

# NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

*Summer 2020*



*Leaving lockdown - Looking to the future*

*INSIDE: Notice of the 2020 AGM of Cowbridge History Society*

## Keeping in Touch in Difficult Times: by Balloon Air Mail, 1870

Some years ago, John Edmondson gave permission for the History Society to print two letters, which were sent during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1. Written on the flimsiest of paper (as they came by balloon from Paris), they amazingly arrived at their destination, Emma Edmondson of Old Hall, Cowbridge. Their author was Harriet Charlton, the youngest daughter of Sir Jeremiah Homfray of Llandaff Court, and Emma was her niece. [Emma is far right in the photograph, but her Aunt Harriet is not shown.]

*Par ballon monte; Postmark Paris Passy, 7 November 1870  
8 rue du Marche, Passy*

*My dearest Emma,*

*I wondered whether you now get my letters sent by the balloons? This is my second letter to you and I sent one to Bonvilston some days ago. I don't much think you receive them but I shall go on from time to time first to let you know that I am still alive but not getting very fat.*

*I fancy we shall not give in until we shall have swallowed our old shoes. We are pretty used to horsemeat which is not very bad. Beef is now allowed us 25 grammes a day each person, to make a pound it requires 50 grammes, just about two mouths full and one has to stand ones turn nearly 2 hours in the rain generally every day, no butter, no eggs, no fritter (?), no milk and very few vegetables worth their weight in gold; no charcoal, coals and wood quite a luxury, in fact. Just enough to keep us alive. We shall know tomorrow what we are going to do. Armistice has failed. I believe we are to try a great battle which we have no chance of winning without cannons of which they have hundreds. I suppose our poor gardes nationaux will be butchered, after which of course they will enter Paris. What can we hope against 50,000 real soldiers? I was in the Bois yesterday, I believe for the last time, it is completely cut down up to the lake all round and looks so wretched and desolate. We have only provisions now for ten days after which must either starve, fight or capitulate which I wish they would and finish at once as there is no other end possible. If the provinces had come to our rescue we should certainly have conquered. With an army behind and before they must have been surrounded but the provinces are decided to stay and defend their own towns and will do nothing to save Paris who they say has got them into the mess and must do for herself. It is a stupid idea because when they have finished Paris, they will take the towns one after the other which will not be difficult separately, whereas if they had all risen en masse even without artillery we could have opposed at least a million and have driven them out. It is expected they will begin to bombard us this week and we shall go into the Blots while it lasts, as we are not enough in the centre here and should be much exposed, some days when our forts fire you have no idea how our house trembles and what will it be presently? Please give news of me to Di and Aemilius and perhaps you could let them know at Bonvilston in case they have not had my letters.*

*God bless you, H.C.*

*A balloon will start tomorrow, weather permitting.*

*Par balon monte; Postmark : Paris illegible, Cowbridge 18 January 1871*

*My dearest Emma,*

*I suppose you are wondering whether I am alive, so I will make another attempt though I don't much fancy that you have got my letters. However I am very happy to say that I am well and bearing all our troubles wonderfully. For the last few days we are being bombarded nearly all day and without as*



..... peace during the night and goes to sleep and a great many people sit up all night in their cellar which I have never tried as I am more afraid of the rats than of the obus's. Three days ago, the enemy opened new batteries at Montretout (?) just opposite my windows intended specially to destroy Passy so I thought it was high time to come into the centre of Paris, so I came with Alice here rue de Lille 33 at the Blots and intend remaining a few days until they finish Passy which is not yet begun.

They direct their fire with fury at all the hospitals and we have just adopted a good plan of putting all the Prussians wounded in Paris into our hospitals and sent to tell Bismarck to fire on his own men if he likes. They began to bombard us without giving the usual notice and in fact they seem to despise all rules of war. Poor Grenelle is being much the worse we hear, but I don't know whether your old school has received any harm. As to our food thanks to our horses we shall not die of hunger, and we are quite used to it, but the rations are diminished every week and are now reduced to half a pound of horseflesh for three days and for three people. The worst is the want of ..... and the cold has been so great but the weather is much milder the last three days. We make hard work to get rid of these savages, but we shall soon ..... better if we can only hold out a little longer. This paper is so disagreeable that I don't know if you will be able to read this.

Your affectionate aunt, H.C.

Our street has not yet received an obus (a canon shell) but all around here has had plenty and some people killed but no very serious harm, and more noise than worth.

[Paris was to fall on 28th January]

Jeff Alden wrote the following article in the magazine of the former Cowbridge & District Local History Society:

"The French were of course well-versed in the use of balloons. After Montgolfier's hot-air balloon in 1783 came a variety of developments and uses; the French used balloons to carry dispatches over the heads of the enemy as early as 1793. In the Franco-Prussian war, a Manchester Guardian reporter at the siege of Metz started off a balloon-mail service, which just preceded the service from Paris, where the balloon post was officially commenced on 26th September 1870. Only one non-manned balloon took off – and that carried postcards only, so the manned flight became the main means of taking the mail out of Paris. The letters were on flimsy paper, weighed less than 4 grammes and cost 20 centimes to send. How did these succeed? The balloons were at the mercy of the winds and so their routes were completely unpredictable; the pilot seldom knew where he was, or where he landed. They could not be controlled and often shot up and down suddenly and painfully, and in addition were unprotected from the weather, bitter cold being a major problem. It was an extremely hazardous operation, not least because the balloons were made of varnished cotton, filled with a highly explosive coal gas and so very vulnerable to Prussian guns.

"The reason for the success of the operation was that though Paris was surrounded by the Prussian army most of France was unoccupied; only the north-east and a wedge from there to Paris were in Prussian hands, so unless the wind was blowing from the south-west, most of the balloons could successfully evade the enemy and were able to land in unoccupied France, from where the mail could be taken by the usual methods. A few other had less predictable destinations; one was lost over the Atlantic west of Cornwall, two landed in Germany, six in Belgium and four in Holland. However, of the 65 manned balloons which left Paris, only seven were lost – at sea or to the Prussians. Two and a half million letters were among the 11 tons of official despatches sent – and two of those ended up with the Edmond family!"

The Siege of Paris lasted from 19 September 1870 to 28 Jan 1871 and the consequent capture of the city by Prussian forces, led to French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war - the establishment of the German Empire as well as the Paris Commune. This harrowing event cannot really compare with the current COVID situation, but the importance of keeping contact with family and friends at such dreadful times cannot be overestimated.

Betty Alden

## Obituaries

Enfys Brown and Marion Eveleigh both played a very active part in Cowbridge life. The COVID restrictions and the closure of the *Cowbridge Gem* have meant that their recent passing went without the usual public tributes. Both of these ladies were founder members of the Cowbridge & District History Society and also belonged to Cowbridge Record Society.

### Marion Eveleigh, MBE

Marion Eveleigh's MBE, which she was awarded in the 1996 Queen's Birthday Honours, was "For services to the community and to Local History in the Vale of Glamorgan". And well-deserved it was, for without Marion, Cowbridge might never have had its own town museum. When Marion died on 24 June 2020, she had been ill for some years and unable to get about much, but the Marion I remember was a lively and determined lady. In the early 1980s, with a team of helpers, she had built up Cowbridge Museum from scratch, and she managed it with aplomb.

From the first day I arrived to offer my services as a volunteer steward in 1999, I received a warm welcome from both Marion and her husband Vic (a former Mayor of Cowbridge). Vic was a handyman who had constructed many of the museum displays himself, improvising with items of old furniture and bits of spare wood. As time went on, however, it became harder for Marion and Vic to continue running the museum, though they did continue as volunteers and, prior to Vic's death, were regulars at meetings of the Local History Society.

Marion was born in Loughborough and moved with her family in 1939 to Cardiff, where her father had a job as manager of a munitions factory (before the war began). She attended King's College, Cardiff, and left at the age of 16 to work at Ely Paper Mill doing clerical and accounts work. She worked there for three years, and it was during this period that she met Vic while out on a Sunday afternoon.

Marion later went to work for George Wimpey, and enjoyed her job, but after marrying Vic in 1950, she could not wait to become a mother. Vic served in REME, but fortunately did not have to serve abroad.

Their married life began in a flat in Roath Park. After the birth of their elder daughter Lynda, they were able to move into a prefab in Newport, where Vic had a job in a foundry. They later moved to Rhoose, where Marion became involved with the W.I. and Young Wives Association. They moved to Cowbridge in 1967, and once again Marion became involved with many organisations, including the W.I., Mothers' Union, and the NSPCC for whom she helped raise funds. She truly was a person of wide interests and great energy.

We extend our sympathies to Marion's daughters Lynda and Jackie and to the rest of the family.



*Deb Fisher*

## Enfys Ann Brown (nee Jones) 1925-2020

Born in Treforest on 12 November 1925, Enfys was the second child of Morgan Howell Jones and his wife Alice Jones. At the age of four, she moved with the family to Cowbridge, when her father became manager of the Midland Bank (now HSBC). They lived in Llwyn Celyn on the High Street. Enfys attended school on Broadway, now Ysgol Iolo Morganwg, before completing her school years at Howell's School, Llandaff. Her father died when she was 14. Enfys went on to study pharmacy at Cardiff University graduating in 1946 with a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree. She obtained a job in the Glaxo Laboratories in Middlesex as a Pharmaceutical Chemist before moving back to Cowbridge in the late 1940s to live with her mother in Tŷ Celyn on Broadway, and she worked in the pharmacy departments of The Royal Gwent, East Glamorgan and Bridgend General Hospitals.

In 1956, Enfys married local printer, Alan Brown, who ran D Brown and Sons Ltd with his twin brother Neil. They settled into Trefelin, Windmill Lane, and Enfys gave up work to concentrate on family life. In 1958 their daughter, Jane was born and a son, Paul, two years later.

During the 1960s, when the Llanblethian Brownies needed a Brown Owl, Enfys took on the role, with her great friend, Mair Thomas, as Tawny Owl. Enfys would shine with the recanting of happy memories of the many years she helped local children 'think of others before themselves', learn new skills and develop their view of themselves and the world in which they live. From the 1970s onwards, Enfys was involved with many local groups and societies, Young Wives, The Children's Society, Mothers' Union to name a few. Enfys had a lifelong interest in local and family history and was one of the early members of the Cowbridge and District Local History Society, she enjoyed many excursions and holidays organised by Yvonne Weeding.

She took immense pleasure in the interests and later the careers of her family. Golf was already a favourite pastime with Enfys' elder brother, Howell. Alan was a very keen golfer too, which rubbed off on Jane, and he also introduced the children from an early age to theatre, opera and ballet, instilling in both a deep love of the performing arts. Enfys was a great enthusiast for Wales' international rugby matches on the television as the family would sing and cheer along with the crowd in the stadium.

After 34 years of happily married life, Alan died in 1990 and their daughter, Jane, who had worked as a Physical Education teacher, taken a Mathematics degree course through the Open University, then retrained as an accountant, came back home to live at Trefelin. They would holiday together, making trips to see performances of opera and other theatrical works that Paul had designed as his international career brought him worldwide recognition. In 1997 she even travelled to the Oscars ceremony in California, as a guest of the academy when Paul was nominated for Best Designer.

In her later years, she determinedly overcame replacement knee operations and in spite of the debilitating effects of arthritis and osteoporosis, which in turn caused developing respiratory problems, Enfys never complained and continued to take an active part in the community until her failing mobility meant she was confined to a wheelchair. Even then she would still enjoy going to Holy Cross for the Friday morning service whenever possible, then more recently receiving holy communion at home. She listened to the daily service on the radio and maintained her modest, personal, Christian beliefs all her life, certainly a source of her stoicism and great courage which would be tested again and severely by the untimely death of her son, Paul from cancer in 2017.



She had an excellent memory, a great sense of humour, loved conversation and kept in regular contact with friends some from as long ago as her early childhood.

Her bed next to an open window, with the sun streaming in and the birds singing outside, she passed away peacefully at home on 14 June 2020, aged 94.

Enfys will be much missed by her many friends and family.

*Jane Brown*

## Report from the Local History Studies Room, August 2020

'Lockdown', however unwelcome, has in fact allowed an unprecedented amount of time for researching and for editing and updating our digital archive. Most of the information is now on the 'People's Collection Wales' website where we know it is being well viewed. Over these last six months, the 'research' documents, which itemise the history and the past occupants of each individual property in Cowbridge and Llanblethian, and some in surrounding villages, have all been reconstructed and expanded with additional information. They should now prove much more readable, accurate and detailed than before. These of course are 'living' documents – they change as new information comes in or an inaccuracy is corrected.

Brian James and I have been teasing out who lived where in Westgate (and Dick Buswell the same for the Limes area), so that the 1999 'Cowbridge Buildings and People' publication can eventually be updated and expanded. This exercise is rather like doing a jigsaw – discovering some interesting news about a person or building, or an ancient deed, and then working out where it might be slotted in. Access online to local newspapers of the 1800s and 1900s has come up with all sorts of gems, as have documents which were already in the archive but not until now really studied.

Via email and telephone, we have acquired several new items for scanning and recording. From as far afield as West Virginia, U.S.A., for example, there is a tombstone of a Martin Jones of Crossways who died in 1863, son of Henry and Elizabeth. Who were they and what was their son doing in West Virginia? There is always someone researching some matter on Cowbridge and its surrounds, and I find it very interesting and rewarding to try to help as much as possible from our records and local knowledge.

To try to ensure the long-term preservation of the archive, John Sherwood and Frank Hartles have worked hard to transfer it on to Modes\*, our new database. This is something we thought we could never afford until we were awarded the Co-op funding. Some work remains, but the transfer is complete and the system is now in use for recording information about the items in our archive.

So, although it is difficult to predict just when Cowbridge History Society will gather for meetings, and indeed when the History Room in Old Hall will re-open, the society continues to be very active as far as our digital archive is concerned. Much of the huge groundwork for this is complete, but continuing recording and usage is essential, and interested people are desperately needed to come forward to train and be enabled to keep it going.

*Betty Alden, August 2020*

*\*Modes is a collections management system used by many UK museums. Although it has numerous features that we may never use, it has some useful ones that we didn't have before. The main advantage of moving from our Excel spreadsheet developed in-house is that the software is supported by a not-for-profit company and technical advice is on hand should we need it.*

## Biographies Project

*The biographies project has continued during lockdown so we have plenty of new reading matter in store for you. It seems appropriate to begin with someone who was very active in the pursuit of local history studies in Cowbridge and whom many of our readers will remember. Perhaps some of you will be able to add to our knowledge of her.*

### Maud Gunter (1890-1977)

Maud Gunter was born in Cowbridge in 1890. Her parents were William Gunter (1862-1927), a railway engineer/foreman born in Cardiff and Mary (1862-1942) who hailed originally from Gelligroes. Maud also had an older brother named Arthur. The Gunter family lived at 81 Eastgate, Cowbridge, remaining there throughout Mary's life.

Maud attended the Cowbridge Girls' High School and in 1908 she was one of five girls from the school who went to University. She obtained a BA degree and by 1925 she had returned to teach at the Girls' School where she was to stay throughout her teaching career. In her early years she taught history, geography and art but she was later to become senior geography mistress. One of her former pupils fondly remembered Maud's contention that there were more meanders in the river Thaw than in the Mississippi!

Maud was a notable local historian, contributing a map and the index to Hopkin James's *Old Cowbridge* (1922) and chapters to *The Vale Series* (edited by Stewart Williams). These were "An Ancient Borough" in *Vale of History* (1960) and "The Manor of Llanblethian" in *The Garden of Wales* (1961). She was one of the founders of the Cowbridge & District Local History Society in 1974, and in 1975 gave a talk to the Society on "Norman families in the Vale". In recognition of her key contribution to the Society's establishment she was made a Life Vice President.

But Maud's contribution to Cowbridge went way beyond teaching and local history. She was an active member and Chair of the town's Welsh Society, founded in 1946. She was a regular attender at Ramoth chapel, though it does not appear she spoke Welsh fluently. Interestingly, her mother Mary is listed in the 1891 census as speaking Welsh as well as English.

During the Coronation celebrations of King George VI in 1937, Maud was an "instructress" for the children's sports. She was also local Secretary of the Earl Haig Poppy Appeal, a charity for ex-serviceman set up in 1921 and which continues today as simply The Poppy Appeal. Such was her prominence in the community that she was one of the local people who featured in the *Down your Way* BBC radio programme when it visited Cowbridge in 1975. She was interviewed by Brian Johnston and selected as her musical choice "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring".

Maud died in 1977 and her funeral service was held in Ramoth. In the same year, the local Art Society planted a tree in her memory in Old Hall grounds. Another legacy is that in the County Council's Cowbridge Conservation Area Appraisal (1980s) one of Maud's poetic lines is quoted:

"Let others rush through to impersonal towns, I'd rather remain twixt the Darren and Downs."

#### **Sources:**

Cowbridge History Society archive  
1891 and 1901 census returns

September 2020

Dear Member(s),

**NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

To comply with covid-19 regulations the Society will hold its postponed 8th Annual General Meeting by “zoom conferencing” at 7.00 p.m. on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. An email invitation to the meeting will be sent a few days prior to the AGM to all those for whom the Society has an email address.

If you have an email address which you have not yet advised to the Society and you wish to attend its zoom meetings please email your name and address to me now at [cowbridgehistsoc@gmail.com](mailto:cowbridgehistsoc@gmail.com)

In the week prior to the AGM for those who would like it there will be an opportunity to familiarise yourself with zooming. Details will follow nearer the time.

**The AGM agenda is:**

- 1. Welcome** by Chairperson Dick Buswell
- 2. Approval of the minutes of the AGM of 3rd May 2019**
- 3. Officers’ Annual Report for the year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020** by Dick Buswell
- 4. Presentation and Adoption of the accounts for the year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020** by Joint Honorary Treasurer Beverly Tonkin

**5. Election of the Management Committee**

The present 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 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 email 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.

## **Minutes of the 7th AGM held at 7.00pm on 3 May 2019 in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge (draft)**

**1. Introduction.** Dick Buswell, the Society's Chair, welcomed all present and advised that the Society's Joint President Reverend Norman Williams has not recently been in the best of health and is unable to attend or officiate as had been planned and that Joint President Brian James is also unable to attend.

**2. Apologies for Absence.** Apologies received from Rev. Norman Williams, Brian James, committee members Betty Alden, Deborah Fisher, Chris Turner and Keith Jones and members Allan Sutcliffe, Colin and Rosemary Ryland, Frank Hartles, John Sherwood, Michael Clay and Pamela and John Kay.

**3. Approval of Minutes of the AGM of 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018** The draft minutes of the 2018 AGM had been distributed with the AGM Notice. As no amendments were suggested the Chair asked that they be approved; proposed by Beverly Tonkin, seconded by Don Gerrard and passed without objection.

**4. Officers' Report.** The Chair, on behalf of the Committee's Officers, reported on the past year's activities. He started by observing that with a membership of 105 the Society remains vibrant and very well supported, particularly in view of the small population it serves. The Chair then thanked the members of the management committee for their work and support; Rev Norman Williams and Brian James the two Presidents for their guidance, Dick Tonkin as secretary and programme secretary, Beverly Tonkin and Keith Jones as joint treasurers, Deborah Fisher as publications officer and editor of the Newsletter, Betty Alden as manager of the History Room and archive and her colleagues and again to Beverly Tonkin for organising the Charter Day trip to Fonmon Castle where a fine lunch in elegant surroundings followed an excellent guided tour.

The Chair then turned his attention to the Society's "The Rural Vale Remembered" occasional publications series the second title of which "Colwinston: A Historical Journey" by Chris Hawker was published this year and reported that sales were maintaining a respectable level. The History Room has for some time lacked space for the storage of the physical archive and as a meeting place for volunteers, visitors, donors, those with enquiries and researchers into local history so it is with some relief that Sally Perrini, the manager of the Old Hall Community College is investigating the relocation of the History Room into the more spacious current reception area.

Digitisation of the archive has largely been completed and it is now accessible at the History Room, the Cowbridge Library and via Peoples Collection Wales to which prepared tranches of the archive are regularly uploaded and through which virtually the entire archive will be accessible globally via the world wide web. Members John Sherwood, Betty Alden, Frank Hartles and Chris Turner have been the mainstays in this process. The Co-operative Society Community Fund stands at around £170 and all purchases by members supporting the Society result in 1% of their value going to our part of that fund.

The Chair concluded his report with reference to the Society's role in responding to applications for development that might affect the area and summarised the current situation at Darren Farm, the Churchill development on Westgate, Aberthin Road and St Athans Road.

**5. Presentation and Adoption of Accounts.** Beverly Tonkin referred to copies of the externally certified accounts that had been put out on the seats for inspection. She reported that on 5<sup>th</sup> April the Society's liquid assets totalled £6,836.85. A sum of £627.60 less than last year as this year's total expenditure of £3,323.41 exceeded the income of £2,695.81. This was due largely to the one-off purchase of computing equipment for viewing the digital archive (£832.39) and the shortfall of £100.82 between sales of the new publication (£451.56) relative to its printing cost (£552.38). Sales continue so the shortfall is expected to reduce.

As did the Chair before her, Beverly exhorted members to buy Co-op "Beans for the History Society!" to increase the size of our Co-operative Society fund.

Income from membership fees was £745.50 and other net incomes arose from book sales, the Charter Day trip, and refreshment sales (£113.50) for which she thanked all those who had contributed cakes; usually at little or no cost to the Society. She observed that with so many members volunteering to give talks and waiving a speaking fee only £135.00 had been expended and spoke for the Society when she observed that a great deal of time and research effort goes into the preparation of talks and that the speakers' work and generosity were greatly appreciated. The year had been successful from a financial perspective and the Society goes forward with a very healthy level of funds.

Questions were invited but there were none. The Chair took the accounts to be adopted.

**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. He proposed that the current committee members be re-elected for the coming year; seconded by Patricia Price and passed without objection.

**7. Conduct of such other business as may be necessary.** No matters had been received.

**8. Closure.** There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.25pm.

I accept this as a true record of the meeting held on 3rd May 2019.

Signed ..... Chair, Date .....

# COWBRIDGE HISTORY SOCIETY

## PROGRAMME FOR 2020

Talks in the autumn session this year will be by Zoom invitation on the first Friday of each month starting at 7.30, save for the AGM at 7.00pm

2020

**2nd October 7.00 pm** Postponed 8th AGM

followed by Mike Wilcock's film "The Cowbridge Physic Garden 2004-08 Royal Visit" (51 mins)

**6th November** The Rebecca Riots and rural protest in South Wales; Chris Turner

**4th December** The Land of Song; Dean Powell