

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society



Birmingham-born printer, Joseph Gibbs, in his garden at 23 Eastgate, about 1930
[Photo reproduced by kind permission of the family]

Christmas 2014/New Year 2015

A BUSY AUTUMN

What a busy season it's been.

There is only one candidate for the highlight of this autumn - Cowbridge History Society's screening of the 1969 classic film *Oh! What a Lovely War*, shown at the Town Hall on 12 November, shown as our contribution to the programme of centenary remembrance events. The final scene, in which Jack Smith, the final casualty of the Great War, totters through Elysian fields to his final resting place and the rolling green hills are gradually covered with thousands of white crosses, while an invisible choir of Tommies sings "And when they ask us how dangerous it was...", is one of the most memorable in cinematic history (blowing *Blackadder Goes Forth* clean out of the water).

Introduced to the audience by our knowledgeable Chair, Professor Dick Buswell, the film was directed by the recently-deceased Richard Attenborough and features a host of big name actors and actresses, including several members of the Redgrave family, Laurence Olivier and John Mills, as well as many lesser-known names who subsequently became familiar faces. Blink and you might miss the momentary appearances of such stars as Jack Hawkins, Paul Daneman and Susannah York.

Ice cream was served at the interval, and the round of appreciative applause as the film drew to a close showed how much the audience had enjoyed the evening. The only fly in the ointment was that Don Gerrard's illness meant we had to miss the planned introductory talk on the origins of the First World War; this will, I'm sure, resurface on a suitable future occasion. We would also like to hear from our members as to whether you would like a film screening to be an annual event, and if so, whether you have any suggestions for suitable films.

As it happened, the following Saturday was the date for the annual Rotary Club Charity Quiz, also held at the Town Hall. The History Society team of Deb and Dave Fisher, Jo Rawlins and Pamela Robson emerged clear winners, despite questions which all teams agreed were much more difficult than in previous years. The society, under its original name of Cowbridge Record Society, has a unique record of never having finished outside the first three places in the eleven years this quiz has been running, which means we have now donated a total of over £2000 in prize money to various deserving causes, which have included Marie Curie Cancer Care, Macmillan Nurses, Kidney Research, Cancer Research, and the Wales Air Ambulance. The recipient of our £250 contribution on this occasion was BLESMA (British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association), which we felt was particularly appropriate in this centenary year.

To return, for a moment, to the subject of that centenary, it's been noted that there are numerous historical events due for commemoration in 2015, and at least some of these are likely to be the subject of Friday evening talks. They include:

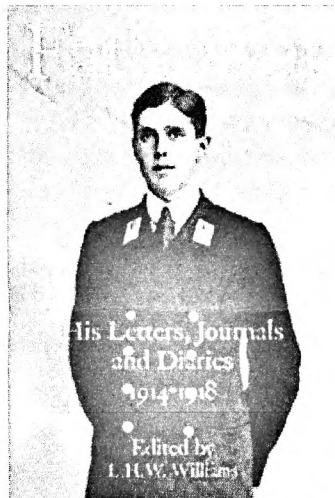
- 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta
- 600th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt
- 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo
- 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Welsh colony in Patagonia
- 100th anniversary of several major battles in the First World War

Some of these have a strong Welsh connection or even a local connection; others we merely recognise as important anniversaries because of their historical significance.



MORE BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reviewed a book about the Second World War in the previous issue, we now have one about the First World War for your consideration. A few years ago, Lawrie Williams edited the letters, journals and diaries of his "Uncle Fat", more formally known as Captain H W Williams, RN. It was originally published privately under the title *Fat's War*.



It covers his service in the First War, from being a cadet at Dartmouth in 1914, the Gallipoli campaign and then service in the North Sea until the surrender of the German fleet in 1918. He gives a very graphic account of his time, interspersed with occasional days on leave which he spent hunting from Bonvilston, and the book contains many very interesting photographs. The author informs us that it has now been published as an ebook and is available from Amazon at the very reasonable price of £2.99; proceeds will go to the charity "Help for Heroes". It has been formatted as an ebook by Mark Tanner of warletters.net.

By coincidence, one of the interviews I have conducted for our future title *Cowbridge and the Rural Vale* was with Mrs Thelma Whiting of Bonvilston, who worked for the Williams family as a cook and had many interesting stories to tell about her experiences working for what she described as "a very kind family". If you are wondering why the latter book is taking so long to get to publication, it is that, despite half a dozen requests in this newsletter, the *Gem* and at History Society meetings, absolutely no one has come forward from the general membership with ideas for additional interviewees who lived in the rural Vale in the mid to late 20th century. I know there are such people out there, whose memoirs will make interesting reading; I just need to find them.

Deborah Fisher
Publications Officer

NEWS FROM THE LOCAL HISTORY STUDIES ROOM

Respects were paid this last November to two of the young Cowbridge men killed in action during World War I: Arthur and Albert Gibbs. A recent visitor to the Local History Room is a descendant of this family, Mrs Vivienne Jones, who brought in numerous photographs and documents to add to our archive.

Joseph Gibbs, born in Sellyoak, Birmingham, in about 1864, had moved into Cowbridge by 1901. He was formerly a printer working for the *Glamorgan Gazette* in Bridgend, but came here to set up his own printing business at 64/66 Eastgate (now the Dogs' Trust shop) with his assistant David Brown. "Gibbs and Brown's", and later just "Brown's the printers" became a prominent Cowbridge business, continued to this day by family members.

In the 1911 census, Joseph Gibbs lived at 23 Eastgate, just up from Wadham's shop, with his wife Florence and their ten children. The First World War took a heavy toll on their lives. One son, Fred Gibbs, was reported missing in action in August 1916, and another, Albert, was killed near Ypres the following month. A further son, Arthur, who joined up later, was killed aged 19 in 1918. Joe Gibbs's young nephew Albert Sutton, who had been born in Bridgend but had moved to Lincolnshire with his parents, was also killed in 1916, winning the Military Medal. It was later discovered that Fred Gibbs was imprisoned in Bavaria, and he returned home safely after the war ended.

Vivienne Jones brought in the letters received by the Gibbs and Sutton families reporting the deaths and the "missing" status of their boys, together with their photographs and those of Joseph Gibbs, the printer. Fred Gibbs had sent a photo of himself home when a prisoner of war. One of Joe's daughters, Ethel Christine, never married, and she ran a stationer's shop at 40 High St. (now Country Casuals) during the First World War. Another of his sons, Henry (Harry), married Dorothy Warren, granddaughter of the publican Solomon Warren of the Bridge Inn (by the corner of the Limes). Harry and Dorothy Gibbs were bakers and bread deliverers in Cowbridge, their

bakehouse and shop being beside the Town Hall (now Pebble). Their home, however, was the Gibbs' family home, 23 Eastgate. Joe Gibbs died in Cowbridge in 1930, aged 67, and his wife the following year.

Besides these, members of other old Cowbridge families have also donated material. These include the Ralls, Collings and Whone families. Henry Collings, a clockmaker, was based at no 9, Westgate, and the Whones lived at Woodland House. Meanwhile, Jane Harvey, who grew up in the Grammar School house during the 1950s as the daughter of headmaster Idwal Rees (Megan, his wife, being matron for the boarders), has sent memories of the school building, and of Old Hall gardens and what is now the Physic Garden.

In addition to all the people who call into the room on Wednesday mornings, or who ring or e-mail or stop me in the street with queries and information, we have had several organisations making use of our material over the last few months in order to promote tourism in this part of the rural Vale. There seem to be a surprising number of small businesses producing notice boards, booklets, digital pictures, etc, in and around Cowbridge. If the History Room collection helps more people enjoy our lovely area I shall be content, unless we find we are swamped with tourists!

If anyone reading this is interested in helping in any way whatsoever with our searches, our general admin., or the digitisation, do please let me know. Contact details are:-

Tel: 01446 773373

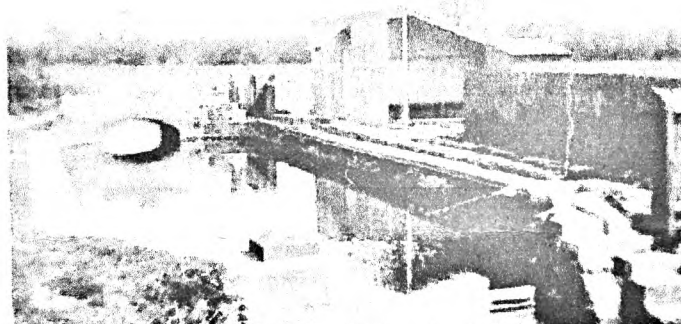
E-mail: bettyalden1@gmail.com

Betty Alden

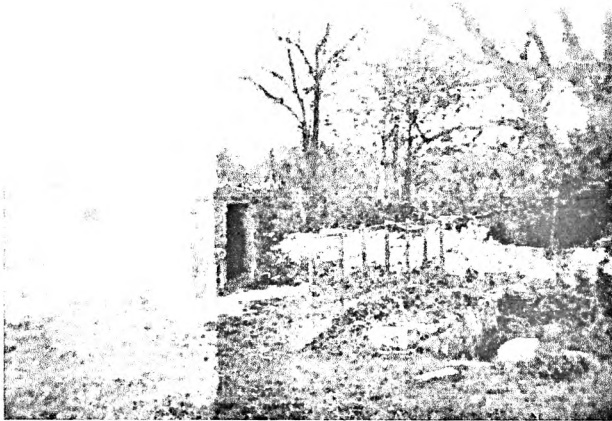
DISCOVERY OF 1926 THESIS

Unexpected items are always turning up in the Local History Studies Room. The latest to surface is a thesis written in 1926 by Stacie Millman. We have so far discovered nothing about the author except that she (or he?) was a first-year student at Glamorgan Training College in 1926 and chose to write a thesis on the subject of "Cowbridge and District" for Geography. The original document is fragile and has been handed over to the Glamorgan Archives, but it contains numerous old photographs of Cowbridge, some of which are of great interest.

Among these is a photograph of the Open Air swimming baths (*right*), about which the author comments: "it is very interesting to notice that the head-stones of the diving steps have been made from slabs of local *Ostrea*. Though always very cold, the water in the baths is particularly clean and pleasant as the river is continually flowing through..." It was not only swimmers who made use of the river water; the recently-built garage next to the bridge in the town centre was using the waters of the Thaw "for electrical purposes". Rather mysterious...



The water from the Silver Well, "situated near the town boundary in the corner of a field" (*overleaf*), supplied the Town Hall pump, which can of course still be seen. However, I was reliably informed by the late Vic Eveleigh (a one-time Mayor of Cowbridge) that the original pump was run over by a lorry many years ago, and the present specimen was recreated, largely from plywood, by himself and a friend. He always found it very amusing that the pump continued to be regarded as being of great historic interest. The thesis gives much attention to the various other wells that then existed around the district, including Bowman's Well (located close to The Butts), the nearby "Rag Well" and its neighbour, the "Pin Well", both of which were credited with supplying water beneficial to health. The Cowbridge Brewery, which was then still in operation, took its water from the River Thaw, beside which it stood; evidently no health concerns there!



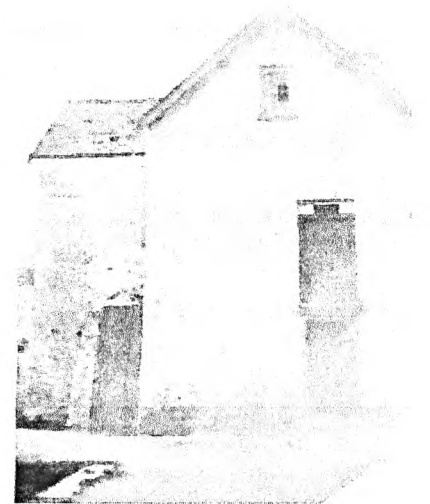
The author also records that the roofs of three thatched cottages in West End have recently been replaced with zinc "owing to their bad conditions", but that there are still two thatched buildings "behind the Town Hall". The construction of the Institute building (now part of Pocketful of Presents) had resulted in the exposure of part of the original town walls, and John Ward, Curator of Cardiff Museum (who had died in 1922), had offered the opinion that these were medieval, not Roman. That analysis has been supported by more recent excavations.

The railway was already in decline, with the author making a correct prediction about its future. "The busiest time at Cowbridge platform is when the dairy farmers from

the neighbourhood are sending off their churns of milk to the industrial towns further north. Even these are tending to use their own vans instead of the railway so that it is probable that this familiar scene will soon disappear."

In terms of the town's demographic profile, the author notes that the town's residents mainly consist of "busy shop-keepers, postmen, policemen and other civil servants" and bemoans the lack of employment available to the younger generation: "the young men and women on leaving school seek their employment elsewhere". In this respect, little would seem to have changed, except of course that improved access to transport means a larger proportion of commuters among Cowbridge's population.

Right: Llanblethian Mill in the 1920s – another photograph from the thesis.



REMY LLOYD JONES

Katherine Remy Lloyd Jones, always known as Remy, was the daughter of an Oxfordshire vicar who, despite contacts with many influential people left a rural parish to work in an impoverished inner city area in the North. Her mother had been a nurse on the Western Front, and Remy qualified as a nurse working at the Westminster Hospital during the London blitz. She had a most demanding war thereafter, serving her country with great courage and distinction. She married Gwylm Lloyd Jones an orthopaedic surgeon, and after the war they settled in Llanblethian, initially in Llanblethian House. She possessed a number of photographs of Llanblethian from that time, many of which have been donated to the Cowbridge Local History Studies Room at Old Hall.

She continued to show a vigorous interest in every topic she came across, actively participating in post graduate education, and remaining physically and mentally active into her 90s until eventually confined to an electric invalid carriage which she drove at speed. She showed her own brand of indomitable courage to the end, dying at the age of 95 in 2014.

David Webb

Mike Petty Alden
Mr John Sherwood
1 Mill Park
Cowbridge CF71 7BG

COWBRIDGE HISTORY SOCIETY Programme for 2015

Meetings take place in the Lesser Hall, Town Hall, Cowbridge

Talks start at 7.30pm on the first Friday of each month unless shown otherwise.

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| 2nd January 2015 | John Nixon and the South Wales Coal Trade with France: origins of Cardiff's twinning with Nantes
<i>Brian Davies, Pontypridd Museum</i> |
| 6th February 2015 | Pentyrch and the Garth - a light-hearted local history study.
<i>Don Llewellyn</i> |
| 6th March 2015 | Daniel Jones of Woodford and Beaupre
<i>Graham Phillimore</i> |
| 13th March 2015 | Charter Day celebration
<i>Destination TBD</i> |
| 10th April 2015 | The Edmondes and Cowbridge - family, land and Old Hall
<i>Dick Buswell</i>
Note: This is the <i>second</i> Friday of the month. |
| 1st May 2015 | AGM at 7pm
<i>followed at 7.30pm by</i>
The Founding of Ramoth Chapel
<i>Brian James (President)</i> |

Talks scheduled for the autumn will be announced in due course by the Programme Secretary, Dick Tonkin.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 2nd January 2015

Yes! It's THIS Friday. A talk from the even popular Brian Davies on "John Nixon and the South Wales Coal Trade with France"

Friday 13th March 2015 – CHARTER DAY TRIP

The trip this year is by coach to, firstly, **Llanelli House**, Llanelli which has been newly restored and is one of Wales' finest Georgian Buildings. There will be a guided tour of the house with an insight into the life and times of the Stepney Family including how they shaped the town and the day to day life of the house.

We will have a buffet lunch at Llanelli House and then proceed to nearby **Parc Howard** which is an Italianate Mansion set in 24 acres of grounds which we might be able to enjoy if the weather is with us. The house itself is home to a museum exhibiting a collection of Llanelli china as well as many other interesting artefacts relating to the owners of the house such as Rev Buckey of brewery fame.

The cost of the trip including the cost of the coach, all entrance fees, the buffet lunch and tips to the driver etc. is £26.50. Because we will have to pay a deposit to Llanelli House, it would be helpful if you could book and pay as soon as possible if you would like to come. Numbers are limited to 30 so places will be on a first come basis.

Friday 5th June 2015 – An Extra Talk

2015 is the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 and we are very pleased that Don Gerrard has agreed to give an extra talk this year to commemorate the event. It will be in the Lesser Hall, as usual at 7.30pm.
