

Agriculturalists and implement-makers of Glamorgan

AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES AND farming practices in Wales, as in other countries, did not change over-night with the introduction of modern farm equipment and mechanical field implements. Many farmers in remote areas clung to the more traditional methods or adapted their implements to the needs and requirements of mechanical changes until the outbreak of the Second World War. The past century and a half has seen the change-over almost complete from near-medieval implements powered by oxen or horses to the mechanisation of every farming operation and the immemorial time-lag between invention and general use has now disappeared in the farming community.

The work of agricultural societies in Wales from the 18th century onwards is a significant feature connected with the history and development of farming technology in Wales. The oldest of these societies in Wales was the Brecknockshire Agricultural Society, which was established in 1755 with the advice and experience of officers from the Society, the Glamorgan Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture was founded in 1772. Many have argued that the Glamorgan society and other similar sister county societies in Wales were mainly promoted by local gentry and wealthy farmers. As a result the smaller farmer and tenant did not benefit from the work of these societies and could not possibly afford to adopt new techniques of farming and acquire new field and barn implements introduced at the meetings of the county agricultural societies in Glamorgan and elsewhere in Wales.

STABLE POPULATION

During the 18th century the population of the Vale of Glamorgan was fairly stable, with most of the inhabitants engaged either in agriculture, or as craftsmen servicing the requirements of an agricultural and rural community. The most important estates in the Vale included those of the Aubreys of Llantrithyd, the Jenners of Wenvoe Castle, and, in the eastern sector land appertaining to the Marquess of Bute; and the manor or lordship of Sully held by the Drake-Tyrwhit family, then of St. Donats, whose descendants took the name of Drake and held Sully until 1811, when it was auctioned and acquired by Evan Thomas of Llwynmadog, Abergwesyn, in Brecknockshire. Other areas of Glamorgan were held by the families at Dyffryn, Fonmon, and that of Coedrhiglan. Many estates consisted of a high percentage of small farms and in some cases the principal landowners were not resident and took very little active interest in the management and direct improvement of agricultural methods.

However, there were a number of enlightened agriculturalists who had been associated with the establishment of the Glamorgan Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture in 1772, of which Robert Jones of Fonmon was elected vice-president at the spring general meeting of 1773. During the early 19th century, some of the local landowners effected a number of changes in their estate management. For example, when Evan Thomas of Llwynmadog purchased the Sully estate in 1811 for £40,000, he immediately undertook to improve and change the pattern of farming in the area. He reduced five farms and four tenements in the parish to the two large farm units of Cog and Hayes. All the old hedges and ditches were removed and he planned the big fields and arranged for the



ELWYN SCOURFIELD
traces the early Vale families who made an impact on the farming scene, many inventing the forerunners of today's agricultural machinery

construction of new boundary walls. The buildings at Cog Farm and Hayes Farm were altered, largely re-built, and extended between the period from 1814 and 1817.

The tenant farmers of Cog and Hayes at Sully are worthy of note in their contribution to farming practices in Glamorgan during the last century. Their names are listed amongst others as leading agriculturalists in the first half of the century, which include families such as the Thomas family of St. Hilary, the Savours of Rhoose, the Morgans of Fonmon, the Smiths of Boverton, the Spencers of St. Athan and Gileston. Others of equal importance as leading stock-breeders were the Garseds of Llantwit Major, the Loughers of Treguff and Llancarfan, the Lowries of Cadoxton, the Yoraths of Moulton, the Surridges of Cogan, and the Blands of Sully. But a number of these leading agricultural families were not originally of Vale stock.

For example, the Lowries of Cadoxton were descendants of Robert Lowrie, who was employed as a shepherd in Sully between 1816-19 and was of Scottish descent. Descendants of the same family married into Penmark families and subsequently farmed at Cwrt-y-fil, Penarth, and at Cadoxton, near Barry. William Lowrie of Cadoxton, who died in 1893, was known in the Vale of Glamorgan 'as a breeder of excellent cart horses ... shires of the older types' and won numerous premiums at the show of the Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Society and the Cardiff horse shows.

Another example was the Bland family of Cog Farm, Sully. Andrew Bland and his brothers were tenant farmers during the early part of the nineteenth century. Andrew Bland was drowned on a sea voyage in 1838, but other members of the Bland family continued to farm at Cog until the 1860s. In addition to tenant farmers who had moved to the Vale from across the border, the first half of the 19th century saw an influx of craftsmen and agricultural labourers from both English and Scottish counties. This pattern was

reflected in many of the parishes throughout the Vale of Glamorgan. After 1831, because of the higher wages offered in the industrial areas of south Wales, many of the local inhabitants left agricultural labouring, but their loss from the rural areas was made good by the arrival of farm workers and craftsmen from the depressed agricultural parishes of England, such as those of Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon. Following the 'hungry forties' the mass immigration of Irish families was also a factor of change in the rural communities.

From the early years of the 19th century, there was a growing demand by local farmers for tools and equipment to cater for the demands of farm production and new methods of husbandry promoted by the 'enlightened agriculturalists'. Many new ideas were put forward as a result of the findings and experiments undertaken by the Glamorgan Agricultural Society. As early as 1774-75 new implements such as a Rotherham plough, hoes, slicers, and drill ploughs, had been deposited at the Swansea warehouse of the society, 'but to be returned to Cowbridge for further experiments'. A year later, at the annual general meeting of the society, 'a plow with a novelty of an iron wheel attached to the heel, to lessen the friction, instead of a soleplate' was presented by Jno. Popkin, Esq., Coytrahen, - one of the leading members of the Agricultural Society.

Because of the increased interest in expanding the growing of root crops and general improvements in cereal growing, farmers realized that mechanisation was vital if they were to cope with demand. In 1808 special premiums were offered to persons who could invent new implements: namely, a threshing machine, a new plough, and a chaff cutter; and premiums of three to five guineas were offered to competitors whose implement would 'perform its work to the satisfaction of the committee'. Vale of Glamorgan craftsmen became eager to accept these challenges proposed by the agricultural society and one of the successful local blacksmiths was David Hopkins of St. Nicholas, who became a 'noted swing plough maker'. He was awarded second prize of £4 for the 'best and most useful implement of husbandry' at the September meeting in 1844. David Hopkins of St. Nicholas kept the village smithy until his death, sometime during the 1860s. In 1864 Abraham Harry was apprenticed to David Hopkins and apparently took over the running of the forge after his master's death. The Harry family still continue to run the family business at the forge St. Nicholas.

COMPETITOR

Another successful competitor at the same meeting was Benjamin Wright of St. Nicholas, who was awarded a first prize for implements, but he had already been awarded a number of premiums in previous years. In 1809 he won the premium of five guineas for having constructed two machines for thrashing by water and horse power, one for Mr. Wm. Evans, Fairwater, and one for Mr. Davies, Wenvoe. Benjamin Wright soon came to be recognised as the 'first practical machine manufacturer in the county'. The Wright family came originally from the village or parish of Rishangles in the county of Suffolk. William and his wife, Betty, first settled at Whitehall Farm, Wenvoe, at the turn of the 18th century. Strangely, William and his younger son of the same name died within 12

days of each other in 1822.

Shortly afterwards, the widowed Betty and bachelor son, Benjamin, moved to Village Farm, St. Nicholas, probably between 1824 and 1828. In 1828, Benjamin who had been born in Bedgrave, Suffolk, married Elizabeth Williams, a spinster of the town of Cardiff. Benjamin Wright was a carpenter by profession and initially rented a workshop at St. Nicholas between 1838-40. Inspired by his success in the manufacture of implements, he and his family moved house and extended the business. According to the census return of 1851, apart from employing domestic servants, he also employed Thomas Price as ironmonger-blacksmith with three apprentice carpenters. Two of his employees hailed from the county of Suffolk. Another blacksmith, called William Legget, resided in the village of St. Nicholas at this time. He was also a native of Rishangles in Suffolk and the likelihood is that he came to work for Benjamin.

At the Cardiff meeting of the Royal Society of England in 1848, Benjamin Wright exhibited thrashing machines, horse rakes, mangold and turnip drills, 'improved and manufactured' by him. However, by 1861 it seems that his son, William Twaits, had taken over most of the responsibilities of manufacturing implements. On 9 June 1870 William Twaits Wright, in conjunction with Evan Yorath, a farmer from Moulton, deposited a provisional specification for the 'invention of improved apparatus or machinery for lifting/loading/unloading hay, corn, straw and other materials' and the patent was granted on 26 November of that year. This implement continued to be marketed under the names of Wright and Yorath, but in 1868 Henry Yorath, the son of Moulton near Penmark, applied for letters patent for improvements to the original patent. Henry Yorath exhibited the improved machinery at the Cardiff Show of 1872 and at Preston in 1885. However, shortly afterwards, Yorath went into partnership with Charles Grieves and traded as Yorath, Grieves and Co., hay elevators. Henry Yorath died in May 1891 but the company continued in business and in 1906 had agencies for retailing farm machinery at 17 Quay Street, Cardiff, and at Ely, Cardiff.



Bill-head, David Tilley, Cowbridge early 20th century.

Another maker of farm machinery and equipment in Glamorgan was William Tilley of Cowbridge. He became well-known as a maker of corn and turnip drills. He exhibited his products at both the Cardiff Show of 1872 and at Bristol in 1878. In conjunction with J. Thomas of Eastfield House, Cowbridge, he submitted patent specifications for a seed dibbler and a mangold/turnip seed sower. The corn drills made by Tilley became widely used by farmers as coach builder and repairer of agricultural implements at West Village, Cowbridge. But, farmers of the Vale could also acquire implements and other machines from a number of manufacturers in the county of Glamorgan. There was a hive of activity in Cardiff, with makers such as Hugh Bird of Womanby Street; Jos. Gover, Tredegar Street; Thomas Lemon of Duke Street and the Hayes; Reuben Lewis of Whitchurch; and Joseph Wm. Hall, again of Womanby Street, Cardiff. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the retail outlet from large-scale English manufacturers became readily available, with agents such as J. Hibbert & Sons, Castle Street, Cardiff; and Hugh Bird of Cardiff, who also had a sub-agency at High Street, Cowbridge.



**HUGH BIRD,
18, DUKE STREET, CARDIFF.**

AGENT FOR
GIBB'S PERUVIAN GUANO,
FOR THE SALE OF
**SUPERPHOSPHATE OF LIME,
BONES, AND OTHER
MANURES.**

Importer of Linseed Cake, &c. &c.

AGENT FOR THE LEADING
IMPLEMENT MAKERS,
AND GENERAL
AGRICULTURAL SEEDSMAN.

WAREHOUSE—ST. MARY STREET.
SHOWROOM—WOMANBY STREET, CARDIFF;
And at the CATTLE MARKET, NEWPORT; and HIGH STREET,
COWBRIDGE.

**Advertisement - 'Hugh Bird' Cardiff
Directory, 1858**

There were also numerous wheelwrights and coachbuilders situated in the Vale. One of the best known was Richard Aubrey, carpenter and wheelwright of Cowbridge, who specialised in the construction of the 'Glamorgan Bow Wagon'. A number of other craftsmen also catered for the requirements of farmers and traders and there was no shortage of experienced carpenters and wheelwrights. They included David Williams of East Villa, Cowbridge; Evan Davies of Llantwit Major; John Thomas of Llysworney; George Williams of Llanblethian; David Morgan, wheelwright and smith, Llandaff; William Davies, St. Fagans and Edward Cosslett of Radyr - a manufacturer of his own patented harvest cart. Other more industrial makers of agricultural requirements during the late 19th century also included Frank Munn & Co. Dumballs Road, Cardiff - a manufacturer of 'special implements for agriculture, wheelwright, blacksmith & founder' and George Kyte, Albion Works, Llandaff (1870-1920s) who was an 'iron-founder, blacksmith and general agricultural engineer'.

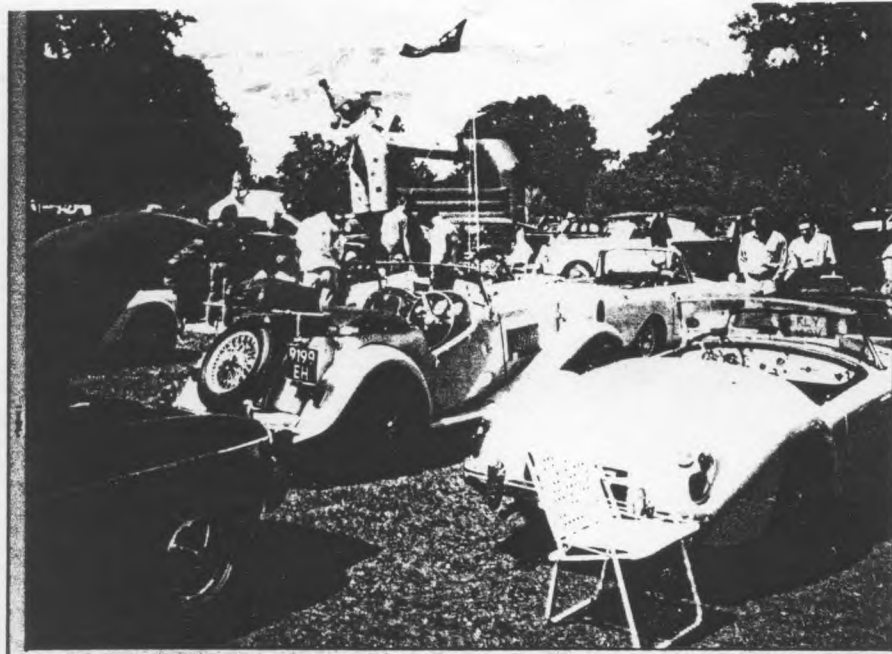


An example of a bow-wagon, built circa 1870 by Richard Aubrey of Cowbridge at the Welsh Folk Museum.

Photo: National Museum of Wales (Welsh Folk Museum).

This, possibly, is indicative in many ways of the changes which were gradually taking place in Glamorgan from 1880 onwards as the agricultural communities of the Vale were also 'in the fore in availing themselves' of modern techniques of farming. Darby, in his observations on farming in the Vale, (1885-86) refers to the introduction of new machinery and that he had witnessed two self-binding reaping machines operating on adjoining farms'. By this period steam-ploughing was also operational on Boverton farm, near Llantwit Major, and steam-driven machinery was in general use for the preparation of winter-fodder. Because of the scarcity and cost of farm labour it was calculated that a farmer operating a self-binding reaper was making a saving of at least four shillings and ninepence per acre. These changes are even more marked during the early years of the present century, and records of wholesale accounts of agricultural manufacturers who traded in the Vale highlight the increase in the purchase of new equipment by farmers. Between 1914 and 1919 the trade outlets increased dramatically. For example, J. Hibbert's Company of Cardiff sold 242 implements which were manufactured by Ransomes of Ipswich. But by 1919 the annual sales figure of Ransome equipment had increased to 765. Similarly, Arthur John & Company, High Street, Cowbridge, sold 40 Ransome implements in 1914, compared with the annual figure of 187 for 1919. Even in the village of Dinas Powys, W. Morgan, who was also an agent for Ransomes, increased his sales from three implements in 1914 to 34 for the 1919 annual figure.

In spite of the introduction of new implements and machinery a number of the traditional craftsmen were still active in many parishes during the early years of the present century. For instance, the Hopkin family retained the role of village blacksmiths at St. Athan and Evan Hopkin is recorded as blacksmith in 1923. Similarly, the Williams family carried on the craft of wheelwrighting in the same village. There was also the constant requirement for a thatcher as numerous thatched cottages and houses were located in the Vale. Thomas Vaughan of Llantrithyd and William Brewer of Llantwit Major were possibly the best-known thatchers during the 1920s. This craft has been safeguarded until the present by Ian Jones of Coety near Bridgend, who learnt the craft from his late father. But in some areas the village craftsmen disappeared and were never replaced. When David Eckley, the blacksmith at Sully, died in 1915, the premises were subsequently converted into a village



Welsh veteran, vintage and classic vehicle show



Harvest workers at Llantrithyd.

Photo: National Museum of Wales (Welsh Folk Museum).

store and there is no further record of a village wheelwright after 1906, when a William Morgan is recorded in that occupation.

Apart from the interest in improving the mechanised facilities to farmers by manufacturers and local implement dealers and craftsmen a number of Glamorgan farmers continued to improve the breeding of livestock and became prominent figures during the late 19th century. For example, at St. Hilary, one of the most influential persons on the agricultural scene was Rees Thomas. His father, T. Thomas, reared not only prize-winning sheep and Hereford cattle, but also 'a family of sons of whom he might well be proud'. The eldest son, William Thomas, moved to Hayes Farm in Sully during the early 1880s. Most of the stock kept at the farm consisted of Cotswold sheep and Hereford cattle, initially bred on the family farm at St. Hilary, with which his family gained first and second prizes at the Royal Show meetings at Cardiff in 1872; second prize at Taunton in 1875; and first prize at Bristol in 1878. During the 1890s William Thomas of Hayes gained further premiums for livestock at various agricultural meetings. For example, in December 1892, he won for the fifth time in succession the cup offered for the best beast at the Bridgend Christmas Show. As well as being appointed judge of Hereford and Welsh cattle at the Royal Agricultural Show at Leicester in 1896 he won further prizes, together with a breed cup and championship premium. He died in 1911 at the age of 68 and, in the obituary published in the local press, it was recorded that the 'Principality had lost one of its principal and most successful breeders and exhibitors of stock'. He was one of the founder

members of the East Glamorgan Agricultural Society and of Cowbridge Young Farmers Club. He was also a member of the Cardiff Board of Guardians, where he represented the joint parishes of Sully and Lavernock for a period of over 20 years. Other leading stock breeders of the Vale, during the second half of the nineteenth century included John Williams of Llantrithyd and Joseph Evan Spencer of Llancadle. They became well-known for their prize-winning dairy cattle and Hereford bulls in competition with T. Thomas of St. Hilary. Christopher Spencer of Gileston and John Williams of Caercadi near Cowbridge were also prominent breeders of the Cotswold breed of ewes and rams, whilst Major J. Simpson Ballard of the Verlands, Cowbridge, was one of the most successful breeders of thoroughbred stallions in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Many changes have taken place in the pattern of agriculture and of land ownership in Glamorgan since the 19th century. Until the last quarter of the century ownership and tenancies had remained fairly stable, but during the early years of the present century a demand arose for land suitable for residential development, especially with the growth of industry and improved communications. As a result many rural villages and market towns have become swamped with both public and private house building. Changes have taken place in the farming communities as the disposal of land has resulted in the fragmentation of estates and that of the traditional farmsteads and what was once a viable proposition at one time has been changed into a pattern of farming to meet the requirements of present day agriculture.

IN THE SUMMER of 1988 the very first Welsh vintage event was held at the show ground and on Sunday, June 18 nearly 200 old vehicles were in position—a terrific sight!

The ages of the participating motor vehicles ranged from the early '20s through the 30s and 40s and onwards to about 1970. In fact, if the local enthusiasts were looking for a fair representation through the ages then this show really scored a huge hit!

Exchange & Mart, the national magazine that boasts a two million readership weekly, is again the sponsor for 1989, therefore bringing great weight to making this show—simply because of the advertising strength and reader awareness.

The 1989 Show will, it is hoped, expand with more vehicles and the successful autojumble that exceeded 100 stalls last year may well escalate.

If it is true family entertainment that everybody wants then we hope that this event will fit the bill. The pre-war exhibits from the quite ordinary and well-loved Austin 7—now an extremely desirable old car—to the Rolls Royce motor cars of which in '88 no fewer than 12 were on show, will all be competing for the rather nice, glitzy prizes.

One of the most exceptional sections, usually the unsung heroes of a show, are the owners of the quite outstanding commercial vehicles. The vehicles are a mammoth task to restore but when finished gleam wonderfully, and the old two-strokes tick over like the proverbial 'Singer sewing machine'!

All sorts of family fun will be laid on—not just old vehicles—amusements for the kids, stalls for mums—so it is suggested that a large picnic order is placed for a really good day out!

R. A. Green