

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

Summer 2017



Dick Tonkin and Keith Jones with Mrs Emma Coates at Llanhari Primary to launch the latest Cowbridge History Society publication

New memoir is a runaway success

Interview with a best-selling author

As I mentioned in the last edition, the AGM in May was not our final event of the year 2016-17. By now many of you will have obtained your copies of the latest CHS publication - David Francis's *Llanharry, Llansannor & District: a Memoir* (ISBN 0953702995) If you haven't, there is no time to waste, as we have almost run out of copies already. The economical format has proved very popular with readers, and you will be pleased to know that your investment has already paid off; for the first time in many years, we have produced a publication that has made a profit within a few weeks of its release.

Despite the atrocious weather, over a hundred people attended the book launch on 16th May at Llanhari Primary School, where they enjoyed refreshments and heard songs and poems performed by the pupils. David Francis, a former teacher [seen in the photograph signing copies at the launch], is a familiar face at the school, having visited several times to give the children the benefit of his knowledge of local history. We understand from their teachers that they enjoyed his visits even more than their regular history lessons!

Most of the marketing of the memoir has been done by the author himself, and I caught up with David at Llanharry Cafe recently to find out his thoughts on this unprecedented success.

How do you feel about the success of your memoir?

Relieved! I have had work published over the years for Stewart Williams of Barry. I've written some short histories, but nothing has gone like this, nothing at all.

You've always lived in Llanharry, haven't you?

Most of my life; certainly I've always lived in the Border Vale. I was born in Llansannor, and educated in Llansannor in the church school, where I had a superb start, both in learning and ethically. They taught us the four Rs - Reading, Writing, Arithmetic *and* Religion. Morality, right from wrong, it did me no harm whatsoever. Then of course I went to Cowbridge Grammar School. I was in the class just above Anthony Hopkins. And there I met my dearest, best, most wonderful friend, Brian James. As I said in my talk at the school when we launched the book, I wouldn't be here now talking to you had it not been for Brian. I wasn't trained in history in any way; I took a degree in philosophy. He started my interest going, and I've had a wonderful life in local history, and made so many friends.



Have you ever been tempted to move away from this area?

Never. It's the country of my heart. I love the Ystradowen area, with the wonderful glacial scenery due to the Ice Age. Up here we have a camaraderie based on the iron mine - the only one in Wales - which lasted until 1975 and bred men, many of whom were characters with their own particular nicknames. I married a girl from Llanharan, and my life has been very happy. I taught in Llangan School and in Llanharry Secondary School, which is now the Welsh school. I also taught in Llanharry Junior for many years and I have wonderful links with the school nowadays.

Did you find it difficult to write your memoirs?

Yes; there were difficulties because, as I said in the memoir, memory is a deceitful enchantress. Sometimes our memories play tricks on us. We think we were at an occasion, or saw something happen, and we weren't. Perhaps our parents so talked about it and described it so many times that we believe that it's our memory recalling it when it isn't. Plus, there was so much to leave out, so many incidents, so many people. I could have rewritten the memoir and doubled it.

Perhaps you could write part two...

I've promised my wife, my children and my friends I won't - but who knows?

Cowbridge History Society Publications Officer Deb Fisher was talking to David Francis

Other news

Behind the scenes at the museum

David Pierce, Chair of Cowbridge & District Museum Trustees, tells us that a number of temporary exhibitions are being planned for next year, including a commemoration of the 1918 Armistice. Curator Aled Lewis and Secretary Steve Harkett are among those working hard to ensure that this the museum's displays continually reveal new aspects of Cowbridge's history.

Missing links

Eagle-eyed Cowbridge historian Don Gerrard spotted something during one of his shopping trips in Cowbridge - or rather, he noticed something that wasn't there. Don observed that some of the metal discs that trace the course of the medieval town wall through the Waitrose complex were missing or damaged. He reported this to the committee and set out to find those responsible for the upkeep of these - as he noted, this is a valuable piece of local history.

Over the page you can see what the discs *should* look like, and what the empty spaces currently look like. It seems that most of the missing ones are on the vehicle access roads rather than the pedestrian area, which may mean that the traffic is responsible for the damage in some way.

This also seems like a good opportunity to reprint the late Jim Grove's beautiful line drawing of the Town Walls, so you can trace their outline for yourselves.

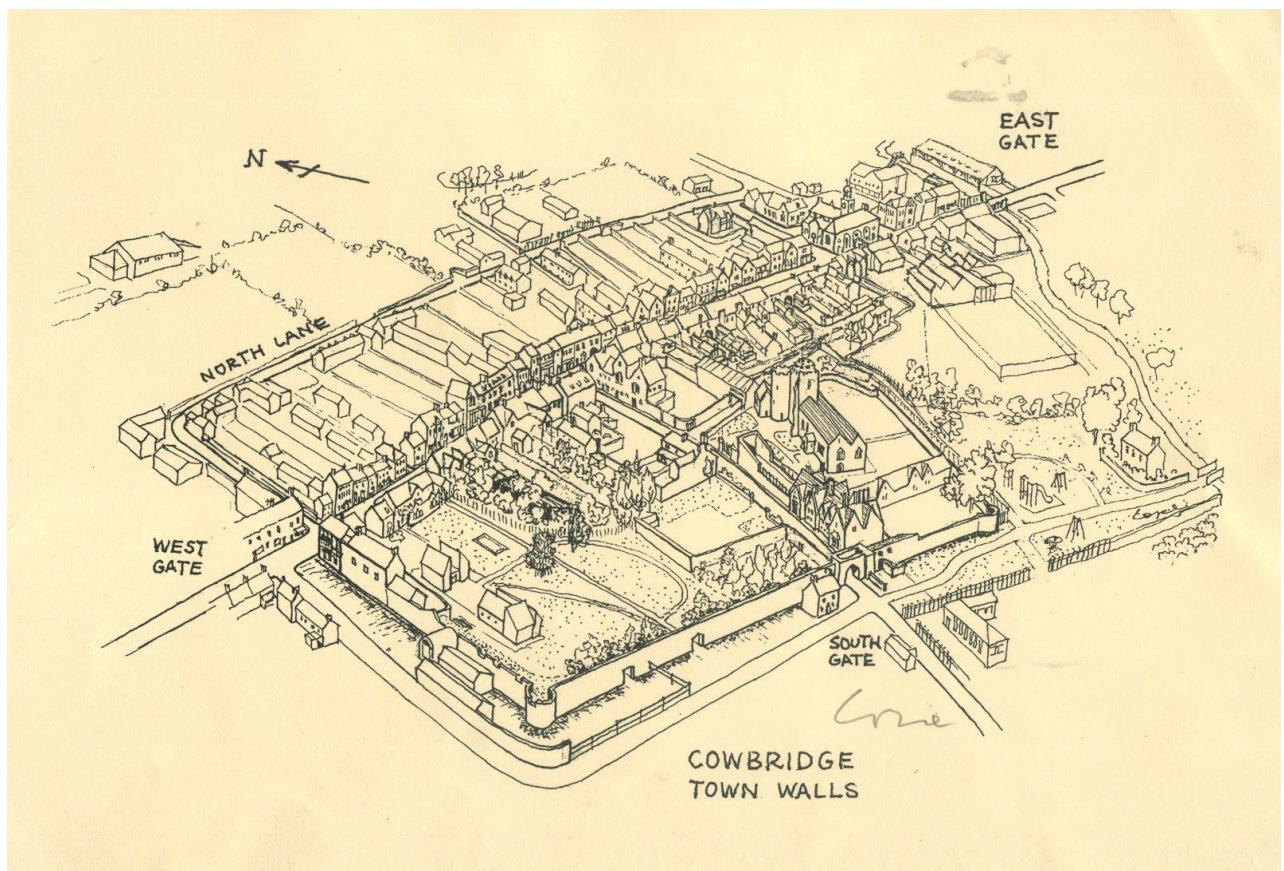


The disc as it should look

Missing disc



Below: Drawing of the town walls by the late Jim Grove



“Down Your Way”

In February 1975, the popular BBC radio programme *Down Your Way* focused on Cowbridge. The genial Brian Johnston, perhaps best known for his Test Match commentaries, was the regular host, and he interviewed six local people, mainly about their jobs. Each was then asked to choose a piece of music to be included in the programme.

Among those chosen to be interviewed on the programme were Alan and Neil Brown, “the printing twins”, who were at that time joint proprietors of Cowbridge’s long-established printers, D Brown & Sons in Eastgate. Another Eastgate resident selected was Mrs Angela Morgan, who ran the Cowbridge Women’s Institute Market - which, as “Cowbridge Country Market”, recently celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Estate agent Herbert R Thomas was a well-known figure in the town and secretary of the Vale of Glamorgan Show. When asked about the cattle market, he commented that today’s farmers, instead of hanging around drinking, would go home early and take their wives out for the evening!

Maud Gunter, the eminent local historian, was another participant; Miss Gunter was a former headmistress of the Girls’ High School in Cowbridge - the buildings in Aberthin Road later became the sixth form block of Cowbridge Comprehensive and are now disused. The joint President of Cowbridge History Society, Rev Norman Williams, was at that time Mayor of Cowbridge, and held the same exalted position of President in the former Cowbridge & District Local History Society. He naturally used his interview to draw attention to the history of the town.

The choices of music sound a little staid compared with what would no doubt be requested these days, ranging from operatic arias to concert songs, the odd one out being the folk song “To be farmer’s boy”, chosen by Mr Thomas.

In a selection of his writings collected by his son and posthumously published, *A delicious slice of Johnners* (2000), Brian Johnston revealed that, in January 1975, the BBC had considered dropping *Down Your Way*. After many protests from the listening public, as well as celebrities such as comedian Norman Vaughan, the BBC changed their minds, and the programme continued until 1992. Johnston died two years later, having given up the programme in 1987 to a “rotating” host; these included contemporary celebrities such as Lawrie McMenemy, Keith Floyd and John Peel.

The book contains some fascinating insights into how the programme was made during Johnston’s tenure and the difficulty in finding suitable interviewees; he speaks of having to “ration” the number of vicars and Women’s Institute ladies. How different it would be if he were still doing it! One can imagine the broadcasting team having to interview more than their fair share of charity shop workers and carers, and not quite as many clergy.

Betty Alden/Deb Fisher

The Story of Fred Dunn

Cowbridge Cricket Club went to war in 1914. Five of her members failed to return. It was a blow that could have meant the end of the Club, yet this year it celebrated its 175th anniversary.

Today when you enter the Cowbridge Cricket Club you pass through the Fred Dunn gates. But who was Fred Dunn, and why were the gates erected in his memory?

The Dunns were a Welsh family who had moved back to Cowbridge from Kent where the father, Frederick, had worked as a mining engineer. They came to the Vale of Glamorgan in 1894 and raised five sons and two daughters in the genteel surroundings of The Cross. Of the boys, Fred was the eldest, then came Jack, Frank, Hugh (always known as Tom) and Aubrey.

The Dunn boys naturally became pupils at Cowbridge Grammar School, a small but scholarly institution under the benevolent guidance of the Headmaster, the Rev William Franken Evans. As with many public schools of the day, games had risen to prominence as a key part of their youngsters' education, and at Cowbridge it seems cricket was at the front of affairs.

The boys were fortunate that cricket played a big part in the life of the town as well. Not only did the school play matches, there was the Cowbridge town club that had begun playing around 1840. The Town Club was hampered by its lack of a home ground, but from 1895 there would be the magnificent facilities that had been created by E H Ebsworth of Llandough Castle.

The Town cricket club though grew into the Cowbridge Wanderers CC in 1906, a Club established by the Rev Owen Jones, a leading cricketer, a local clergyman, and by all accounts something of a rogue. While at Oxford, Jones was rusticated for causing damage to a railway carriage and travelling First class on a third class ticket. He must have been the only clergyman that publicans called in to sort out the local ruffians! The Wanderers provided a local counterpoint to the private XI run by Ebsworth.

After eight years, the Ebsworth XI faded, and first the "Glamorgan Gypsies", then the Cowbridge Wanderers, took over Ebsworth's ground on a leasehold basis in 1911.

By around 1911-12 the Dunn brothers prowess at cricket was evident. Fred Dunn was the Wanderers' Captain, Hugh scored the most runs, and Frank had already played for Glamorgan in 1911 in the Minor Counties Championship. It seemed that life for the middle class sporting youngsters of that era was indeed something close to perfect. And as we know it did not last.

Events in Sarajevo resulted in the *Western Mail* reporting that nine members of the Cowbridge Cricket Club had joined up in the 1st / 5th Welsh and they were smartly sent to Neyland for training.

The jingoism of the day is well illustrated by the poem by 'Velox' a regular correspondent on local affairs to the *Glamorgan Gazette*.

Cowbridge Cricketers and The Kaiser

*With a bayonet Fred Gibbs will tickle his ribs,
Jack Foukes with a left handed twister
Will take his off stump, or on his rump
Succeed in raising a blister
With a ball well shot, which is sure to be hot,
Dai Evans will grin when the Kaiser shouts 'Hoch'.
Billy Moynan be jabbers will give him a pill,
Charlie Morgan will yell when the Kaiser looks ill,
If he asks for a truce Lyn Llewellyn and Bruce
With the two brothers Dunn will give him a run,
If he wants to argue there still will be Pell
Who will send him a Yorker and land him in _____!*

Albert Gibbs joined the Cardiff Pals, the 16th (Cardiff City) Service Battalion, and fought at Mametz Wood. Having sustained heavy losses, the Battalion was transferred to Flanders, where Albert died in

September 1916. Harold Moynan joined the South Wales Borderers (Breckonshire) territorial battalion in 1914 and lost his life at the third battle of Ypres in 1917.

The other Club members to die were three out of the five Dunn brothers. Jack and Frank Dunn, alongside Bruce Bird, departed from Devonport on 19th July 1915 bound for the Dardanelles. On 10th August, during an ill-fated attack on Scimitar Hill, Frank lost his life in heavy crossfire. Five days later Jack too died in skirmishes with Turkish troops in the wooded hills overlooking Suvla Bay.

Bruce Bird had a 'miraculous' escape but was to suffer dysentery for many years afterwards. Neither Frank or Jack have known graves but they are commemorated on the Helles Memorial. The third Dunn brother to die was closer to home. Tom perished in a drowning accident in the River Monnow near Monmouth in May 1916.

You would have thought that with the war in full horror those custodians of the Cowbridge Athletic Club would have shied away from attempting to buy the ground. Not a bit of it.

The March 1915 Committee meeting approved the purchase. Brave indeed!

The Committee each donated £5 and local fundraising got the fund up to £311. In today's money that's around £22000, an extraordinary vote of confidence in the future. But it wasn't enough.

The problem was solved through the help of the new resident of Llandough Castle, Sir Sydney Byass. Like Harry Ebsworth Sir Sydney had widespread cricketing and business interests, in his case ownership of the Port Talbot steelworks. He would go on to become Chairman of Glamorgan and President of Cowbridge.

Sir Sydney provided the Cowbridge Athletic Club with a loan of £400. Eventually, with Sir Sydney's backing, his loan was repaid and the balance transferred to a bank loan which the Club paid off with commendable speed as normality became established. BY 1919 there were still issues with money, but there were also real problems getting the ground back into a satisfactory state. Here, led by Fred Dunn, the younger men came to the fore, undertaking all the tasks necessary to get the ground into some sort of order.

For Fred Dunn in particular to return to play such a key role in the revival of the club and indeed its management over the forthcoming decades; without three of his brothers it must have been a difficult experience. In the 1930s, Cowbridge staged Glamorgan fixtures, and in 1961, two years after his death, Fred Dunn's contribution was further marked by the unveiling of the gates by his sister, assisted by Fred's successor as Cowbridge President, J C Clay.

Jeff Bird

An Invitation to Members

Cowbridge History Society recently supported the Cowbridge Cricket Club in their recent application to the Lottery Heritage Fund for the financing of the refurbishment of the Fred Dunn Memorial Gates. The excellent news is that the application was successful and together with funding from elsewhere the refurbishment can be achieved. The Club has invited members of the Society to attend the official re-opening on Friday 29th September from 11.00am.

If you would be interested in attending and have not already advised me **please let me know** by telephone on 01446 772704 or by post to Stallcourt Mews, Stallcourt Close, Llanblethian Cowbridge CF71 7JU **before 15th September at the latest**, so that I can let Jeff Bird, the Club's President, know how many of us will be accepting their kind invitation.

Dick Tonkin
Secretary, Cowbridge History Society

MONTHLY PROGRAMME FOR 2017

**Cowbridge History Society meetings take place in the Lesser Hall, Town Hall,
Cowbridge**

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

PLEASE NOTE that visitors and guests are always welcome to attend the monthly meeting on payment of a one-off fee of £2.50 per meeting.

Autumn 2017

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| 6th October | <i>A Journey along the Thaw Valley</i>
Chris Young |
| 3rd November | <i>At the Grave of Henry Vaughan: a 1924 Road Trip</i>
Deborah Fisher |
| 1st December | <i>A Walk Around the Dyffryn Estate ... NOT the one at St Nicholas!</i>
Brian Davies
Followed by the traditional wine and mince pies |

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to the Secretary at **dicktonkin@btinternet.com** for potential publication in the next newsletter, or may be brought along to the next monthly meeting.

Subscriptions

As we are into a new financial year, you can join for the 2017 - 18 season at any time before the start of the new season in October. The membership fees are unchanged at £7.50 per person and any cheques should be made payable to "Cowbridge History Society".