

**The Bear Hotel,**  
**the Druids and**  
**My Family**  
**connections**

**By Samuel Thomas**

**For the Jeff Alden local**  
**history competition**

**D.O.B-5/08/97**

*The Bear Hotel dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is a Grade II listed building and in late medieval times it was a hall-house. It still has a lot of its original features, but it has been altered a lot over the years. Two medieval mantelpieces remain - one in the lounge bar and one with two shields in the reception area (photo attached). The dining room has a barrel-vaulted ceiling which is medieval.*

*It is believed that it was previously the Cowbridge town house for the Thomas family that lived in Llanmihangel Place. The first reference to The Bear being an inn is in 1736. Samuel Edwin owned the inn in 1738 and in 1768 he leased it as an inn to John Edmond.*

*In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the upstairs was converted into an assembly room and Quakers held their meetings there. It has held many formal dinners, meetings and balls throughout the ages. The Freemasons and the Glamorgan Agricultural Society also met there in the late 1700's.*

*There have been many relations of mine owning and working at the Bear in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but I admit that my family have only been involved for a small percentage of the time. Here I list some of the landlords who I am related to:*

*Bradley,  
Thomas,  
Williams.*

*In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Bear was a coaching stop. Tired horses pulling heavy loads of mail would stop here to be changed on the run from Cardiff to Pembroke via Swansea. It also provided accommodation and stables for horses and for travellers going between London and west-Wales. For that reason it has become very well known. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Napoleon held his troops here en route to London after a failed invasion at Fishguard! This was when Christopher Bradley was the landlord. He was well known for his difficult and bad tempered nature - "How like Bradley is to the Bear" was a local saying. He was very involved in coaching*

*and was known as a Mail Coach Proprietor. Michael Glover became the new landlord after Christopher Bradley. Bradley moved to a nearby post office when he left the Bear in 1804, but he continued to sell beer and spirits, so he was in competition with Glover.*

*My great, great, great, grandfather - Joseph May - was the ostler at the Bear before buying the Druids, which is now actually called the Ancient Druid today. It was called the Druids because of the druid stone in the garden next door.*

*The ostler was a very important position as he would have to look after all the coach horses and the individual horses that stopped at the inn. Joseph's wife, Margaret - my great, great, great grandmother - died in the Bear of typhoid in 1847. The outbreak of typhoid was probably a result of the open sewer in the land behind the hotel. Many others died during this outbreak.*

1854



*Joseph May died in 1885 and the Druids closed in 1886. One of his daughters – Annie Bridget Thomas (formerly May), lived at No: 41 Eastgate, on the corner next to the railway station. She had moved back to Cowbridge from west Wales after her husband, Robert Thomas, died. It was then called the Ancient Druid, but is now called the New Druids. It is all very confusing!! I attach photos of The Ancient Druid and The New Druid as they are today. It is recorded that when the Druids closed she moved the licence and ran this hotel and was landlady until 1921. However, my grandmother could recall going to the Ancient Druid with my grandfather and being served by Annie Thomas, which would have been closer to Annie's death in 1931, as my grandmother was born in 1914.*

*Annie Thomas is buried next to her mother and father (Joseph and Margaret May) in Holy Cross churchyard and there is a plaque inside the church to commemorate her death (see photos).*

*There are memorials in the Holy Cross church to the Bradleys, Williams Mays.*

*I have also shown the Bradley coat of arms, see the photo page.*

*Jeff Alden told my father a few years ago that there is a family pew in Holy Cross church which we haven't yet identified. He also told him about several family graves in the graveyard which we did not know about. My father has already done work to preserve them as much as possible and we will continue, as all family memorials play an important role in preserving the history of Cowbridge.*

*There are a lot more family connections that I am trying to discover and I look forward to uncovering them! I think there is a family link between my great-grandmother -Thomas (formerly Blackmore) - whose family were associated with the Taff Vale Railway.*

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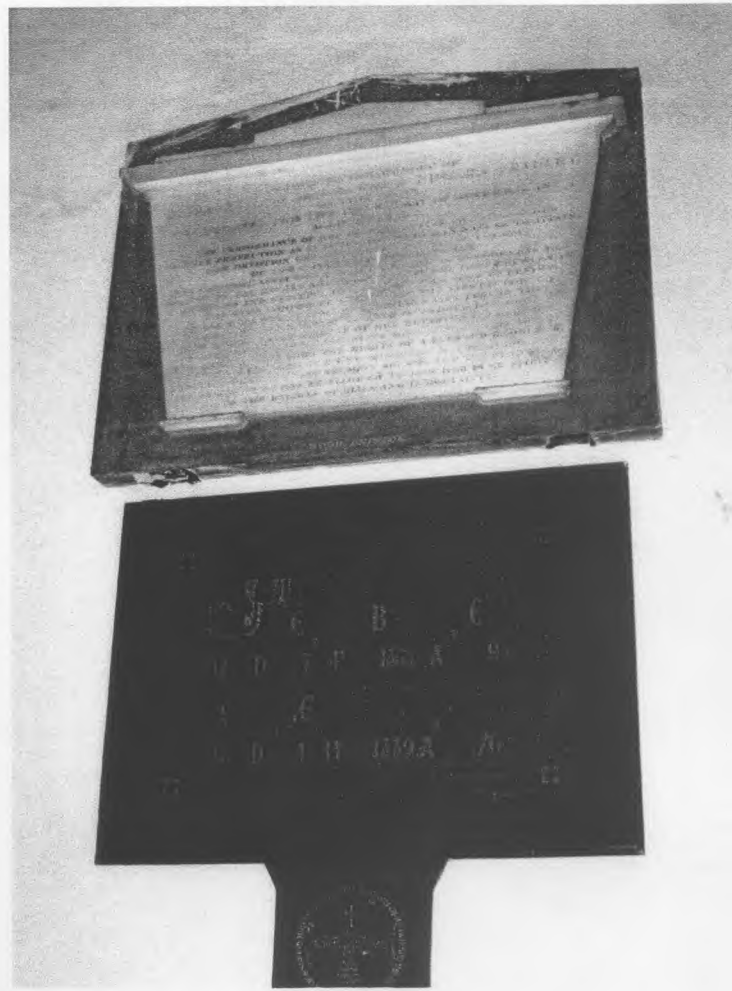
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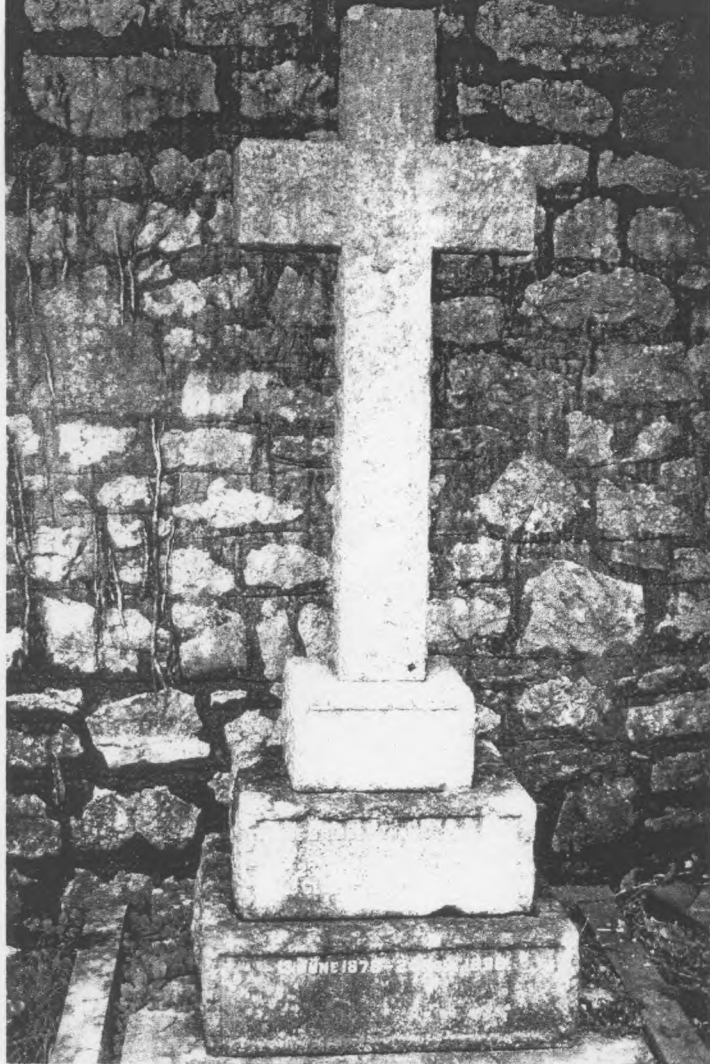
***Family Recollections.***



Left: Number 41, The Ancient Druid Hotel. Known today as the New Druids.

Right: Bradley's Memorials in Holy Cross Church.





The grave of Annie  
Bridget Thomas.



The grave of her parents,  
Joseph and Margaret May  
in the graveyard of Holy  
Cross Church.



The burial plot of the Bradleys and Mays in the graveyard of Holy Cross Church.

Here is the Bradley Coat of Arms.

