

The Glamorganshire Agricultural Society by John M Cann

The recent book on 'Henry Williams Lancarvan' (Cloutman & Linnard) is concerned mostly with Clock and Watch making, but nonetheless discusses his farming activity. There is a reference to 'Records of the Glamorganshire Agricultural Society ... 1772-1869', a small book written by John Garsed, a secretary of the Society and published in 1890. There is a copy in the Bridgend Reference Library. It makes fascinating reading for anyone with even a slight interest in agriculture.

The Society was founded in 1772 to encourage improvements and advances in farming in the County, and appears to have been both very active and successful in doing this. The main meetings were to be in Cowbridge in the spring and the autumn, the inaugural one certainly in the Bear, and later there were two additional 'regional' meetings in Cardiff and Swansea. An initial Vice-President in 1772 was Robert Jones Esq. (of Fonmon) who continued to be active in the Society. One of their first acts was to encourage the growing of the forage crop sainfoin. John Garsed comments (in 1890) on the importance of this decision as the crop sainfoin was "*so valuable*". Garsed also comments that "*turnip husbandry is the fountainhead of all good cultivation*". The Society encouraged the four course system (1st Turnip, 2nd Barley, 3rd Clover, 4th Wheat) by giving farmers premiums of £1 per acre for all the acres over ten that were being cultivated using the system, with a maximum of £100. There was also a premium given of 10/- an acre for the farmer who drained the most black, peaty or boggy land between 3 and 10 acres, and premiums for the best cart horses, and the best potato crop (5 guineas). These premiums or prizes were only available to those members who farmed (and/or owned) land of less £50 annual value. The more wealthy members, who had more land than this, while not

elligible for the premiums could be awarded gold or silver medals.

The money came from membership fees and larger subscriptions from major landowners. Straight away in 1772 the Society bought farm implements up to a total value of £50 so that they could be inspected by members. This collection, housed in a warehouse in Cowbridge, initially included a 'Northampton plow' worked with two horses. Later they even bought a stud stallion that farmers could bring their mares to. Unfortunately the stallion arrived late in the season, and they had to reduce the fees, members payed half the fee charged to non-members. The stallion did not turn out to be very popular and was sold. In September 1849 an exhibition of farm equipment was held at which one of the exhibitors was Yorath of Moulton.

On the 3rd May 1790 *"It was resolved to send for a Spinning Jenny, with a person to work it, and place the same in the middle of this County, to instruct those engaged in flannel and hose manufacture, in the hope that it may tend to the introduction of manufactories, and thus prevent the exportation of raw wool from the County"* In 1791 *"... A person to repair the spinning and carding machines and work them, should be obtained from Manchester."* The result was a Woollen Factory in Bridgend, water powered, on the river Ogwr just upstream of the old bridge. It included all the processes from combing, spinning, weaving and dyeing to finishing. It was never financially viable and closed by 1820 when the buildings were sold to a tannery, and later became Stiles brewery. *(this information on the factory, was kindly supplied by Jeff Alden, Garsed did not include it.)*

The Society involved itself in politics in Jan 1836, when a petition was sent to parliament on the 'prevailing agricultural distress'. But its major business was awarding the premiums and medals, which over the years were many. The following examples may have some interest.

Aug 1778 - Messrs Evan Simmons, St. Hilary, a

medal for best yearling bull at Cowbridge.

Jas Portrey, Picketstone, 3 guineas for yearling bull.

Apr 1779 - Mr Thos Williams, Penmark, 5 guineas.

Dec 1780 - Ed Samuel, Penmark. David Rees, Lancarvan, 1 guinea. John Mathews Lancadle, 5 guineas.

Dec 1781 - Thomas Mansel Talbot Esq. 'gold medal for his spirited endeavours to introduce the English pheasant into this County'.

Oct 1782 - Mr Hy Williams, Lancarvan, best crop of turnips 10 guineas.

Aug 1783 - Mr Hy. Williams, Lancarvan, 1st prize for best boar.

Sept 1789 - Mr W Alexander, Penmark, rye grass 5 guineas

Apr 1801 - Mr thomas William, Lancarvan, rye grass seed 5 guineas

Nov 1804 - Mr Dd. Rees, Lancadle, red clover seed 3 guineas

John Garsed culled all this from the fairly sparse records of the Society. It makes a fascinating story.