

COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No 56 : DECEMBER 2004

FUTURE MEETINGS

December 3rd

The Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture
'Women in Mediaeval Art'
Arthur Peplow (Vice President)

December 9th

Christmas Visit to Sutton *see below for details*

January 7th, 2005

'The Ham: the Family, the House, the Garden'
Hilary Thomas

February 4th

'The Battle of St Fagans, 1648'
Dr C Tilney-Davies

March 4th

'Shipping in the Bristol Channel'
Allan Cook

March 13th is Charter Day: there will be a celebration near this date

April 1st

'In Search of Kenfig'
Dr Terry Robbins

'Lecture meetings' are held in the Lesser Hall of Cowbridge Town Hall on Fridays at 8pm

30 YEARS OF C & D LHS

We celebrated our 30th birthday as a society with an excellent visit to Sutton, followed by a meal at the Cross Inn, Llanblethian. Cecil England, who was the leading light in the formation of the Society, entertained us with his account of the matters leading up to the inaugural meeting; his speech is outlined on page 4.

We have been invited back to Sutton for a Christmas celebration on Thursday Dec 9th. It will be an 'American supper' - bring a plate of food (to share). The cost will be £5 a head, to cover our supplying the cold meats and drink. Numbers are limited, so book with Bruce McGovern (773611) a.s.a.p.

SOCIETY LIBRARY

Keith Jones has kindly agreed to act as the Society Librarian. Please contact him on 01656-860552 if you would like to borrow any of the following:

1. *Excavations in Cowbridge 1977-88*; GGAT
2. *Glamorgan - the Greater Houses*; RCHM
3. *Glamorgan - Mediaeval Secular Monuments*; RCHM
4. *Old Cowbridge* - Hopkin James
5. *Cowbridge* - Robinson; GGAT
6. *Cowbridge and Llanblethian Past and Present* - James and Francis
7. *The Border Vale of Glamorgan* - Francis
8. *Vale of Glamorgan Series, Vols 1 to 4*; Stewart Williams
9. *Glamorgan Historian, Vols 1, 6, 9, 11*; Stewart Williams
10. *Annals of South Glamorgan* - Spencer
11. *Castles of the Lordship of Glamorgan* - Homfray
- 12-14. *Glamorgan County History, Vols III, IV and V*
15. *Histoire de la vallee de Clisson*
16. *Morgannwg*: misc volumes.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Joint Chairmen: Bruce McGovern, Jeff Alden
Hon Secretary: Don Gerrard
Hon Treasurers: Ivana Locke and Val Pugh
Programme secretary: Dick Tonkin
Publicity Officer: Robert Cope
Editor of the newsletter: Jeff Alden
Representative on Vale Conservation Advisory Group: George Haynes
Committee: Betty Alden, Arline Boulton, Dick Buswell, Marilyn Cope, Liam Ginn, Keith Jones, Iris Simpson

EDITOR'S NOTE.

Thanks once again to our contributors to this newsletter. Articles, short notes, questions or reminiscences are always welcomed.
Jeff Alden 01446-773373

A COWBRIDGE GUNNER

Following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, Britain directed its military activities away from Europe, sending many of its forces to India and the far east and others to Africa and the West Indies. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the industrial revolution had caught up with weapons of war, and an arms race had begun. France built the world's first ironclad warship, *La Gloire*, and in 1860 the Royal Navy responded with HMS Warrior, now preserved in Portsmouth Harbour.

The British Prime Minister of the time, Viscount Palmerston, appointed Sidney Herbert as his Secretary for War in June 1859 by which time war had broken out between France and Russia and there were widespread fears of conflict between France and Britain. Herbert assumed war was inevitable and a Royal Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom recommended the building of fortifications to protect Britain's ports and naval bases. These were mainly along the English Channel coast but also included Milford Haven, the principal ports of the Bristol Channel (including Flatholm and Steepholm islands) and at Cork in Ireland. It is the fortification at Swansea which gives the point to this story.

Some years earlier, alarmed by the military posturing of France and Russia, the UK government had introduced the Militia Act of 1852. This authorised the raising of a volunteer force and in 1854 the Royal Glamorgan Artillery Militia was formed to guard the country's coastline, particularly the approach to Swansea Bay. An initial proposal to mount heavy guns on Swansea pier failed because the structure would not bear their weight, and in 1859 work started on the construction of a five gun battery on the Lighthouse island at Mumbles.

The Royal Glamorgan Artillery Militia's roll of officers at this time includes Lieutenant James Simpson Ballard of The Verlands, Cowbridge. As the years went by the volunteers trained at Mumbles, at South Hook Fort, Plymouth, and at Fort Hubberstone in Milford Haven. Over the same period James Simpson Ballard was promoted to Captain, then to Major and finally, on 1 January 1875 to Lieutenant-Colonel in command of the Royal Glamorgan Artillery militia all without ever having heard a shot fired in anger!

Palmerston died in 1865 but his fortifications were not completed until some years later by which time the threat from France had receded. The forts were never put to the test and were known to the Victorians as "Palmerston Follies".

Guns were maintained on Lighthouse Island at Mumbles until the first World War but now only the stonework of the battery remains. On Flatholm (still accessible in the summer from Barry) some of the gun barrels are still there, solid and immovable. Indeed they had been sold to a Cardiff scrap-metal dealer, but he found them too big and heavy to move or cut up, and so they remain to make you wonder how they were ever hauled into position in the first place!

The Ballard family was prominent in Cowbridge in the nineteenth century. James Ballard was the innkeeper of the Bear in the 1820s and developed a brewhouse which was the ancestor of the Old Brewery, while his brother Edward ran a flourishing ironmongers shop opposite the Duke. James went on to farm Llwynhelyg, and then moved to the Verlands in 1861. His son was James Simpson Ballard; he lived with his father and was noted as a breeder of stallions. The *Glamorgan Gazette* reported in 1866 that 'Captain Ballard will send four horses to the Birmingham Horse Show'. He died in 1882, aged 48.

Alec Jones

THE SOUTH WALES CANALS (Part I)

Some short and rudimentary canals were known in China around 40 to 30 BC, and in Europe - in Holland and Italy - as early as the 12th century. A short canal, the Exeter Canal (1¾ miles long and 16ft wide) was built in Britain between 1564 and 1566, but the experiment was carried no further. Canal transport was developed in France during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) and many were built - such as the Canal du Midi which linked the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

Canals flourished in Britain between 1750 and 1830, the period of the height of the Industrial Revolution. Until about 1750, transport had been a nightmare. Roads were merely tracks, inland water carriage was confined to rivers, and railways were a distant dream. Inland travel was thus very difficult, any manufacturing was located close to the sources of raw materials, and markets were local. Consequently, canals were perceived to be the best, safest and most efficient means of transporting heavy or bulky loads such as pottery, iron coal, cotton, etc. (A horse could pull a load of 7 tons in a wagon on soft roads, but 56 tons towing a barge). The slowness of canal transport was not an issue in the days before railways.

The first modern canal in Britain was the Sankey Brook Navigation (1757) which enabled coal to be carried from St Helens to Liverpool. However, the canal which awakened public interest was the Bridgewater Canal (1759-61) which linked coal mines at Worsley with Manchester. The engineer was James Brindley, and the canal a masterpiece, especially the Barton Aqueduct. Immediately the price of coal in Manchester was cut by half.

Between 1765 and 1820 the area between Liverpool, Hull, Bristol and London was covered by a 400-mile network of canals. The builders of these canals, mostly Irish labourers, were known as 'navigators', hence the word 'navvy'.

Canals came to south Wales a little later, with the development of the south Wales coalfield. During the canal age 205 miles of waterway were constructed in Wales, 164 miles in south Wales. Here the canals were a fragmented group of relatively short waterways, conceived in isolation from one another and from the rest of the British canal network. They followed the narrow river valleys, were heavily 'locked', and were built to varying lock and boat dimensions. Places out of reach of the canals were connected to them by extensive systems of tramroads. The greatest of the south Wales waterways, the Glamorgan Canal, obtained its Act of Parliament in 1790, and triggered the building of 77 miles of canals between 1794 and 1799. The Glamorgan, the Neath, the Monmouthshire and the Swansea were all completed during this period, engineered almost entirely by Thomas Dadford, Thomas Sheasby, and their sons. The Aberdare, the Brecon and Abergavenny, the Kidwelly and Llanelli, and the Tennant were completed after 1800.

The canals greatly accelerated the progress of the Industrial Revolution in the south Wales valleys, bringing coal and iron for export to the developing ports of Newport, Cardiff and Swansea. Nor was their importance purely local, for the Glamorgan Canal carried the iron cannon that helped defeat Napoleon, and was the means of introducing Welsh steam coal to London.

Soon after the railways came to south Wales in the 1850s, the canals lost their dominance. By 1900 they were carrying little traffic, but they survived into the 20th century as suppliers of water to industry rather than as arteries of transport.

By the 1950s the canals were almost extinct. There are now only 45 miles in the whole of Wales open for recreation and amenity. Restoration owes much to the Inland Waterways Association, and to local voluntary organisations.

Don Gerrard
(to be continued)

COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY: ITS ORIGIN

My wife and I moved to Cowbridge in 1963, as I had taken up an appointment as treasurer of the (late lamented) Cowbridge Rural District Council, and very soon afterwards I also became Borough Treasurer to the Ancient Borough. I was invited to join the Rotary Club, and my wife joined the WI.

In July 1974 I became chairman of the Vocational Service committee of the Rotary Club, and started to search for projects to implement for the benefit of the community. After a visit with my wife to a WI market at Botley near Southsea, I discovered that they had just started a Local History Society. This was just what I was looking for - and I should have considered it earlier, because a member of the Cowbridge Rotary Club was the Revd Llewellyn Jones, the Vicar of Llantwit and the President of the Llantwit Major Local History Society.

One Rotary member who said "That's a good idea" was John Hollings who ran a newspaper and sweet shop in the High Street; so I said to him "OK - you organise that. Put up a notice in the shop and the library, asking people to sign if they were interested, etc...."

The Rotary Club organised the calling of the inaugural meeting of the Society at the Council Chamber of the Town Hall on Friday, 25th October 1974, when more than fifty people were present.

In his introduction, the Mayor of Cowbridge, Councillor Norman Williams, emphasised the importance of preserving documents and records in local history, especially in a town with a long history such as Cowbridge. The guest speaker, the Revd W Llewellyn Jones of Llantwit Major Local History Society, outlined some of its important activities in creating an awareness of the historic value of so much of the environment in a community which was changing so rapidly. Buildings, footpaths, documents, customs and oral traditions all played a part, and such a Society could do a great deal to save much of value that would otherwise be lost. Mr Elwyn Gibbs, another founder member from Llantwit Major, also spoke, stressing the value of practical activity and research in local history.

Cllr Norman Williams was elected president - and how good it is to see Norman still serving as our president today. Miss Maud Gunter was made life vice-president in honour of her life-long work on the history of Cowbridge and Llanblethian. John Hollings was elected chairman; John Miles became secretary (and he remained as secretary for nearly 30 years); Iolo Griffith was elected as Treasurer. The committee members were Pam Owen, Betty Williams, Stuart Hodson, Dewi Hopkin and Bob Whitaker.

The first meeting was held in Cowbridge Library on Friday 8th November 1974 when Miss Maud Gunter spoke on the history of Cowbridge - a stimulating start to what have been thirty years of interesting lectures and pleasant excursions. I am delighted to have played my part in the formation of the Society. Long may it continue!

Cecil England