

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

Easter 2019



Is it worth saving?

Cover story

Almost all our members will be aware of the planning controversy surrounding the proposed demolition of the former Cowbridge Girls' High School (also sometimes known as the Intermediate School) in Aberthin Road, to be replaced by social housing mostly in the form of a four storey block of 34 flats and five houses. There are two questions here: the first is whether the proposed new buildings comply with planning regulations, are needed, fit into their environment and are compatible with the character of Cowbridge. The second question is whether the school buildings are historically significant enough to be protected from demolition.

We all recognise that old buildings sometimes have to be pulled down. In a few cases this is because they have been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that they are unsafe (a ploy that is, sadly, frequently used by property owners to free up the land for a more profitable use). In other cases, it is because the buildings are not in themselves of any historical value or significance. Whether these particular school buildings fall into the latter category is debatable. Cowbridge History Society, in its responses to the planning application, has tried hard to take into account a range of views and favours, at a minimum, a recognition of the importance of the former school in the history of girls' education; this realistically means that the planners should make an effort to preserve at least part of the building, rather than simply putting up a plaque that will eventually be destroyed or lost. This may take a little imagination and perhaps cost a little more money, but that is the developers' problem and no one else's.

The former Girls' High School buildings - used between 1971 and the opening of the new Cowbridge Comprehensive in 2010 as a sixth form block - are undoubtedly in a dilapidated state and parts may be unsafe. They were built under the direction of philanthropist John Bevan, who had been a long-time supporter of the idea of a girls' school to rival the existing boys' grammar school. It was Bevan who obtained the site and paid for the construction of a boarding house as well as classroom facilities.



The building was constructed to the design of a local architect, Robert Williams of Ystradowen (1848-1918), who also designed the Cowbridge Institute (which, incidentally, *is* a Grade II listed building). Williams, himself educated at the Eagle Academy, was relatively newly qualified. He spent much of his career working overseas and eventually died in Cairo, a year after participating in the Yale & Harvard expedition to Upper Egypt. A copy of his plans for a boarding house to be added to the school, dated February 1895, is still in existence. These incorporated, among other things, a Matron's Room, a Dining and Sitting Room, a Kitchen, a Servants' Bedroom, a Bath Room (just the one!), and 8 Dormitories. From the measurements, it seems as though these "dormitories" would each accommodate no more than one or two girls, but the description mentions proudly that "this gives nearly the same area as the Dormitories in Milton Mount School for Ministers' Daughters". Naturally, we looked into the latter, which was founded in 1871 at Gravesend in Kent; Williams must have been familiar with that particular building, and perhaps used it as his model.

The main part of the school building included a Cloak Room, an Assembly Room (by far the largest room), a Cookery Class Room and a Physical Laboratory. There was also a Scullery and Laundry, and a Cellar

“with places for boot and knife cleaning”. The Heating Chamber would be equipped with a boiler by Haden’s of Trowbridge, a noted engineering firm that operated from 1816 to 1945.

Also in the archives is a handwritten invitation to the luncheon, held on 16th September 1896, to celebrate “the formal handing over of the building to the Governors”. The Chairman of the Building Committee was Alderman Edward John, and among those present were the then Mayor and Mayoress of Cowbridge.

The opening of the school was a landmark in the education of girls in the district; only in 1880 had the Elementary Education Act come into force, ensuring that children up to the age of 10 attended school. Beyond that age, the education of girls was even more sporadic. Not until 1918 would secondary education become compulsory up to the age of 14. So, when the school opened in 1896, with Mrs C M Gladish as its head teacher, it really was a pioneering establishment, not only in Cowbridge but in South Wales as a whole. The photograph on the previous page shows a group of pupils in around 1900. In 1908, the school succeeded in sending a few girls on to university (at a time when only a handful of universities admitted women). Among these was the late Maud Gunter, one of Cowbridge’s foremost local historians and a founding member of one of our predecessor societies, Cowbridge & District Local History Society. The school expanded, and a new block was opened in 1960, near the original school buildings in Aberthin Road. This later became part of Cowbridge Comprehensive School, when the boys’ and girls’ grammar schools merged in 1974. A photograph of the new block, taken from the programme of the official opening in 1960, is shown on the right.

For in-depth information about the school and its beginnings, members might like to consult page 165 of *Cowbridge & Llanblethian: Past and Present*, the 1979 publication by our co-President Brian L. James and life member David J. Francis, where a fuller account is given than we have room for here.

In Cowbridge we have become used to the former Boys’ Grammar School getting a lot of attention as a historical building (and rightly so), but have tended to overlook that girls were excluded from benefiting, thus the Girls’ High School is regarded by some as being of no historic interest. This is simply not the case. In 1971, when the school was about to close, Maud Gunter, now a teacher, gave this message to the pupils: “You can be proud of the history of your school. See to it that you uphold its record in your own day and generation.” Some of those girls are now members of Cowbridge History Society.



While we’re on the subject...

While we are on the subject of marking the site of historic buildings, those following the saga of the missing Town Wall markers in the Waitrose car park will have noticed that they have still not been replaced. Waitrose proposed that, since it had proved difficult to find an adhesive that would prevent them being displaced by the effect of vehicle pollution, the depressions left behind by the missing discs should be filled in to prevent them becoming a trip hazard. Our response has been to ask Waitrose to look for another solution - for example, using coloured mortar to fill in the depressions, so as to ensure that the line of the town walls remains visible. We are firmly of the opinion that the responsibilities of those who planned the Birds Lane development did not end when the store opened to the public but include a duty to maintain the area and keep it looking attractive as well as preserving the historic features.

Talks of the season

January's meeting gave us plenty to think about, when Elin Jones introduced us to the history of the campaign for women's suffrage, through the lives of many individuals, such as Mary Wollstonecraft (incidentally the mother of Mary Shelley), Caroline Norton, Emmeline Pankhurst and others. Shortly afterwards, BBC Wales showed programmes about five significant Welsh women and asked the public to vote for one of these to be the model for Cardiff's first statue of a named woman. Two of the shortlisted women, Sarah Jane Rees ("Cranogwen") and Margaret Haig Thomas, Lady Rhondda, were active campaigners for women's rights.

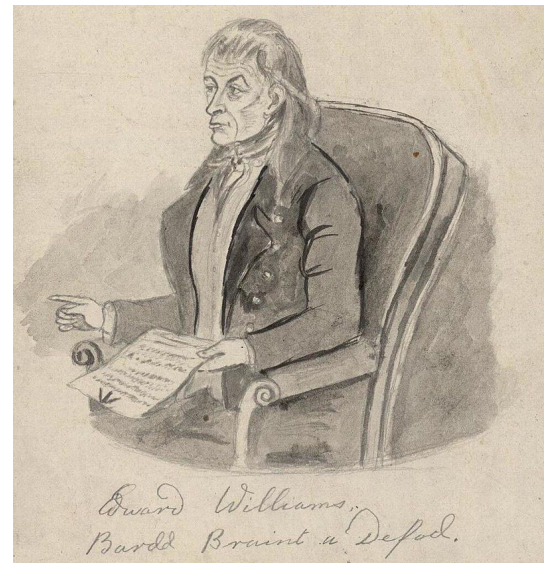
On 1st February, the month which (according to the old adage) "brings the thaw", a long-standing member, Patricia Price, was to have talked about Lord Byron, using Lady Caroline Lamb's famous description of him as "*Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*" as her starting-point. Byron was born in January 1788, thus the date was very close to his 231st birthday... Unfortunately, the thaw did not materialise and the meeting was cancelled because of the adverse weather; it will be rescheduled in the 2019/20 programme.

On St David's Day, the speaker was our old friend Chris Young of Llantwit Major. Chris is currently working on an exciting project to produce a book that follows the course of the River Thaw and charts its history, but the topic of her talk, "Button Gwinnett and his links with Cottrell", revealed her tremendous versatility. Who knew that a signatory of the Declaration of American Independence had such close connections with the Vale?

The Charter Day trip, as always, took place on 13th March, and was ably organised by Beverly Tonkin. The destination was Fonmon Castle. You can read a full report of the trip elsewhere in the newsletter.

Popular novelist Gareth Thomas is with us again in April, to talk about Iolo Morganwg, at our monthly meeting on 5th April 2019. This talk will be in a different vein from the highly successful book launch last year. It is also worth noting that Professor Geraint Jenkins recently chose Cowbridge as the venue for the launch of his new book on the factual side of Iolo. I think many of you will have seen Gareth's letter to the *Gem* in March, correcting some of the misapprehensions about Iolo's historical significance.

We still have more to look forward to. In May, the Annual General Meeting will be accompanied by a talk on *The Lave Netsmen of Wales*, given by Dylan Jones. It's important for us to get good attendance at this meeting, because it helps the society decide its future direction. The documents for the meeting can be found at the back of this newsletter.



Deb Fisher
Publications Officer

Biographies: Reverend David Roberts

The tireless Chris Turner has been investigating the lives of local men and women of historical significance. The article below may become one of a series if members would like that - and if Chris has time to write them!

The Reverend David Roberts was the minister of Sion "The Limes" Calvinistic Methodist chapel from 1849 until his death in 1858. Born in Carmarthen around 1802 he qualified as a minister in 1825. He was known as a popular preacher who had carried out preaching engagements throughout Wales. His popularity may explain why Sion had such a large and active congregation in the 1850s. The Religious Census of 1851 recorded that the evening attendance on 31 March 1851 was 350, by some margin the highest evening attendance of any religious establishment in the parish of Cowbridge on census day.

An interesting point about Roberts was that although a Welsh Methodist he was known to advocate a close relationship with the Church of England and indeed was listed as the owner of a pew in Holy Cross Church. Methodism of course sprang from the Anglican Church of England and while many of the early Methodists retained their Anglican links, to continue doing so in the 1850s was rare.

Roberts had a very clear and active social and political conscience. According to John Richards in *The Cowbridge Story* (1956), he was one of only six burgesses of Cowbridge to vote in the 1852 election for the Liberal Walter Coffin, the first nonconformist (Coffin was actually a Unitarian) to be elected as an MP in Wales. The six burgesses received special recognition in the form of a printed address and special dinner for having the courage to vote against the standing MP Rt Hon John Nicholl who represented the Bute family's landowning interest in Cardiff Borough, which included Cowbridge.

Roberts was also a supporter of the Cowbridge Patriotic Fund which had been set up in 1854 to care for the wives and children of soldiers fighting in the Crimean war. Indeed, he was the only nonconformist minister listed as attending the founding meeting of the fund and the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian reported him as saying that "...he had hoped to see more of the second class of the people amongst them, but it was gratifying to find that so many of the first class were present. He hoped the subscription would be worthy of their town".

His obituary (see *Y Drysorfa*, 1859) described him as popular and witty, not a description that is often seen in obituaries of Welsh nonconformist ministers in the early Victorian times! It was noted that he preached in excellent Welsh and without the need to use English words. Such was his local popularity that on the day of the funeral all the shops in Cowbridge were closed from morning to evening and those attending were from all parts of Wales.

Roberts's memorial inscription in Holy Cross cemetery says: *"In memory of Revd David Roberts of this town. He diligently served the Calvinistic Methodist connection as their Minister for thirty three years and died in the blessed hope of eternal life on the 17th day of November 1858 aged LVII years."*

His granddaughter, M E Hughes (1861-1937), was the wife of a missionary doctor (A D Hughes). They travelled to India in 1887 but had to return to Britain in 1891 following a serious injury to Mrs Hughes.

We would welcome involvement from Cowbridge History Society members in the biography project. If you are interested, please approach Chris Turner at one of our monthly meetings, or e-mail us.

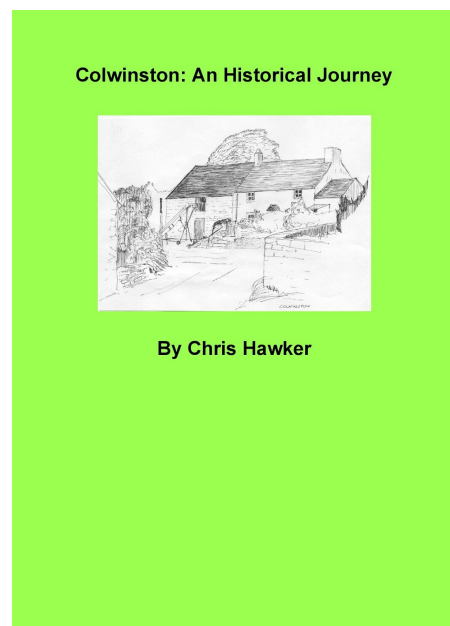
Colwinston: the story continues...

On Tuesday 5th March, a capacity audience gathered at the Sycamore Tree Inn at Colwinston, to hear Chris Hawker talk about his research into the history of the village, which led to the publication, last autumn, of Chris's monograph, *Colwinston: A Historical Journey*, which was published in Cowbridge History Society's series, "The Rural Vale Remembered", and is selling well. Most of those attending were members of the Vale of Glamorgan National Trust Members' Association (VOGANTM), which sponsored this talk, but there was a scattering of CHS members as well as locals.

It was interesting to hear Chris's revised version of a talk he originally gave over a year ago, and pleasing to hear him credit the great contribution made by our co-President Brian L. James.

One of the perils of publishing any book based on research is that the very process of investigation leads to new discoveries and additional facts that are too late to be included. This was the case with the discovery of the Colwinston Ivories "regalia" and documentation, which turned out to be in the possession of a local farmer and are now in safe keeping.

The Local History Studies Room (Jeff Alden Room) at Old Hall now holds the source material that Chris used in researching his publication, which is accessible on the computer by those visiting the room (open Wednesday mornings 10am-12 noon).



Yvonne's legacy

When Yvonne Weeding, former Chair of Cowbridge & District Local History Society, passed away last year, her daughter Fiona sought a home for some old paintings that were connected with the family's history. She has now been successful in placing them with the sewing needle museum at Forge Mill, Redditch. Fiona writes:

"My great-great-grandmother was related to Abel Morrall who was instrumental in developing the first modern manufacturing sewing needle in the 1800s in Redditch. Her name was Elizabeth Harwood (nee Morrall) married to William Harwood. They are in the paintings along with their son Henry Harwood.

"I managed to piece together some information about them from some old letters / wills of theirs. I also discovered that the paintings were left by my great-grandfather to his youngest son (along with a wooden chest that my brother now has). The oldest brother was left 2 small cottages. So they were obviously quite highly regarded! The museum is going to do some more research and is planning on displaying the paintings during exhibitions."

The photograph on the right shows Fiona and a representative of the museum, with one of the paintings.



Charter Day Commemoration 2019

This year's Charter Day visit to Fonmon Castle brought 37 of the Society's members to this famous country seat. Assembling in the entrance hall, one of the many notable features of the property quickly got our attention as its walls are covered with old masters from Van Dyck, Joshua Reynolds and other great portrait painters. We were greeted by Serena, our guide for the visit, whose knowledge of the Castle, the families for which it has been a home and its and their histories was truly encyclopaedic and nonetheless retained our keen interest. Suffice to say that the Castle's oldest parts are 12th century with additions and extensions in many of the centuries that followed, most notably in the 1500s by the original St John family and in the second half of the 1600s by Col. Philip Jones, a magnificently capable operator, who purchased the estate from the St Johns in 1654.

More improvements followed in the mid 1700s, made by Philip's grandson, Robert Jones III, MP for Glamorgan, who inherited in 1686. The castle has been owned by the Jones and Boothby families for the last 350 years; those connections ended in January 2019 with the sale to new owners Nigel Ford and Rebecca Harris.

Our visit also took in the huge, wonderful and barely altered kitchen (with tales of swords and original home brew's beer bottles), a library, withdrawing room and eventually ended in undeniably the most gracious room the Society's Charter Day visitors have had the good fortune to dine in. The gilding, ancient and myth-based plasterwork, furnishings, ceramics and views from the end windows were a fine accompaniment to a very tasty lunch. (See photograph below.)

Prof Dick Buswell, as Chair, gave Beverly Tonkin a splendid bouquet of flowers and thanked her on behalf of the Society for arranging so enjoyable and informative a venue for our annual commemoration of 13th March. As the weather had eased somewhat and the sun made an appearance, many took the opportunity to explore the Castle's renowned walled and flower garden which were developed by Sir Brooke Boothby, his sisters and daughter.



Dick Tonkin

Secretary



March 2019

Dear Member(s),

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's 7th Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.00 p.m. on Friday 3rd May 2019 in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge Town Hall; doors will be open from 6.30. The AGM will be followed at 7.30 by a talk on The Lave Netsmen of Wales by Dylan Jones.

The AGM agenda is:

- 1. Welcome and Introduction** by Rev. Norman Williams, Joint President
- 2. Approval of the minutes of the AGM of 4th May 2018**
- 3. Officers' Annual Report for the year ending 5th April 2019** by Chairperson Dick Buswell.
- 4. Presentation and Adoption of the accounts for the year ending 5th April 2019** by Joint Honorary Treasurer Beverly Tonkin.

5. Election of the Committee of the Society's officers

The present Executive Committee consists of one of the Society's Joint Presidents, the Chairperson, the Secretary/ Programme Secretary, the Joint Treasurers, the Publications Officer and three ordinary, i.e. non-officer, members (of which there could be five). These positions are currently occupied by Brian James, Dick Buswell, Dick Tonkin, Beverly Tonkin and Keith Jones, Deborah Fisher, Betty Alden, Don Gerrard and Chris Turner respectively all of whom have agreed to stand for election and have been provisionally nominated by the Executive Committee. These positions, save that of Joint President, are open to any fully paid-up member of the Society. Any further nominations for membership of the committee must be received by the Secretary not less than ten days before the date of the Annual General Meeting; such nominations being signed by a member of the Society and by the person therein nominated. All elections for which there is more than one nominee for a single position shall be by secret ballot of the members present at the Annual General Meeting.

- 6. Conduct of such other business as may be necessary;** ten days' notice of such business being given in writing to the Secretary.

Yours sincerely,

Dick Tonkin, Hon. Sec.

N.B. Please bring this agenda with you; the draft minutes of last year's AGM are overleaf. Copies of the draft accounts will be available to view at the AGM.

Registered Charity No. 1094061

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Cowbridge History Society
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Minutes of the 6th AGM held at 7.00pm on 4th May 2018 in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge.

1. Introduction. Dick Buswell, the Society's Chair, advised the Meeting that the Society's Joint President the Reverend Norman Williams is recovering from pneumonia and is unable to attend or officiate as had been planned. David Francis had also made his apologies as he was indisposed and would not be able to attend and receive the Certificate of Honorary Life Membership which was to have been awarded to him at the AGM. The Chair indicated that this award will be made at a later date. However, as the Society's Joint President Brian James was present he started proceedings by welcoming members to the 6th AGM and then handed over to the Chair

2. Apologies for Absence. Apologies from Rev. Norman Williams and David Francis

3. Approval of Minutes of the AGM of 5th May 2017 The draft minutes of the 2017 AGM had been distributed with the AGM Notice. As no amendments were suggested the Chair proposed they be approved; passed without objection.

4. Officers' Report. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee's Officers, reported on the past year's activities. He commenced by observing that the Society remains active with membership of over 100. On behalf of the membership he thanked the members of the Society's Management Committee, the History Room team headed by Betty Alden and the catering team headed by Brenda Richards for the splendid support they have given over the past year and for the hard work they have all put in on the Society's behalf. The Chair then moved onto the latest addition to our range of publications, "Llanharry, Llansannor and District: A Memoir" by David Francis which was very successfully launched and sold well such that it is now out of stock. The Chair's advice to the Meeting that the author had insisted that all profits from the sales should be retained by the Society occasioned a vigorous round of applause.

The Chair then paid tribute to the late Jo Rawlins and Yvonne Weeding who had both been stalwart officers of the Society and/or its predecessor organisations.

The Meeting was advised that the digitisation of the Society's paper archive was complete save for the on-going process of putting into digital format the material the History Room continues to receive. Plans to improve access to the digital archive by installing better hardware and software in the History Room were outlined as were the plans to have an online presence through the web. The best way of achieving this remained under consideration; the Peoples Collection Wales being one alternative.

The Chair reported that the Society has continued to respond, where appropriate, to planning matters that may affect the historic environment of Cowbridge and mentioned in particular, observations made to the Vale of Glamorgan Council concerning the detailed planning application that the Darren Farm developer had lodged that had led to the consent it had very recently received.

The Secretary thanked the Chair for his report and called on Beverly Tonkin a joint honorary treasurer to present the Society's accounts.

5. Presentation and Adoption of Accounts.

Beverly drew the Meeting's attention to copies of the accounts that had been put out on the seats for inspection. She reported that the income for the year totalled £1,509.04 which is unusually high: this is mainly attributable to the successful sales of "Llanharry,

Llansannor and District: A Memoir". She then summarised the incomes received from the Charter Day trip, catering, donations, Gift Aid, bank interest and membership fees and the expenditures incurred on the hire of the Lesser Hall and the History Room, speakers' fees, insurance, stationery, printing, postage, charitable payments, the web page and computer consumables. The net surplus of income over expenditure was £1,509.04 which keeps the Society in a strong financial position with liquid assets of £7,429.45 held at Barclays Bank and the Yorkshire Building Society.

Beverly Tonkin invited questions. As there were none the Chair proposed that the accounts be adopted and this was passed unopposed.

6. Elections to the Committee. Dick Tonkin confirmed that all current members of the committee were willing to continue and that no further nominations for the Committee had been received. The Chair proposed that the current committee members be elected for the coming year and this was passed without objection.

7. Other Business. No formal resolutions had been received by the Honorary Secretary and the Chair invited matters from the floor. Gwerfyl Gardner asked if any progress had been made with the proposed demolition of the cattle market buildings. It was reported from the floor that a meeting concerning this is scheduled to be held in the Lesser Hall on Thursday 10th May. Deborah Fisher informed the Meeting of the "fantastic" launch of the English version of Gareth Thomas's "I, Iolo" in the Cowbridge Library on Monday 30th April. This launch had been supported by the Society which had assisted with the launch arrangements and facilities.

8. Closure. There being no other business the formal meeting closed at 7.21pm.

Submissions

This newsletter is normally issued 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.

Newsletter Archive

There is now an archive of old Cowbridge History Society/Cowbridge Record Society/Cowbridge & District Local History Society newsletters available for reference in Cowbridge Library.