

# NEWSLETTER



*A new Prince of Wales*

of Cowbridge History Society

*Autumn 2022*

# ***End of an era; the beginning of another***

## **The Queen**

It would be wrong not to mention the recent passing of Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom, whose unprecedentedly long reign was regarded by many as a second “Elizabethan age”, partly because of the many changes and developments that have occurred in Britain since 1952, when Elizabeth acceded to the throne at the age of 25. We now have both another monarch and, perhaps equally importantly for us in Cowbridge, a new Prince and Princess of Wales, whose role in the life of our country may be significant or otherwise, depending on their commitment to it.

Crowds of people thronged the streets of Llandaff recently in order to get a glimpse of a man who had been seen in Cardiff many times before, but never in his role as monarch. Does he look and behave differently now? It is hard to tell. The death of the Queen not only brought sadness, along with celebration of her achievements, it brought hope for the future, perhaps in the form of “modernisation” of the monarchy or an increased empathy with ordinary people and the trials we face in our everyday lives.

Perhaps members would like to send us their personal memories of the Queen, especially if they met or saw her locally in the Cowbridge area, for publication in a future edition of the newsletter.

## **A change of venue**

As members will be aware, at some point during lockdown, the Town Hall staff booked out the Lesser Hall, which we have used for many years for our Friday evening meetings, to another group, and we were forced to relocate to the **Maindy Hall at Ramoth Chapel**. Unfortunately, although we were told we would be able to return to the Lesser Hall this autumn, but this turned out to be misleading and so all our in-person meetings from now until further notice will be held at Ramoth. We once again thank the Rev Heather Weddell for her assistance in enabling events to go ahead.

It was decided recently that we will experiment with holding the **January and February meetings via Zoom**, so that members don't need to venture out of their homes in the part of the year that is most associated with inclement weather. We will of course review this decision in the light of members' response.

## **An anniversary**

Almost fifty years ago, in 1974, a group of individuals got together to create the former “Cowbridge & District Local History Society”. The society later merged into Cowbridge Record Society, which changed its title to the present “Cowbridge History Society” which you all know and love. We nevertheless think it is important to recognise this anniversary, and we welcome ideas from members on how to celebrate it. 2024 is not far away, and we must start planning soon.

*Deb Fisher  
Publications Officer*

## Talks of the season

The Annual General Meeting was well attended and the committee was re-elected as follows:

**Chair:** Dick Buswell

**Secretary:** Dick Tonkin

**Joint Treasurers:** Keith Jones, Beverly Tonkin

**Publications officer:** Deb Fisher

**Committee:**

Betty Alden

Don Gerrard

Chris Turner

At committee meetings we have discussed how to recruit new members to the society. We very much value our long-standing members, but the average age is gradually increasing and we would value additional input from younger members as well as more committee members to share the essential tasks. Please contact the Secretary, or any other committee member, if you are interested.

The AGM was followed by our final talk of the season, by our Chair, Dick Buswell, on the subject of "Toll Roads and Trusts in South Wales". Dick talked about the origins of the movement to improve Britain's roads in the 17th and 18th century, and showed his wide geographical knowledge by means of old maps that revealed the extent of the toll road network.

## News from the Local History Room (Old Hall)

The Jeff Alden Room continues to open for visitors and helpers on Wednesday mornings, but, as previously mentioned in the Newsletter, the team is getting smaller and is now in serious need of additional assistants if the room is to continue to open regularly. Visitor numbers to the room also fluctuate too – sometimes four or five people in a morning, occasionally none. Some come in the hope that we are holding a History Society meeting! [Note: The committee would certainly not be averse to attempting to hold small meetings on specific subjects if there were a demand, but our members will need to let us know.]

The main use being made of the archive is that of the digital archive. It is heartening that people from all over the world, and the UK in particular, are accessing information that has been added by us to the 'People's Collection Wales' website. This connects them with our History Society website and enquiries filter through to me. I also receive many via my own email address, by telephone and by personal contact. I find our archive invaluable (especially with its 'search' facility) in my attempts to help with these enquiries.

In the room at Old Hall, we keep an A3 scanner, the black and white laser printer, a colour inkjet printer and a desktop computer and monitor. Copies of the archive are held in Cowbridge Library and Cowbridge Museum (in the Town Hall), but they appear to be under-used by the general public. CHS has been paying for the use of the room at Old Hall on Fridays as well as Wednesdays. Several Friday mornings were spent on training a volunteer in digitisation techniques, but that person has now withdrawn. The room helpers can also scan documents, but are mostly not CHS members and are not interested in the recording of the data that goes with them. We would be very happy to hear from anyone who is able to offer help. If you have children or

grandchildren of school age, it may be worth letting them know that time spent on this type of volunteering can be counted towards Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Accessions and enquiries in recent weeks include the deposit of a whole collection of photographs and documents relating to David Watts (ex-mayor, Freeman of the Borough, auctioneer, founder of Watts & Morgan) and family, Llandough Mill and St Quentin's, Llanblethian, and the Bridge Garage. We have also received an archaeological report on the site of the old Post Office, and information relating to the wooden bungalow once sited on Mount Ida and Windmill Lane. Numerous descendants of local families have been seeking and providing family history information. We regularly supply pictures and articles to the *Glamorgan Star*.

*Betty Alden, August 2022*

## The Dictionary of Cowbridge Biography

The dictionary is a compendium of people born before 1900 who have a significant connection to Cowbridge and its district or who have made an important contribution to the life of the town or surrounding area.

Suggestions for inclusion are welcome and can be submitted to Chris Turner ([chrisbturner@live.com](mailto:chrisbturner@live.com)), who edits the Dictionary. Chris can also provide advice on relevance and word limits, but by way of example see below.

### Rhys, Thomas (1778-1851)

Schoolmaster

Master and owner of the Eagle Academy in Cowbridge.

The school had been established by Rhys's uncle Thomas Williams (1759-1839) around 1780 and moved into the building occupied by the former Spread Eagle public house in c. 1794. Williams brought in Rhys initially to be a teacher but also as a partner in running the school. Rhys took over as Master in 1810 when Williams retired due to ill-health. Rhys's first wife Joanna died in 1815 but in 1816 he married Sarah Simpkins. Sarah's sister was Elizabeth Simpkins who ran a successful drapery business in Cowbridge and owned a number of properties in Llanblethian. Sarah was known as a very kindly woman who acted as a matron for the school boarders. The school became very successful with many famous people receiving their early education there. Iolo Morganwg, a good friend of Rhys, sent his three daughters (Peggy, Nancy and Tally) and his son Taliesin to the School. It seems that the School was well regarded and former pupils recalled Rhys as a "worthy, ingenious and kindly man, who wore drab breeches and white stockings." When Rhys retired in 1840 an advertisement appeared in the *Cambrian* (21 March 1840) announcing that the long established "Writing Academy "... having attained a considerable reputation, a favourable opportunity now offers itself for re-opening the School, with a reasonable prospect of success."

Rhys resided at Penlline House and played a full part in Cowbridge's civic life being appointed as one of the town's Bailiffs on three separate occasions in the 1830s. He was also a trustee of the Bridgend Turnpike Trust.

Rhys's eldest daughter was Mary Catherine Pendrill Llewelyn (1811-74) who, although she married Rev Richard Pendrill Llewelyn against her father's wishes, became a well-known and respected writer, poet and translator of Welsh. His younger daughter Elizabeth was born in 1816 and his eldest son Charles Thomas, who assisted him in the School for a time before becoming an

attorney, was born in 1819. Rhys also had another son Thomas, born 1824. His wife Sarah died in 1828 having been in ill health for some time. According to the 1851 census his younger daughter Elizabeth resided with her aunt Elizabeth Simkins and, interestingly, appeared to be the sole beneficiary of her father's estate.

Rhys died at Penlline House in July 1851 and is buried in Llanblethian churchyard. In recording his death, the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian noted "The thousands whom he educated are scattered all over the known regions of the globe; and the ability, and integrity, he displayed in the unremitting discharge of his laborious duties as a preceptor of youth were universally acknowledged."

#### Bibliography

B Ll James and David J Francis, *Cowbridge and Llanblethian Past and Present* (1979)

B Ll. James, "The Eagle Academy" in *Echoes of Old Cowbridge* (2011).

*Cambrian*, 8 March 1828, 21 March 1840, 11 November, 1843.

*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 2 August 1851.

*Chris Turner*

## 2022-23 Subscriptions

For those who have not yet paid their subs for 2022/23, we would appreciate it if you could either send a cheque, payable to "Cowbridge History Society", to Beverly Tonkin at Porth y Felin, Town Mill Road, Cowbridge, CF71 7BE, or transfer the fees by BACS to Cowbridge History Society account no.00034614 at Barclays Bank UK PLC, sort code 20 12 25 **using their surname and first initial as a reference.** A standing order could be set up if preferred.

The current subscription rate is £7.50 per person.

*Beverly Tonkin, Treasurer*

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to [dicktonkin@btinternet.com](mailto:dicktonkin@btinternet.com) for potential publication in the next newsletter.

## **PROGRAMME FOR 2022-23**

Talks will be on the first Friday of each month in person at Maindy Hall, Ramoth Chapel (depending on Covid-19 rules, if any)

### 2022

**Note that the AGM begins at 7pm and the talk at 7.30pm. All other talks begin at 7.30pm.**

- October 7th**      *Truth is stranger than fiction: writing accessible history*; Deb Fisher and Phil Carradice
- November 4th**    *The view from the Rocking Stone - some idiosyncrasies of Pontypridd history*; Brian Davies
- December 2nd**    *RAF St Athan and the Local Community*; Sue Pattinson  
***With mince pies and wine***

### 2023

**Note that the January and February meetings will be held via Zoom. (A link will be e-mailed to members a day or two before the meeting.)**

- January 6th**      **Zoom talk:** *Edging the City - a Journey round the Border of Cardiff*; Peter Finch
- February 3rd**    **Zoom talk:** *The Welsh Not, education and the Anglicization of 19th Century Wales*; Martin Johnes
- March 3rd**        *Fannie Margaret Thomas and the Women's Suffrage Movement in South Wales*; Ryland Wallace
- March 13th**      Charter Day Celebration: Talk and guided tour at Nantgarw China Works, with lunch and refreshments
- April 14th**      *Glamorgan's Greatest Generation: Memories of WW2 Life in South Wales*; Malcolm Cowper
- May 5th**         AGM at 7pm, followed by *Railways and Society: a Vale perspective up to 1900*; Chris Turner

TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS, PLEASE: -

ONLY attend in-person meetings if you have no Covid-19 symptoms (e.g. cough, temperature, loss of sense of taste/smell etc.) and if you have had a booster vaccination within the past 12 months. Maintain 1 metre or more distance where possible. The use of face masks is optional.