

# COWBRIDGE AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 31

JANUARY 1992



The Grammar School

## ANCIENT BUILDINGS

At the Annual General meeting of the Society in September last, Vic Eveleigh reported a depressing lack of action to improve the state of Llanblethian Castle (and this was well documented in George Haynes' article in the last Newsletter) He asked members to continue to barrage CADW with letters and to seek every means to publicise the situation. Since then CADW has undertaken extensive work on the castle to stabilize it and remove much of the encroaching ivy, shrubs and trees. It is now more visible than it has been for years and it is to be hoped that CADW will undertake further restoration to make the building safe for public viewing.

Meanwhile another local historic building appears to be under threat - the Old Grammar School - see Vic Eveleigh's notes on page 2 and take action as you think fit.

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

February 14th : 'Gardens in History and Art' by Patricia Moore

March 6th : 'The Stradlings of St Donats' by Professor Glanmor Williams

April 3rd : 'Captain David Tilley and the Cowbridge Fire Brigade 1901-1924, by Leonard Davies.

## CHARTER DAY DINNER,

WEDNESDAY, 4TH MARCH 1992

in Cowbridge Town Hall

Price £9.50

Sherry Reception in the Mayor's Parlour at 7.00 p.m. prior to dinner at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets from : Bruce or Rita McGovern

(773611)

Neil or Val Shannon

(773957)

With the passing of John Idwal Rees into Cowbridge history, it is fitting to recall the significance of his appointment to the headship of Cowbridge Grammar School, in 1938 at the age of twenty-eight.

The School was founded by Sir Edward Stradling of St Donats about 1608 and was purchased from the family by Sir Leoline Jenkins. Latin Secretary to Charles II, who had begun his education there as Llywelyn Jenkin, son of a yeoman of the parish of Llanblethian. Sir Leoline bequeathed the School to Jesus College, Oxford, in his will of 1685.

A Classics graduate of the Universities of Wales and Cambridge, Idwal Rees quickly showed his outstanding gifts of leadership and example, and had distinguished himself on the rugby field by playing well for Wales. His 'presence' was remarkable and his knowledge of and concern for everyone in the School was a binding force which made the School truly special. His absence in the Royal Air Force for some of the war years was a blow to all of us who were there and I recall especially two occasions, the one when he took assembly for the first time on his return and said " I have received a complaint from civilians" - pause and a slight murmur from his audience - " from townspeople about the behaviour of certain boys...", and the other : "Today is Friday the thirteenth and Mr Baugh is leaving us" (George Baugh was Head of English and a brilliant teacher).

Peter Cobb, Vicar of Magor, gave the oration at the funeral service at St Paul's Church, Sketty, Swansea on Thursday, 5th September 1991. Peter recalled his first meeting with Idwal, in a Cardiff hotel, and accepted the post offered him (though he had not seen the school) on the strength and sincerity of Idwal's personality. Peter came to Cowbridge with the thought that it would do for two years or so, but taught Geography there for seventeen years. Its humanity, Peter declared, was the distinctive quality of the School and Idwal its foremost exponent.

Iolo Davies, Idwal's successor and the last Headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, was at St Paul's and a strong contingent from Cowbridge School included the head boy and head girl.

We all thanked God for a much loved friend and headmaster who was such an inspiration to us all, and he will remain in our hearts and thoughts always.

John L.S.Miles



COWBRIDGE SCHOOL

COWBRIDGE

THE OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL, CHURCH STREET

This Grade II Listed building is reputed to be in such a dangerous state that the Education Committee of South Glamorgan County Council is considering whether it should stop using it. If this happens there is a serious risk that the building will rapidly deteriorate beyond repair.

The Town Council is looking for support in its campaign to persuade the County Council to carry out the long overdue maintenance and repair of this important part of our heritage in order to bring it back fully into community use

If you are concerned about this, please write to :  
Mr M.Boyce, Chief Executive  
Mr B.Davies, Director of Property Services / Mr D.Orrell, Director of Education / County Councillor P.Perkins, Chairman of Education Committee  
at : County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff. CF1 5UW.

Further information can be obtained from Councillor Vic Eveleigh (772495).

## Two Leg Breaks and Half a Century Between

### A Wartime Reminiscence

Early in May 1990 my brother Bill fell in his garden and broke his right leg (it was three weeks before the local hospital discovered that it was broken, but fortunately it mended).

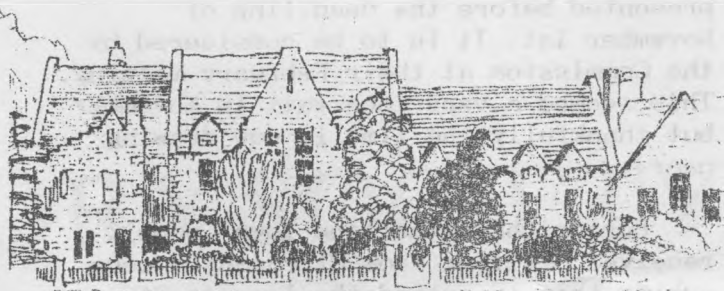
The memory of Summer 1940 came flooding back. No one who lived through that, eventful summer can ever forget it. I remember as if it were yesterday the sight of the Army officer coming through the front gate with bad news.

Invasion was expected : indeed, on 7th September all coastal areas received the warning and policemen went round the doors, warning each household. On the Aberthin road, northward out of Cowbridge, railway trucks filled with concrete slabs stood, ready to block the road in face of invaders.

On the day I recall, the London Scottish, a Territorial Regiment, were passing through in convoy. A piper was sitting on top of one of the coaches playing the pipes. Bill always needed to be up front and at nine and a half years old had to know what was going on. So he was outside the grey stone walls of the High School when one of the coaches collided with a truck which hurtled into the wall and disintegrated, pinning Bill against the wall by his left leg which broke above the knee. (At his sixtieth birthday party Bill still vividly recalled how his leg was twisted round and how he only just managed to stop some foolish person turning it round.)

So Bill was rushed off to Cardiff Royal Infirmary, and an Egyptian surgeon named Saldis did some first-rate work on him. To immobilise the fidgety youngster, his leg was completely encased in plaster so that only the big toe appeared, and the plaster was continuous, encasing the pelvis and waist.

In the fine weather the nurses in the upper wards pushed the patients' beds out on the verandahs so that they could enjoy the sun. Above the Hospital in the blue sky floated a barrage balloon, to keep the bombers off. The sirens wailed to signal a raid and all the nurses took cover, leaving the patients on the verandahs.



HIGH.school- Cowbridge

Over the rooftops came a twin-engined German bomber with an RAF fighter in hot pursuit. The front gunner of the bomber opened fire on the balloon and shot it down. (What did John Dioxide, our Chemistry master tell us? 'Air and hydrogen form an inflammable mixture which burns with explosive violence. Witness what happened to the Hindenburg') The German gunner must have been using day ammunition, for the hydrogen mercifully did not ignite. If it had, the hospital in all probability would have burned down.

When Mother and I visited Bill the next day (there was a bus only every two hours as the bus service had been stripped for war purposes), the remains of the barrage balloon, were lying on the hospital roof, the shrouds dangling from the edge.

When we eventually got Bill home, still in plaster, Mother and I made a stretcher for him out of two broom handles and some canvas. When the siren sounded, we put Bill on the stretcher and placed it under the dining room table : it was the best we could do as there was no air raid shelter.

Bill lost a whole year from school but made a perfect recovery, our Glaswegian doctor, Robert Brown Miller, taunting him into action to take the first steps after the plaster was off. It is ironical that fifty years later he should break the other leg.

At the end of the war in Europe, the town siren was used as a fire alarm for the town brigade : it was some time before my stomach ceased to turn over at the sound. Peace had come at last!

John L.S.Miles

The Museums and Galleries Commission's application form for the Registration of Museums has been duly completed and was presented before the dead-line of November 1st. It is to be considered by the Commission at their February meeting. This seemed a very long wait in November but thankfully the time is now drawing near.

During the summer the Town Council received a letter from St Fagans Museum asking them to extend the loan to St Fagans of the Cowbridge stocks and a bushel measure and also to agree the insurance value of these articles. These items have been on loan to succeeding Cardiff Museums since 1895. It was decided by the Council to inspect these items before signing anything. I was asked, as Curator, to accompany two Councillors, Mrs Kitty Gates and Mr Vic Eveleigh (the Council's two Museum representatives) to St Fagans. Miss Stevens, a staff member of St Fagans, was very welcoming and we were taken to a room where the stocks and measure had been displayed for our benefit.

I had been warned by members of the History Society who had seen the stocks at an exhibition staged by our Society in its early days, that they were in a very poor condition; also Miss Stevens warned us of their poor state. We were therefore pleasantly surprised at the size of the stocks and the efforts made by St Fagans to preserve them.

The bushel measure was a mystery to us all. Present Councillors had no knowledge of it and it had not been mentioned when the Society had asked for a list of Cowbridge items in the possession of the National Museum when we were setting up our own museum. As it was valued at £700 we could not imagine what to expect and once again we were very pleasantly surprised. It is made of bronze, bell metal to be exact. It is engraved with the date 1743 and stamped with a London bellfoundry's mark. Quite an impressive artifact. St Fagans are happy for us to have these items back at any time so we hope to have them for a short exhibition some time this year.



On a less cheerful note, the new conservator from the Council of Museums in Wales says the medieval spearhead found at St Hilary is in an unstable condition and needs treatment fairly quickly; her estimate for the treatment is £62. Unfortunately it does not end there. When stabilised, in order for it to survive, it will need to be kept in an environment of very low humidity. This kind of box costs about £200. The news is not all bad, however; we hope to get a 50% grant towards stabilisation and we are considering making a box ourselves. could be gratefully received.

Marion Eveleigh



#### RECENT MEETINGS

When the business part of the A.G.M. in September had been completed, Mr Jeff Alden gave a most interesting talk on the history of Llanblethian. His slides showed traces of early settlement and of the old buildings which still remain.

In October Mrs Nic Treharne spoke on Music and Local History, illustrated by recordings and by a small choir.

Mr Len Davies stepped in at very short notice to talk at the November meeting about the Stage Coach Routes of South Wales. This proved to be an amusing and engrossing resume of the various means used over the years to reach the areas now covered so easily by the M4 motorway.

Mr Arthur Peplow gave the Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture in December, speaking about the Pilgrim routes to Santiago da Compostella. He spoke of the importance of relics to medieval Christians and of the pilgrimages undertaken to visit them. According to tradition the remains of St James are buried at Santiago de Compostella, but nowadays this is generally held to be unlikely. Some authorities think that the site could be a pre-Christian sun-worship pilgrimage site and certainly it was a Roman burial place. The legend of St James did not apparently arise until the 8th century. However Compostella became, and still is, an important pilgrimage site. Mr Peplow showed some beautiful slides of the many interesting, historic buildings on the different routes along which pilgrims travel by various means today.