

# ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

VOL. 1, No. 1, OCTOBER 1983

## Project Newsletter



JHM  
ROATH MILL.

The ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY was formed in November 1978. Its objects include collecting, interpreting and disseminating information about the old ecclesiastical parish of Roath, which covered an area which includes not only the present district of Roath but also Splott, Pengam, Tremorfa, Adamsdown, Pen-y-lan and parts of Cathays and Cyncoed.

Meetings are held every Thursday during school term at 7.15 p.m. at Albany Road Junior School, Albany Road, Cardiff.

The Society works in association with the Extra-mural Department of the University College, Cardiff who organise an annual series of lectures (Fee:£8.50) during the Autumn term at Albany Road School also on Thursday evenings. Students enrolling for the course of ten Extra-mural lectures may join the Society at a reduced fee of £3. for the period 1 January to 30 September 1984.

The ordinary membership subscription for the whole year (1 October to 30 September 1984) is £5.

Members receive free "Project Newsletters" containing results of research as well as snippets of interest to all who wish to find out more about the history of Roath. They have an opportunity to assist in group projects under expert guidance and to join in guided tours to Places of local historic interest.

Chairman: Alec Keir, [REDACTED]

Secretary: Jeff Childs, [REDACTED]

Treasurer: Gerry Penfold, [REDACTED]

## ROATH - GEOLOGY AND ARCHEAOLGY

### Geology

The terrain of the East Moors, Pengam Moors and the flood areas of the River Rhymney and the Roath Brook consist of alluvium and estuarine marls. Further inland in the area of Splott, Roath and Cathays the subsoil is mainly river gravels. North of the old village of Roath the land rises gently to a height of just over 200 feet on the summit of Pen-y-lan Hill where the reservoir is sited.

Pen-y-lan has a two-fold geological significance. Firstly, it is here that are found the oldest rocks in the neighbourhood - an outcrop of rocks of the Silurian age. Professor F.J.North tells how hundreds of millions years ago the great masses of strata of coal measures, carboniferous limestone and Old Red Sandstone were gradually eroded away leaving exposed the ancient Silurian rocks. The thickness of missing strata he estimates to have been at least 8000 feet. Secondly, Pen-y-lan is significant as marking the southwest boundary of the massive ice sheet of the last Great Ice Age (c. 200,000 B.C.) the line of which extended N.N.E. from Pen-y-lan more or less following the line of the present Welsh border, continuing northward and then eastward to the East coast of England. Tree trunks rooted in black clay resting on Triassic Marl at a depth of 17 feet were found in 1901 during dock excavations at Roath.

### Archaeology

One of the most significant of all archaeological finds in Wales is the Old Stone Age axe found about 50 years ago on Pen-y-lan Hill; it is on exhibit in the National Museum of Wales with the following caption:

" Hand axe of Acheulian type made of quartzite from Pen-y-lan. Date: Middle Acheulian (c. 200,000 B.C.) The implement is the first of its kind to have been recorded in South Wales, though some flint hand axes, apparently of Acheulian type have been found in Pontnewydd cave near St. Asaph in North Wales. It was probably made locally from a subangular fragment derived from one of the beds of gannister which occur in the coal measures. It was picked up by the donor, Miss M. Remington, from among stones cleared from an allotment on Pen-y-lan Hill; many unworked cobbles of the same material were found with it and probably reached the spot by solifluxion during the last Ice Age, long after the great interglacial period during which Middle Acheulian man flourished."

Also held at the National Museum is an end scraper on ridge backed flake of white patinated grey flint found at Roath Park. The bold working is described as of Pre-Neolithic character (Catalogue No. 193 (91.445)). A polished flint axe with thin butt and slightly flattened oval section was found in a peat bed "some feet below" the surface on the site of the Dowlais Steel Works East Moore in 1896.

In 1902 during work on preparing the site of the Roath Power Station some prehistoric bones were excavated and are described in the Public Library Journal Vol. III pt. 6, March 1902:

"Excavations on the site of the Roath Electric Power Station have revealed interesting relics in the shape of ancient human bones and those of hoofed animals. The deposits in which

the discoveries were made are alluvial, consisting of 20 or 30 feet of clay used for brick-making and underlain by gravel and shingle. Foundations are being laid upon these last beds and in every case the bones were found at this level resting upon the sand and pebble. Our readers will remember the press notice of the chief find, the upper part of the skull of the URUS, with horn-cores complete. This ancient animal is believed to be the direct ancestor of the British wild oxen, the nearest approach to which are the well known "Chillingham Cattle" preserved in the park of that name in Northumberland. A rather larger pair of horn-cores of the same animal was also found but in fragments. When mended this will prove a fine museum specimen."

The bones were identified by Mr. John Storrie, curator of the Cardiff Museum.

Roman pottery was found in the proximity of Pen-y-lan Hill and the Cardiff inner by-pass. It was discovered in a disused quarry near the recently demolished Edward Nicholl home. O.S. 171 (154) 1978.788.

Sources, etc.:

National Museum of Wales - various publications.

NORTH; F.J. Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society, Vol. XLVIII (1915) pp 36 - 49 article on water borings in Roath.

NORTH, P.J., "The Evolution of the Bristol Channel."; National Museum of Wales. 3rd ed. 1964. Cardiff.

ANDERSON, J.G.G., Article on Geology in "The Cardiff Region; a Survey" (prepared for the meeting of the British Association in Cardiff), Cardiff. pp 22 - 24.

Public Library Journal, Cardiff, as described and acknowledged in the text.

A.J.W.K.

## PRE-NORMAN ROATH

Many of the buildings that stand in Roath today are the product of suburban development undertaken during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. The area was viewed as being ripe for development by speculative landowners primarily to accommodate Cardiff's increasing population following new dock and railway construction. The landowners largely responsible for the suburban infilling were John, 5rd Marquess of Bute (1847 - 1900), Sir Charles Morgan (created 1st Baron Tredegar in 1859) and Godfrey, 2nd Baron Tredegar (1851 - 1913), Alfred Donald Mackintosh (sometimes referred to as the Mackintosh of Mackintosh), and the Crofts-Williams family of Roath Court.

If a survey were carried out amongst current Roath inhabitants (particularly the younger element) it would not be very surprising if many would find it difficult to imagine the landscape of Roath as being anything but the serried rows of terraces and shop fronts that are familiar today. Such a conception would be fallacious however since for the greater-part of its evolution, the Roath landscape has been predominantly agricultural, and characterised by dispersed farmsteads. This is clearly evident from the Roath tithe map of 1840.

The area known as Roath is also much older than is generally appreciated. In its time Roath has served as a manor parish village and suburb, and it is imperative that the local historian define clearly which of these units he is describing. It should also be borne in mind that, as well as some of these units existing at the same time, other complications arise in Roath's manorial and parochial contexts which have to be clarified.

Manorially, Roath was originally one manor, established by the first Norman lord of Glamorgan and Cardiff in the 1090s, and known as the Manor of Roath. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the manor became fragmented so that three manors were forged out of the original unit. This process will be described in more detail in a future Project letter.

Parochially, we need to distinguish between ecclesiastical parishes and civil parishes (although the latter never applied to Roath). The ecclesiastical parish of Roath is reputed to have been created in the sixteenth century, although its antecedent, namely the chapelry of Roath, originated in the early twelfth century. The ecclesiastical parish was the unit which served the spiritual needs of the community although it also came to perform administrative (i.e. secular) functions such as the organisation of Poor Relief. As a consequence of population growth and urbanisation in the second half of the nineteenth century, the boundaries of ecclesiastical parishes lost their significance. New ecclesiastical districts emerged to serve new parish churches that were built within the confines of an original parish, to cater for the increasing population. This was the case in Roath. (This is why modern parochial boundaries bear no resemblance to the original ecclesiastical ones). Although many civil parishes did follow the boundaries of their ecclesiastical namesakes they had a fundamentally different purpose. They were the product of late nineteenth century legislation, being the creation of the Local Government Act of 1894. They were exclusively civil and administrative units, and formed a third tier of local government until they in turn were abolished by the Local Government Act of 1972. (The 1894 Act in terms of civil parishes had no effect on Roath which had since 1875 come under the administration of the extended borough of Cardiff).

In its manorial context, Roath has a wealth of source material available. This will become clearer when we study such records in future Project Newsletters.

It is appropriate that this first Project Newsletter should contain a reference to the origins and characteristics of pre-manorial Roath. In order to do this however it is necessary to place the latter in a larger context for the reason that describing pre-manorial Roath without reference to wider issues (regional and "national") would be virtually meaningless, with the ensuing description extremely superficial. As it is, what follows is based entirely on secondary source material and interpretation, because written source material is virtually non-existent, whilst non-written sources for Roath are largely based on legend.

Professor William Rees in his history of Cardiff suggests that the present Roath Court Funeral Home (at the junction of Albany Road with Newport Road) may have been one site of royal centre of the many independent Welsh rulers who filled the vacuum following the departure of the Roman garrison from Wales in c400, but when it served as a royal centre is uncertain. He bases this view mainly on the observations of the sixteenth century antiquarian Rice Merrick (Rhys Meurig) who in his "Booke of Glamorganshire Antiquities" published in 1578 stated that within the lordship of manor of 'Rothe Dogfilde stood an old Pyle, compassed with a Mote, which is called 'The Court' but now in ruyne". Rees believed this mound to be suggestive of Pre-Norman origins. Moreover the 'Pyle' and 'Mote' are also seen as authenticating the claim that the place name Roath (in Welsh, Y Rhath) is of Gaelic extraction, being derived from 'Rath' the old Irish word for an ancient earthwork, fortress or enclosure.

It should be pointed out however that in an article entitled 'The Problem of the Rathes of Pembrokeshire', Professor W.F.Grimes is cautious in ascribing archaeological derivations to place names which have 'rath' connotations. He writes:

'Rath is a term commonly used in Ireland to define a particular type of earthwork a circular enclosure defended by a bank-and-ditch system which is normally very strong in relation to the very small area enclosed. Apart from its presence in certain place names (where in any case its origins is probably different) the word occurs in Wales only in one quite limited area: the central part of Pembrokeshire, here taken to be a piece of country with a radius of about twelve miles around Haverfordwest.

(See the article in Donald Moore (ed) The Land of Dyfed in Early Times, Cardiff 1964;

In the absence of any contrary information as to the origin of the place name we may take it that the derivation from an earthwork or fortress is the most we can go on for the present.

Finally, John Hobson Matthews hypothesised that there was reason to believe that the name of Roath predates the Norman foundation of Cardiff, and that the area of land between the Taff and Rhymney rivers, incorporating the site of Cardiff castle, equated with 'the District of the Rath'.

What follows broadly describes the main territorial and administrative features of pre-Norman 'Wales' with special reference to the 'Cardiff' region.

## GLYWYSING AND THE KINGDOM OF MORGANNWG

After the withdrawal of the Roman forces from Britain (in the fifth century) native dynasties arose in South East Wales and elsewhere. Tradition has it that somewhere between the fifth and seventh centuries petty kings of the line of the legendary king GLYWYS ruled an area which extended from the river Tawe in the west to the river Usk in the east, known as GLYWYSING. Glywys was reputed to be the great grandson of Eugenius, one of the sons of Magnus Maximus (Macsen Wledig), the late Roman ruler. In the course of the seventh century a new dynasty under MEURIG ap TEWDRIG emerged. It is from his grandson MORGAN ab ATHRWYS who ruled in the eighth century that the name MORGANNWG is said to be derived. The kingdom of Morgannwg was larger than Glywysing and included the ancient Kingdom of Gwent. It covered an area from the Tawe in the west to the Wye in the east.

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF MORGANNWG

### The Gwlad

In pre-Norman times, Wales was divided into GWLEDYDD or states, so that the kingdom of Morgannwg was a Gwlad. The latter represented a region subject to single rule and a single dynasty. In each gwlad the king or prince exercised certain privileges and prerogatives, maintaining at his court or LLYS a royal household of high-ranking officers and retainers such as the Disdain or steward, the Judge, the Court priest and the Bard.

### Cantrefs and Commotes

The most important administrative unit of the gwlad was the CANTREF, which was itself derived from a unit comprising one hundred TREFYDD (or townships). In turn cantrefs were divided into two or more CYMYDAU or Commotes in order to facilitate the collection of dues and the holding of local courts. These ancient administrative units reveal a highly developed system of local government. In each cantref or commote the king or prince (the tywys og) had a lesser court-house which served as a centre for local government.

The sites of these court-houses were known as MAERDREFI or royal villages, and they were the largest centres in each commote. It was here that the king or prince's local officer, the Rhaglaw (deputy or viceroy) held the court of the commote, the Maer collected the dues of the Bondment while the Rhingyll (sergeant or beadle) collected those of the Freeman.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The old Welsh System was based on kinship. Society was composed of tribes with all members united by real or supposed descent from a common ancestor. Within the tribe there were smaller groupings or clans based upon a closer blood relationship. Members of the clan were responsible for the payment of a variety of dues to the Chieftain, and the Gwestfa (a food rent) to the king or prince when he and his officials were in the area. (Interestingly, mention is made of a guest rent in a Minister's Account of 1301 for the Manor of Rumney. It would appear that this was also claimed by

Norman lords.) Members of the clan were Freeman who occupied scattered farmsteads. Gavelkind was the method of inheritance, where property was divided equally among a man's sons.

In addition to the freemen were the, Bondmen who lived in BOND VILLAGES - the only villages to be found in Wales before the coming of the Normans. These bondmen too were subject to dues and services.

### CANTREFS OF MORGANNWG

The kingdom of Morgannwg consisted of seven constituent cantrefi, whose boundaries ran along the lines of the river valleys that run from the uplands to the sea. They included GWRINYDD (GORFYNYDD) which lay between the Tawe and the Thaw, PENYCHEN between the Thaw and the Taff, GWYNLLWG between the Rhymney and the Usk, GWENT ISCOED and GWENT UCHOED.

Historical evidence of the medieval period also points clearly to the fact that SENGHENYDD or 'y Cantref Breiniol' had been an administrative entity in the Welsh period.

### SENGHENYDD

The pre-Norman cantref of particular interest to us is Senghenydd, lying between the rivers Taff and Rhymney, and extending from the boundary with Brycheiniog in the north (near Merthyr) to the sea at Cardiff. The cantref was divided into three commotes:

- (1) UWCH-CAIACH (above Caiach) to the north of Caiachbrook near Llancaiach.
- (2) IS-CAIACH (below Caiach) south of the Caiach brook as far as the ridge of the Caerphilly mountain.
- (3) CIBWR (Kibbor) lying to the south of Caerphilly mountain, as far as the Severn shore or Bristol channel.

It is the commote of Kibbor, whose Llys or Court-house was reputedly at Llysfaen (Lisvane - meaning 'Stone Court') which is of relevance here, as it was this area which was adopted in its entirety by the Normans as their Lordship of Cardiff - an area which also incorporated the MANOR of Roath and which later encompassed the ecclesiastical parishes of Roath, Llanedeyrn, Lisvane, St John's and St Mary's in the 'towne' of Cardiff (east of the Taff) and part of Whitchurch.

The manor of Roath will form the basis of a future Project Newsletter.



## NOTES ON SOURCES

The passages devoted to the origins of Roath are based on MATTHEWS, J. HOBSON,(ed.), Records of the County Borough of Cardiff (6 Vols. Cardiff 1898-1911, especially Vols I, II & V).

REES, William, Cardiff. A History of the City (Cardiff 1962, revised ed. 1964).

MERRICK, Rice, A Booke of Glamorganshires Antiquities (1578) (ed. J.A. Corbett 1882; reprinted Barry 1972) (The first complete edition of Merrick's study is scheduled to be the first publication issued under the auspices of the recently formed South Wales Record Society. Entitled Morganiae Archaigraphia: a Book of the Antiquities of Glamorgan, it will be edited by Brian L1. James.

The background to pre-Norman society was based on the chapter by J. Beverly Smith entitled "The Kingdom of Morgannwg and the Norman Conquest of Glamorgan", in Vol. III of the Glamorgan County History Series (ed. T.B. Pugh, Cardiff 1971) and the same author's article in Morgannwg entitled "The Lordship of Glamorgan".

## ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is nothing for Roath comparable to Edgar Chappell's history of Whitchurch. It is the intention of the Roath Local History Society to publish a history of the ecclesiastical parish some time in the future, using original source material.

Much of the material for Roath is subsumed within more general histories, e.g. of Cardiff or Glamorgan. Of these by far the most important is the Matthews compilation of Cardiff records detailed above. This can be consulted at the Cardiff Central Library; University College, Cardiff, Arts and Social Studies Library (Salisbury Collection) and the Glamorgan Record Office.

Apart from those already listed the following works will also be found useful:-

ANDREWS, D.A., Cardiff - a Sketch Book. London, 1920.

BALLINGER, J. Guide to Cardiff City and Port. 1908.

BALLINCER, J., (ed.) , Cardiff. An illustrated handbook. 1996.

CAERDYDDIAN (pseud.);"Reminiscences of Cardiff", South Wales Echo, June 1892'

CARDIFF CITY COUNCIL. Cardiff 1889-1974. 1974.

" " " The Cardiff Guide. 1976.

Various Authors. The Cardiff Region. 1960.

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DAVIES, J., Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute. Cardiff. 1981,

EVANS: C.J. (ed.), The Book of Cardiff, London and Oxford 1937

EVANS, C.J.O., Glamorgan: its history and topography. Cardiff 1938.

HALLETT, H.M., (ed.), Handbook for Cardiff and the Neighbourhood. 19

HILLING, J.B., Cardiff and the Valleys. London. 1973.

HODGES, T.M., "The peopling of the Hinterland and Port of Cardiff" in W.E.Minchinton (ed).  
Industrial South Wales 1750-1914

JENKINS, J.A., The Book of Cardiff, 1912

" " Cardiff and its history, 1905.

JENKINS, W.L., A history of the town and castle of Cardiff. 1854.

MORGAN, C., A brief guide to Cardiff and the neighbourhood; 1891.

PATERSON, D.R., Early Cardiff. Exeter, 1926.

THOMPSON, H.H., Cardiff. 1930.

VACHELL, C.T., The history of Cardiff. 1913.

WARNER, Marmaduke, History of Roath St Germans.

WALKER, D.G, "Cardiff" in R.A. Griffiths (ed.) Boroughs of Medieval Wales. 1978.

WILLIAMS, G, (ed), The Glamorgan County History Vol 4. 1974.

WILLIAMS, Moelwyn, "Cardiff - its people and its trade 1660 - 1720" in Morgannwg , Vol. VII. 1963.

WILLIAMS, S.(ed), The Cardiff Book. Vols 1,2 &3. Barry, 1973,74,77.

" " The Glamorgan Historian. Vols 1 - 15,

" " Cardiff yesterday, 7 Vols. 1979 - 1983.

" " South Glamorgan : a county history Barry. 1971

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HEADTEACHERS, The book of Cardiff. Oxford. 1937.

The Parish of Roath - publication celebrating the centenary of the rebuilding of Roath Church. 1970.

REES, W., The placenames of Cardiff. South Wales and Monmouthshire Record Society. Vol. 2. 1955..

Most, if not all the above, should be held at the Cardiff Central Library. Many more works on Cardiff and its hinterland are also listed in the Library's extensive Local History collection.

D.J.P.C.

Here is a curious entry from Ewen's Directory of Cardiff of 1855:-

ROATH once a Roman Station and Town was  
despoiled of its "old building materials"  
it is said in 1089 by one Iestyn ap Gwrgan.  
(this Iestyn seems to have been pretty much  
in earnest, for he left nothing to indicate  
its former existence) and therewith was  
built the Town of Cardiff of that date.

#### Footnote on origin of the name "ROATH"

Although the usual explanation is that it comes from the ancient Irish term for a fortress or enclosure with surrounding rampart, another explanation sometimes advanced is that it could be from the Welsh 'rhodd' a gift."

#### EARLY REFERENCES TO ROATH

The earliest references to Roath in medieval charters are found in G.T. Clark's "CARTAE ET ALIA MUNIMENTA QUAE AD DOMINIUM DE ZGLAMORGAN PERTINENT" - 4 vols. Dowlais and Cardiff, 1885 - 1893":-

A.D. 1106. In a confirmation (of an earlier charter of Robert, Fitzhamon) by Henry I to the Abbot of Tewkesbury

"Raz" - Cartae I p.39.

A.D. 1171 - 1183 Confirmation by Bishop Nicholas of Llandaf -

Cartae I p.133.

"videlicet ecclesiam parochialem Stae Mariae de Kayrdif cum capellam de castello, capellam Sti. Johannis, capellam Sti. Thomae, capellam de Raht, capellam de Sti. Dionissi de Kibur, capellam de Liffeni, capellam Sti. Edern, capellam de Lanbordan -----"

Charter of Edward I - Cartae III p.770:

- "Raz"

12th Century:-

- Radn - Cartae I p 223
- Rahat

- Raath

In later documents as Rotti, Rothe and finally as Roath.

The grant by Richard Bulchart to Margam Abbey of 5½ acres (c. 1155):

- "que jacent inter pratum Willelmi Docgeuel et pratum hominum de Rad"

Early medieval references can be discerned to the parish church of St. Mary, Cardiff, the chapels of St. John, St. Thomas, Roath (later St. Margaret's), St. Denis (presumably Lisvane), Llanedeyrn and Llanforda - a chapel now disappeared at Coed-y-gores.

The name Roath Dogfield" originates from the personal name "Docgeuel"

### CURRENT PROJECTS

1. Work is proceeding on transcribing in chronological order the records of baptisms, marriages and burials from the Bishop's Transcripts of the parish of Roath, photocopies of the Llandaff Diocesan records having been purchased from the National Library of Wales. A comparison will then be made with the Parish Registers of St. Margaret's Church, Roath.

2. Preparations are being made to mount a public exhibition of photographs, historic documents etc. from Monday, 28 November to Saturday, 10 December at Roath Branch Library, with the assistance and kind permission of the librarian, Mrs. J. Mulready.

## FUTURE ISSUES

Articles will appear in future issues on the following subjects;

- An A.B.C. of Place Names in Roath, with notes on each.
- The Manors of Roath
- The Parish and the Parish Church
- The Village
- Land Ownership
- Urban Development
- Non-Conformist Places of Worship
- Street Names
- Parish Records
- Gentry Families
- Roath Wills and Inventories
- What we learn from Census Returns (1841 - 1871)
- A special issue next year will mark the centenary of Albany Road and the MacKintosh Estate.

Contributions, letters, queries and comments for inclusion in future Project Newsletters will be welcome. At present there are no facilities for reproducing photographs but black and white drawings, graphs, maps etc. can be reproduced.

Correspondence should be sent to:

The Editor

Mr, A.J.. Keir



## Note by the Treasurer

As a matter of policy it has been decided that the whole of the 1985/4 membership fees will be allocated to the production and distribution of the Newsletters. A reserve supply will be held by the Secretary for sale to the public at prices varying with the size and quality of each Newsletter.

G.H. Penfold.