee for the coming year. This was seconded by Rev. Norman Williams and passed without objection.

7. Other Business. No matters were raised.

8. Closure. There being no other business the formal meeting was closed at 7.20pm.

I accept this as a true record of the meeting held on 5th May 2017.

Signed Chair, Date