

COWBRIDGE AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 28

FEBRUARY 1988

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Charter Day Dinner will be held this year on Friday, 11th March at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m. in Cowbridge Town Hall.

Tickets are £6. If you wish to go, but have not yet got your ticket, you should quickly contact Mrs Ruth Sherwood on Cowbridge 2119.

There is to be an excursion to Warwick on Saturday, 21st May 1988, leaving Cowbridge at 8.30 a.m. Mrs Jean Dale is collecting names for this trip and you can see her at a meeting, or contact her by phone on Cowbridge 2439.

March 4th

'The History of the Diocese of Llandaff'
Speaker : The Rev. 'd Canon W. D. Davies

April 6th

'How to get a Coat of Arms - A general introduction to Heraldry'
Speaker : J. C. Soulsby

May 6th To be announced later.



'A. N. Old Bovi an V. C.'

We are grateful to Dr Michael Duggan for producing this most interesting article and allowing us to print it. The first part appears in this issue, and in the May Newsletter we shall print the second part which considers the type of evidence available and information about the source documents used in the research.

The Society meets on the first Friday of the month at 8.00 p.m. in the Lesser Hall of Cowbridge Town Hall.
All are welcome.

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St Hilary ST HILARY

OCTOBER MEETING

The talk for October was 'The Life and Times of William Thomas, the Diarist' given by Roy Denning.

William Thomas came from Michaelston-super-Ely in the 18th century. He was the son of a builder, and he kept school and collected taxes. Obviously an intelligent man, he kept a diary of the doings of anyone of note (and some who were not) living in the Vale. The diary goes from 1762-1795, though there was an earlier one. He was considered a 'wizard' on account of his activities.

David Jones of Wallington, who was born in Llanblethian in 1834, made abstracts of the diary in a large volume so as to make the rather colloquial diary more understandable.

The diary itself is a remarkable document of the age, with a day to day account of deaths and births and of the financial and creditable status of many citizens. He was given to writing of the faults of the populace - of people who were in debt, or who had been to prison. He was very forthright in his personal comments on character making it easily discernable who he liked or disliked. The local nobility came under close scrutiny, all the infidelities, debts and even illnesses being noted. The diary leaves an account to posterity, of the everyday life of a community which would never, otherwise, have been known.

Roy Denning has studied the diary over a long period and written his own interpretation of parts. He showed slides of the area where William Thomas lived and worked and gave a most interesting account of a local man who, most unusually for his day, kept a detailed diary. The evening was completed by several questions from interested listeners.

R. S.

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NOVEMBER MEETING

At the November meeting, the talk was a fascinating one with the title 'Cholera - Epidemics in Cardiff and the Vale' by Len Davies, well known to all present.

Cardiff, in the 1801 census, had a population of around 1800 and only started to expand with the building of the Bute dock and the Taff Vale railway. With the potato famines in Ireland, many destitute Irish came, illegally, across from Ireland to South Wales as ballast on ships, landing around Aberthaw and making their way to Cardiff. Cardiff became overcrowded, with little sanitation or drainage. Thomas Andrew Walker (who built Barry docks) first started look after the interests of the worker. A medical officer of health, Dr Payne, in 1839 realised the problems and did much to help improve the health of the area. He was on the Cardiff Union Board of Guardians till 1891. At a 1848 meeting, Thomas Webster Ramell from London arrived as an inspector and soon became aware of the awful health problems.

Many of the problems were made worse by the geology of the area. Cardiff is very flat - the highest part being 10ft. above neap tides and the lowest 2ft. below spring high. There are two rivers the Taff (a fierce river) and the Ely (gentle river), with a dyke at the Newport end of the town to prevent floods. Floods have occurred from 1500 to the present date, the worst being in 1607. Cardiff lies on gravel with mud the sea up to 30ft. thick. Because of the unsanitary conditions - no proper drainage, with open sewers, the water supply coming from a contaminated canal and river, and only one good pump draining water deep enough to avoid problems, it is not surprising that disease was rife. At the height of the influx of population, housing was offered at 2/- to 4/- per week, with sometimes over 40 to a small house, and no toilet facilities.

The first bad cholera epidemic was in 1849, introduced from Ireland. This epidemic was prevalent also in Edinburgh and Wolverhampton. May 1849 saw the first Cardiff death, and the epidemic travelled down the geographic line of the gravel/mud interface. Out of a population of 16693 there were 347 deaths. There was next a typhus epidemic and the medical world tried to clean up Cardiff with whitewash and sanitary regulations. The next epidemic was in 1853, brought in

ship. The Common Lodging Act of 1854 helped conditions, when it was enforced, the streets were much cleaner and the Ely works provided a better water supply.

Cardiff being a port was now the main problem and in 1863 yellow fever came to South Wales by a ship travelling from Cuba to Swansea. A seamen's hospital was opened in Cardiff on a frigate (with the translated name of 'Wood Nymph') where sailors could get free treatment. In 1873 Flatholm was made into a hospital and, later, a smallpox hospital was set up in Barry. Finally, in 1890, all ships had to be visited by medical officers.

The fact that, after the first cholera epidemic, Cardiff came out very well with fewer deaths than average was due, in a large part, to the work of Dr Payne and Thomas Webster Ramell.

Questions from the audience completed a most interesting and thought provoking talk.

R. S.

R.S.

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HIGH SCHOOL - COWBRIDGE.

DECEMBER MEETING

A capacity audience attended to hear the Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture. Arthur Peplow was unable to give the lecture as planned, but one of his colleagues, Brian Scott was able to substitute for him. His subject was 'Recurrent themes in mediaeval church art'.

He took as his reference point the magnificent rood screen of the church of St. Fiacre in south-west Brittany, in the Morbihan. This screen dates from 1480 and is in flamboyant Gothic style, highly decorated and painted.

Most rood screens in Britain were destroyed at the Reformation, but Mr Scott was able to show slides of carvings in the stone-work of English churches and also wood carvings, particularly those on misericords, which had been executed during the same period as the screen. Similar figures were common to many of these.

For instance, on the St. Fiacre screen there is a figure of a musician with what appears to be bagpipes and this occurs in many English churches such as that at Boston Stump in Lincolnshire where the 'bagpipes' are depicted as a cat (or perhaps a pig).

All the seven deadly sins are another recurrent theme. A particular character, unfamiliar to us today, but ubiquitous in mediaeval church art, is Tutivillus, the demon of all evil. He usually carries a scroll whereon to write down all the evil things people say, or the good they omit to say. He can be seen on a misericord at Ely Cathedral and at St. Lawrence, Ludlow, amongst many others.

Reynard the Fox appears at St. Fiacre dressed as a priest and also at the Minsters of Beverley and York, and at Great Malvern Priory.

Mr Scott explained that in the rood screen at St. Fiacre all the devilish characters appear in the lower part of the screen. In the upper part, Mary the mother of Christ is depicted, and at the highest level is Christ on the Cross.

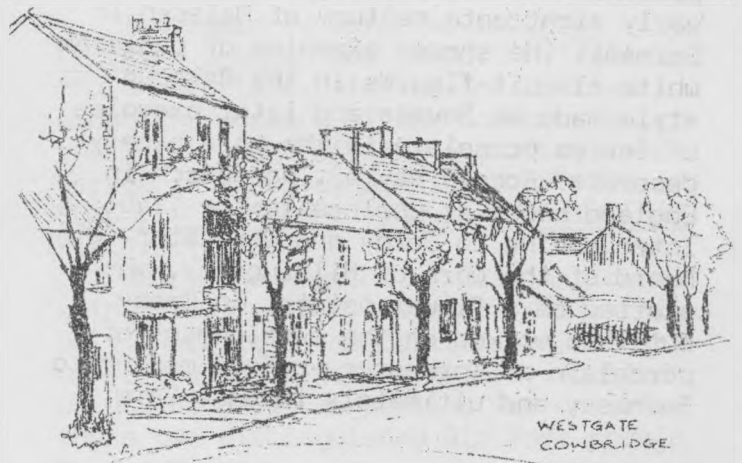
The members will probably be looking much more closely at the carvings in old churches in future.

Mrs Yvonne Weeding expressed thanks to Mr Scott for an absorbing lecture.

Following the meeting, punch and mince pies were served by Mrs K. Cran and Mrs R. Sherwood.

M. H.

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WESTGATE
COWBRIDGE.

JANUARY MEETING

On a miserable, wet evening, the Lower Hall was again filled to capacity to hear Dennis Heal talk about the effects of history on the development and design of antiques. He demonstrated this with the aid of slides of furniture, ceramics, silver and ivories.

Arch-like decoration on early English oak furniture can be traced back through Romanesque (Norman) architectural design to such Roman building structures as the Pont du Gard in Provence. By the 18th century other woods such as mahogany were being used and furniture designed by Robert Adams of graceful design deriving from classical Greek style. This was natural enough for an era when the Grand Tour of classical sites was part of a gentleman's education. Furniture from the early 19th century could have decoration of Egyptian motifs inspired by an interest in Egypt at the time of the Battle of the Nile.

Turning to ceramics, Mr Heal showed some beautiful examples of ancient earthenware, including a Spanish plate dated 1340 with a design of Moorish style and a piece dating from 1525 with grotesque design influenced by decoration found in contemporary excavations in Rome of the Golden House of Nero.

The art of making fine porcelain had been known in China for many centuries and Mr Heal showed slides of examples of the 1,000 pieces of porcelain found a few years ago in the wreck of an old Dutch ship which foundered in the mid-eighteenth century. It had been carrying porcelain and tea from China.

Mr Heal then told the story of the search for a method of producing fine porcelain in Europe, beginning in the early eighteenth century at Meissen in Germany. (He showed examples of unglazed white biscuit figures in the Baroque style made at Sevres and later examples of Sevres porcelain in the more highly decorated Rococo style). The search in England began at Chelsea in the 1740s, later moving to Derby and Worcester. We heard of the work of Billingsley, who started as a flower painter in Derby, but then worked on the development of porcelain at Worcester, before moving to Swansea, and ultimately to Nant Garw.

Changing design of silver through the years was demonstrated by a snuff box of the Restoration period, a silver-gilt ewer of 1730 in the French Baroque style and silver-gilt candlesticks in the later Rococo style. The neo-classical design of Robert Adams's furniture was also seen in a 1780 candlestick of old Sheffield plate.

Mr Heal closed with a selection of slides of the art-deco period of the 1920s, the figures reflecting the emancipation of women, following the 1914-1916 war.

Mrs Weeding, the chairman, thanked Mr Heal for a most informative and interesting evening.

M. H.

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LLANBLETHIAN CASTLE

At a meeting held in Llanblethian on 12th January, representatives of the Welsh Office and CADW stated their intentions about the purchase of Llanblethian Castle. A straightforward purchase of the land from its present owner will initially be sought, but, if necessary, compulsory purchase will be undertaken.

The area includes the castle grounds, the field opposite Castle Cottage, and 30m wide strip of land below the castle walls in two of the 'Three Fields'. Some of the land opposite Castle Cottage will eventually become a small parking area for visitors; work on the building would include clearing the site, removing ivy from the walls, and making good - but no attempts are to be made to reconstruct the castle.

We will try to keep you informed of further developments.

J. A.

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'A. N. OLD BOVIAN V. C. '

Cowbridge has undergone an astonishing change of character over the past decade, which reflects not least an influx of new residents in numbers enormous in comparison with the previous few centuries. The days when the School Bell divided up the day as surely as the cattle-market divided up the week must surely seem extremely remote and unreal to the inhabitants of Toytown-on-Tweed (for this is how many seem to regard the place, I regret to say).

It is every year more obvious, therefore, to those who take some interest in Cowbridge, how great a blessing it was that Iolo Davies wrote his masterly history of Cowbridge Grammar School shortly before our elected representatives saw fit to dispose of it. No prophet is accepted in his own country; and, just as few, perhaps, realise how prestigious an institution the School once was, long years ago, so few, too, are aware that A Certaine Schoole (note 1.) is not just a collection of anecdotes filling out a list of names, but a finely-written and authoritative history, carefully researched and, where necessary, closely argued.

There are, nevertheless, a number of loose ends. Some of these may be retrieved in the original manuscript of the book, for much information had to be omitted in order to keep the final draft

within reasonable limits (note 2.). But other problems cannot be solved with ease; for example, Iolo disposed once and for all of the myth of the School's origin as a bangor, a seminary or "university", attached to the clas of St. Illtud at Llanilltud Fawr. But he could not entirely exclude the possibility that a chantry-school existed in the town prior to the Stradlings' foundation, the latter being intended to improve upon it or replace it after its dissolution. (Hopkin-James made great play of this idea in his own version of the myth) Similarly, Iolo did not fully explain how the School continued to function while the original Schoolhouse was demolished and the present building constructed, in the mid-nineteenth century. This gap led someone to propose that parts of the original building were actually preserved and "built into" its successor, a notion used in a recent and ludicrous article about "the Ghost of Lost Dorm." in The Vale Star. I should mention, therefore, that the Schoolhouse of the Stradlings was totally demolished (apart from the building immediately to the east of the South Gate, lately known as "the Boot-House", which includes part of the Town Wall). During the reconstruction the School continued in Cae Cady House, now the residence of Dr Mellor and her family (note 3.).

One of the most enigmatic of such problems is the identity of the Old Boy who, in the nineteenth century, was awarded the Victoria Cross, and I should say at the outset that, very sadly, I have not been able to solve it. What I have arrived at is the name of the most likely candidate, and I strongly suspect that that is where the matter will rest for eternity.

The award is referred to in A Certaine School thus (1, pp. 115, 123): "More important... is the information about the working of the School... in the latter part of 1864 and after, preserved in a survey published in 1870 [Reports of Schools Inquiry Commission. M. A. K. D.]..."

Under the heading of Distinctions gained "elsewhere" there are two entries only. Here it seems particularly unfortunate that this Survey rigidly avoided using the names of pupils, for one of these two distinguished Old Boys should by rights have a specially honoured place in the School's history. I refer..

to the one... who, on some farther field, had won the Victoria Cross."

Apparently, the information provided in the Survey related to 1864, inspection of premises taking place at a later date.

The Victoria Cross itself was instituted on January 29th 1856, and since the Old Boviian recipient must have left the School by late 1864, eight years need be considered in the search for his identity. But the situation is more complicated than such a short period would imply. During the whole of World War II, for example, only one member of the Welch Regiment (that was the official spelling) received the award (it was Lt. Tasker Watkins, of Heol Shringig, Nelson, and Pontypridd Grammar, now Lord Justice Watkins, V.C.); during the Great War, when many, many more fell, there were still only three recipients in the Welch. In early days, however, the Victoria Cross was used much as the Military Cross and its equivalent, the Military Medal, are used today. This is not to devalue the award in any sense. But it does mean that what would be a very easy task, had the Old Boviian received the decoration this century, is rendered difficult in the extreme.

Luckily, there exists an important source, V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments (note 4.)'. This book, the work of a retired officer, is obviously a labour of love, and it records brief biographies of recipients of the Victoria Cross qualified for inclusion, giving their places of education, if known. The book is wide-ranging, for as well as those who served in regiments described as "Welsh", including those prior to the period when they were so described (the Welch Regiment was not always called thus, for instance, and originally had no Welsh connections at all), the author cites anyone who hailed from Wales or resided there when the award was made.

I have made certain assumptions in my attempt to find the Old Boviian in question, which are not entirely valid. These I will now discuss.

1. During the mid-nineteenth century, Cowbridge School was in a reasonably good state. For almost the entire first half of that century, the Rev'd Dr William Williams, the aptly-nick-named "Old Doctor", was Headmaster, but he was



assisted in his declining years by his Second Master, the Rev'd Thomas Edmondson, who effectively ran the place. There is evidence that it continued to flourish, despite Dr Williams' great age, until his death in 1847. Subsequently, the Rev'd Dr Hugo Harper became Headmaster; he was a remarkable man, who moved to Sherborne after a mere three years and transformed it – it had less than five pupils when he arrived, although he took several Boviians with him – into one of the country's leading schools. Finally, there was the Rev'd W. Holt Beever, who maintained something, at least, of the standard to which Harper had raised the School, for a while.

In short, the School was attractive to parents. On the other hand, it was not a Harrow or a Winchester, not ever; and Wales itself appeared to be semi-barbarous to the majority of Englishmen at that time – it was in 1847 that the famous, or infamous, Report on Education in Wales known to Welshmen as Brad y Llyf'rau Gleision was published.

2. It seems very likely, therefore, that most of the boys at Cowbridge would have been Welsh, or had connections in Wales' – relatives living locally, perhaps.

3. For similar reasons, Cowbridge School would not have attracted those of high station in the society of those days – the sons of peers and baronets.

These suppositions are confirmed from the list of forty (out of forty-four) boys contained in the Report of 1870 which mentions the recipient of the Victoria Cross (l. pp. 117-118). All the dayboys, obviously, are local (though these, too, might have included boys staying with relatives); three of the boarders are from London, of whom two are possibly brothers, while the rest hail from South Wales. They are all from backgrounds that would now be described as "middle class".

4. This being the case, it seems likely that the recipient of the decoration from Cowbridge School would appear among the "V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments".

5. One can certainly exclude those recipients whose education is described as "rudimentary" or were illiterate (not a few).

After eliminating recipients on these various grounds, only three possible candidates remain. Two of these are Scottish, and there seems to be no reason why they should have been to Cowbridge. One man is left, and he has a few points in his favour, in addition.

Henry Raby was born in Llanelli, where his grandfather was a pioneer industrialist, in 1827; his father had business in France which kept him, and his wife, abroad for lengthy periods, and Henry and his brother, Arthur, seem to have made their home at their grandparents' house. Only one year of his education is accounted for - 1840-1841 when he attended Sherborne School; after this, presumably, he was bought a commission as a midshipman (an officer-cadet, to all intents and purposes), for he was by then in his fifteenth year.

A naval detachment fought on land at the Battle of Sevastopol, and among them was Henry Raby, now a Commander. On June 18th, 1855, he led two ratings in a victorious skirmish under heavy fire, personally rescuing a wounded soldier from open country. For this action, he and his two companions were each awarded the Victoria Cross. Raby subsequently played an important part in the suppression of the slave-trade and was wounded in a ship-of-the-line off the China station. He retired as a Rear-Admiral, remaining on the Retired List until his death at Southsea in 1907; by then, he had received Turkish and Sardinian decorations, and been made a Companion of the Order of the Bath and a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.

Raby was obviously a faithful servant of the Empire on Which the Sun Never Set, and his brother, likewise an old Shireburnian, was cast in a similar mould. He served in the consular service at Maine, U.S.A.; Scutari, on the Black Sea; Jeddah, in the Khalifa; and on the Dardanelles. Eventually he, too, was decorated for faithful service as H.M. Consul-General in Livonia and White Russia.

What is uniquely interesting about Henry Raby, the old sea-dog, is that he was the first man ever to wear the Victoria Cross. Although not the first man to be cited (and it is after the citation in the London Gazette that one is entitled to use the letters), he was the senior officer of the Senior Service present at the first investiture, on June 29th, 1857, and therefore the first to receive the decoration from the hand of the Queen. It is recorded that Her Majesty was so excited that she thrust the pin through Raby's uniform jacket and into his chest, apologising when she drew blood; but Raby remained stoutly at attention and did not flinch, replying, in the finest British tradition, "Never fear, Ma'am!" Raby's decorations are in the Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth; his grave is at Southsea. It should be noted that the boys of Sherborne School were given a week off in his honour when he received his award, at the express command of the Queen.

(to be continued)

Notes :

1. Iolo Davies ; A Certaine Schoole. Cowbridge : D. Brown and Sons, 1967.
2. These manuscripts are available for examination at the Record Office, Mid-Glamorgan County Hall, Cardiff.
3. Iolo Davies : personal communication.
4. W. A. Williams : V.C.s of Wales and Welsh Regiments. Wrexham : Bridge Books, 1984.



THE OLD TOWN HALL, AND HIGH CROSS
(copied from an old painting).

MUSEUM NEWS

The Llanharry Iron Mine is the theme of Dr King's new exhibition. The iron from this mine was top rate ore and therefore highly valued during the last war. The first shaft was sunk in 1901, the second in 1910 and the third in 1921. The mine finally closed in 1975.

Mr Dauncey of Prisk has donated his excellent collection of minerals which he amassed in his years of working in the mine. The photographs were supplied by Mr Morris who is a keen photographer and the exhibition records the 30 years he worked in the mine.

Dr King is usually to be found with the exhibit when the Museum is open and he is interested in talking with anyone about the mine, or discussing and identifying minerals, fossils etc. found in the area.

M. E.

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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

- President : The Rev'd Norman E. Williams
- Hon. Chairman ; Mrs Yvonne Weeding
(Cowbridge 2878)
- Hon. Secretary : Mr John Miles
(Cowbridge 2270)
- Hon. Treasurer : Mrs Val Shannon
(Cowbridge 3957)
- Programme Secretary : Mrs G. Keay
(Cowbridge 2879)

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