

THE WIZARD OF WERNDEW

Joseph Harries -- Pembrokeshire's best known "cunning man"

Brian John



Glan-y-Mor, on the main road between Dinas and Newport — built by Joseph Harries and his widowed mother Mary.

We should perhaps refer to Joseph Harries, the Wizard of Glan-y-Mor and Werndew because he lived and practised his mysterious arts from both houses in the parish of Dinas, on the north Pembrokeshire coast. He was born in 1830 and died in 1890, so he came to the story of Pembrokeshire wizardry relatively late, when in other parts of Wales men like him were not taken at all seriously.

Dr John Harries of Cwrt-y-Cadno in Carmarthenshire (the most famous and well-documented wizard in Wales) died in 1839, when Joseph was still a child — so Joseph was a contemporary of his son Henry Harries (1821-1849). But Joseph was not a relative of the Carmarthenshire wizards.

What do we know about him? Well, he was certainly the most famous of the Pembrokeshire wizards, known also as a dyn hysbys (knowing man), conjuror, magician, herbalist, quack doctor or physician. There is no doubt that he was a skilled chemist and physician, and that he was feared and respected in his own home area in his own lifetime. It was widely believed that he could foretell the future, but he also had a mastery of the occult. He was frequently called upon to remove curses that had been placed by witches and others whose powers were weaker than his.

I have in my possession -- courtesy Stephen Evans of Glan-y-Mor and Hywel Bowen-Perkins -- assorted notes and copies of pages from Joseph Harries's notebooks that were literally recovered from a skip..... He was a meticulous record keeper. In his notebook entries dating from 1873 to 1889 (copied by Hywel) we see that he most often saw just one patient per day -- and hardly ever more than three in a day. He recorded their names and addresses, symptoms, previous treatment from local doctors, prescribed remedies and details of recovery or reactions. Hywel records that he was very precise in his observations and diagnoses, and gave very sophisticated treatments -- often, but not always, based on herbal preparations that he mixed himself. Some sources say that he was qualified as a chemist or pharmacist but not as a doctor -- so some in the medical profession would have seen him as a "quack doctor" and would have resented his involvement in the care of the sick people of the community. He was registered as a chemist on 29 June 1869 -- but that does not mean he was qualified (the Royal Pharmacological Society registered all practising chemists as an amnesty, and were afterwards much more careful about those accepted as qualified practitioners).

Joseph was just 59 when he died. He never married. Virtually nothing is known about his childhood or his life as a young man. Where was he educated? Did he have a mentor? Where did he learn his skills as a chemist and as a physician? Was he self-taught?

He is referred to as living at Werndew, but his family also owned Glan-y-Mor and he appears to have spent much of his life there, on the main Newport-Dinas road, rather than in the cottage up on the mountainside. He travelled widely -- "a little man on a grey mountain pony" -- and sold his services to those who needed them over a distance of 20 miles to west, south and east, incorporating Cardigan, Haverfordwest and Fishguard. The "renowned doctor" was feared and respected in equal measure. He comes over as someone rather disreputable, and rather frightening and intimidating.....

I am intrigued by his association with Gedeon Chapel, where he was a deacon. How "religious" was he? Not very, by all accounts, since he is reputed to have fathered at least two local children as a result of liaisons with unmarried local girls. Nonetheless, he left £1,500 to the chapel in his will.

Joseph's father William (who died in 1857) was first married to Ann, and their first son David inherited Werndew when his father died. Joseph was 37 at the time, and his mother was Mary, William's second wife. We don't know all the details, but it appears that he and David did not get on well, and in 1857 he set about building Glan-y-Mor as a home for himself and his widowed mother. It took a long time -- most of the work was done between 1861 and 1871; maybe they lived there while the work was going on. It was like a lodge down on the main road, connected to Werndew by a driveway. The driveway is still in use today. The family must have owned an extensive tract of land, including Felin Werndew to the east along the Newport Road. In 1887 Joseph inherited Werndew on the death of his brother, and moved back there -- and that is where he spent the last 3 years of his life. So we can assume he was at Glan-y-Mor for 30 years. There are records of his surgery and dispensary there.

Joseph had an interesting relationship with Rev Benjamin Rowlands, who was ordained in 1885 and immediately took up his post as minister of Gideon Chapel, not far from Werndew and Glan-y-Mor. He was a lodger at Glan-y-Mor between 1885 and 1887, and resigned his post at Gideon in 1892 prior to moving with his new bride to Saron Chapel in Clydach. He died in Dinas in 1902, having left Clydach in 1899. He was only 44 years old -- and locals blamed his early demise on the evil influence of Joseph Harries the wizard.....

He left a "deposition" in March 1892 relating to various spooky events that occurred after Joseph's death. He was not always complimentary about his erstwhile landlord; nonetheless, Joseph left him a pony and trap in his will when he died in 1890.

When I visited Werndew a few years ago the lady then in residence told me that she had recently cleared out a room that had been used (presumably well over a century earlier) by Joseph Harries as a dispensary. She had thrown away assorted old bottles full of medicines and potions -- what a sad loss to science and folklore.....!!

As far as I am aware, there are no photographs of Joseph Harries in any of the local collections.

See: "Folklore and Folk Stories of Wales" by Marie Llewellyn, 1899

Note: When I collected together assorted folk tales for my *Pembrokeshire Folk Tale Trilogy* (in 4 volumes) I found some confusion relating to Joseph Harries and Abe Biddle, who lived near Haverfordwest. Some folk tales have been transferred from the one to the other, and who knows where the truth lies?



*Werndew, where Joseph Harries was born
and where he died*



Outbuildings at Werndew

There are some interesting insights here:

<http://daibach-welldigger.blogspot.com/2018/12/the-chapels-of-dinas-cross.html>

In the section on Gideon Chapel, Dinas., we read that the chapel was built in 1830 (the year of Joseph's birth) but Mrs Harries Werndew is listed as one of the leading lights in the growing "independent" congregation. So we can assume that Joseph's mother was very active in the chapel and was committed to the cause. The family might even have gifted the land on which the chapel and graveyard are located. Mary must have contributed to the building costs, and to improvements to the chapel in 1843 together with an extension to the cemetery. One wonders what Joseph's feelings were about the chapel, the ministers and the great revival in the local area in 1859? He was eventually a deacon, but it does not appear that he was the architypal "good Christian gentleman....."

John Davies was the minister from 1843 to 1877. Then came John Francis, who was driven out in 1881 because of the bitterness of a small number of persons in the congregation.

One wonders what that was all about. When he left, the chapel may have been without a minister for a while, until the young single minister called Benjamin Rowlands arrived, and he was still in post when Joseph died.

Both Joseph and his half brother David are buried in the bottom corner of the Gedeon Chapel graveyard. They have identical granite headstones with rounded tops. Between them is a simple slate grave headstone to Joseph's mother Mary and younger sister Jane, who was just 26 when she died; and to one side is another squared off slate headstone marking the grave of father William Harries.



Gedeon Independent Chapel, just outside the village of Dinas



The wonderful box pews and balcony inside the Chapel



Gedeon Chapel and graveyard — dating from 1830 and used continuously since then



The simple granite headstone at the head of the grave of Joseph Harries

One person who studied the life and reputation of Joseph Harries was Rev Towyn Jones, who died in 2019. He gave a talk to the Dinas Cross Historical Society on 20 Jan 2003, and Stephen Evans took some rough notes of what he said. It's not known whether there was a transcript of the talk. Towyn picked up some information from Joseph Thomas of New Moat, who knew a lot about Joseph Harries's deeds and reputation -- the Welsh Folk Museum taped his recollections.

The depositions about JH collected by the rector of Newport may be somewhere in Cambridge, together with an 1892 photo of Glan-y-Mor.....



Rev Towyn Jones (1942-2019), who had a great interest in the supernatural and who wrote extensively about wizards, ghosts etc in the Welsh language.

THE STORIES

The most solid of the stories relating to Joseph Harries are these:

1. The building of Glan-y-Mor
2. Dr Harries and the Hornets
3. The conjuror and the jewel thief
4. Joseph and the hungry witch
5. The killing at Clyn
6. Mischief at Gedeon Chapel
7. The robber on Trenewydd Mountain
8. William John's Aerial journey
9. The mystery of the stolen painting
10. Joseph and the salty bones
11. Fairy Helpers for Dr Harries
12. Tragedy on Frenni Fawr
13. Joseph Harries and the ghostly reverberations

These tales have come from a number of different sources, and one cannot be sure of their authenticity. Such is the way with folk tales. Some may be reasonably accurate, reflecting strange events witnessed by others; some may be inventions; and some may have been created and passed on by Joseph Harries himself, since self-promotion was something in which all wizards specialised. Some of the stories are very similar to versions involving Abe Biddle or some other wizard with Pembrokeshire connections.

1. The Building of Glan-y-Mor

The wizard Joseph Harries was born in 1830 and lived during his youthful years at Werndew -- the family farm on the mountainside above Dinas. But in 1859 he was forced to move out when his half brother David inherited the property, and he built a house on the main Newport-Fishguard road at the bottom end of the Werndew driveway. This was planned to be the residence for himself and his widowed mother, and she probably paid for most of the work. The building of the house took almost ten years - maybe because cash was tight.

Two men were employed on building the house. One of them recorded that one day the supply of building stones ran out. Joseph Harries was unconcerned, and told the builders that there was nothing to worry about. Sure enough, next morning when the men turned up for work "there were stones aplenty". How did they get there? Nobody else could have delivered them overnight, and the builders were quite convinced that some mysterious power had been invoked by the wizard in order to bring them in and stack them ready for use.....

William Beddow, one of the builders, made a deposition to the Rector of Dinas on 28 March 1892 about Joseph Harries, who had died in 1890. He claimed that around 1874 he had been engaged to build a wall at Glan-y-Mor. One day he and a local miller were called in by Joseph Harries to look at a mirror placed on the kitchen table. He then said he would go upstairs and stamp his foot on the floorboards -- at which point the men were required to look into the mirror. They did as they were bidden, and saw David Harries of Werndew

(Joseph's half brother) and Ebenezer Davies of Ffynnonofi (a well-known local rascal). They gave the names to Joseph when he came downstairs, upon which he nodded and said no more. They never did discover what these two had been up to.....

It was known that the wizard used the mirror in order to find the names of those who had committed various crimes -- it was used to find the name of the man who shot a horse belonging to a local farmer, and also the name of the person who had stolen jewels belonging to a lady belonging to the Pembrokeshire gentry.

2. Dr Harries and the Hornets

Dr Harries was a deacon of Gedeon Independent Chapel, and lived not far away in the house called Glan-y-Mor. The chapel minister had lodgings in the house, which was also used for meetings and clerical social gatherings. It served effectively as a manse. In the course of one particular winter social evening at Glan-y-Mor, there were many clergymen and their guests present, and a good time was had by all, with singing, telling of tales and much laughter. At last, in the early hours, the conversation drifted round to the occult. Joseph Harries said nothing, for his strange powers were well known, but one elderly cleric denounced all sorcery and witchcraft (*rheibio*), and of course it was incumbent upon all the other clerics present to nod gravely in agreement.

At last Dr Harries got up, disappeared through the French doors onto the lawn, and returned holding three small rings. He held them up, saying quietly to the assembled company "Now, gentlemen, we'll see what is possible." He placed the three rings on the floor, left the room and locked the door on the outside, leaving the trapped clerics and their guests to stare intently at the rings. Suddenly, in one of the rings, a small buzzing insect appeared. As the men watched it grew and grew into a large angry hornet. It flew into another ring and was replaced by a second fly in the first ring. This also turned into a huge hornet. As they watched with mounting alarm the process speeded up until the room was filled with droning hornets. Eventually the ceiling was darkened with the creatures and panic set in as they flew into men's hair and clothes, into the curtains and furniture. As the men shouted and fought to escape from the room Dr Harries suddenly opened the door. In an instant the hornets swarmed out towards the darkness and droned away into the distance. Joseph said nothing, but picked the rings up off the floor. He knew that he had spoiled the party, but thereafter all the clerics present became somewhat more cautious in their pronouncements concerning matters beyond their understanding.

3. The conjuror and the Jewel Thief

Dr Joseph Harries of Werndew was once called in by a lady of some social standing who was staying at the mansion of a wealthy Pembrokeshire family. The doctor duly arrived, and greatly impressed the lady with his appearance. He was a tall, slender man with long shaggy hair and large, deep-set eyes, and a somewhat dreamy expression on his face. But his voice was well modulated and his manner courteous, and this gave the lady some confidence that he might be able to help her with a matter that required some discretion.

The countess described to the doctor how she had lost some of her jewels, and she declared that they had been safely in her travelling bag when she had left another Pembrokeshire mansion at dawn the previous day. On hearing the story Joseph opened his battered old bag and took out a mirror, which he placed on the table in front of the countess. Then he

asked her to look into it and to tell him what she saw. She sat down and looked into the mirror while Joseph asked her to "compose herself."

At last she said that she could see nothing but a mist, which she described as like the steam from a kettle. "Look again", said the good doctor. And as she looked quietly into the mirror the mist rolled away and she saw a woman in a dress of white brocade, with her back turned towards her. "Do you know her?" asked Joseph. "I don't think so," replied the Countess, "but I cannot see her face, for her back is turned."

The doctor then told her to pause for a while, and to close her eyes. This she did. After a few minutes she was asked to open her eyes again and to look once more into the mirror. And now, as the countess looked, the woman in the mirror turned to face her, and she was amazed to see some of her jewels in her hands, and others upon her neck and in her hair. Again Joseph asked "Do you know her?" And the countess instantly recognized her as a personal friend of her hostess, from whom she had recently taken her leave.

The doctor was asked to undertake discreet investigations, which he did with considerable tact. The result was the restoration of the jewels to their rightful owner. The thief was never prosecuted, but the solving of the mystery made a profound impression upon a small circle of the Pembrokeshire gentry.

4. Joseph and the hungry witch

A very industrious labourer, living in a hovel, was constantly troubled by a hare which came into his garden and devoured his vegetables. He had shot at her several times but all in vain; he could not kill her however hard he tried. The very same hare, as far as he could judge, was doing an enormous amount of damage and causing a great deal of annoyance to others as well. Beds of cabbages, leeks, potatoes and other vegetables were continuously growing less than they should and were disappearing as though carried away in the night.

At length the poor fellow became suspicious that it was not a hare but a local witch who was transforming herself and getting up to serious mischief. The cottager consulted Dr. Harris of Glan-y-Mor. The doctor conducted certain investigations and then told him that the hare was not a wild and harmless creature, but was a form assumed by a certain witch whose name he mentioned. "Never mind," said the conjuror, "I'll put her right. Now then, take this little piece of iron, cut it into nine small pieces, put them into your gun instead of nine pieces of lead shot, and fire at her the next time you see her inside your garden. Be careful to aim at her legs and not her vital parts. She doesn't deserve to be killed."

This was done. Next time the cottager saw the hare he aimed at her legs and pulled the trigger. A ball of fire appeared, and the report of the gun was terribly loud one as the hare disappeared.

Next day the assistance of Dr. Harries. was procured for an old woman in the district who had been hurt in the legs. The doctor knew all about it. Three of the pieces of iron were extracted from one of her legs, which at once settled the question that she had assumed the form of a hare, being a witch, and had visited the garden of the man and various others because she was hungry. After that, the hare was never seen again.

5. The Killing at Clyn

David Llewellyn lived at a farm called Clyn, near Cilrhedyn in the Gwaun Valley. He was involved in a bitter feud with a neighbour. He had a fine pony in a field near the farmhouse, and one day when he went to feed it he found that it had been shot. The poor animal lay dead in the middle of the field. There were no clues as to the culprit, but Mr Llewellyn had little doubt that his unpleasant neighbour had been the man responsible. When accused of the dastardly deed the man denied all knowledge of what had happened.

At length Mr Llewellyn decided that he would go to consult the *dyn hysbys* Dr Joseph Harries of Werndew, near Dinas. When he arrived in the doctor's consulting room he explained that his best pony had been shot, and that he was seeking help in discovering the culprit. Dr Harries listened intently, and then said "Do you see that large mirror on the wall? Look into it very carefully. However, do not frown or laugh or make any movement of your head while you are staring into the glass." Obediently, David Llewellyn looked into the mirror. "Now," said Dr Harries, "I will show you the person in the very act of shooting your pony. But be sure that you can look at this event without any movement of your head. If you move, you will forever be afflicted with whatever movement you make." "Yes, yes," said David Llewellyn. "I promise I will not move at all." "Very well," said the doctor. "I will now leave the room and you must look very carefully into the glass."

As Mr Llewellyn looked intently into the mirror, the glass cleared and he saw his neighbour, together with another man whom he had assumed to be a friend, approach his pony with a gun. The neighbour took aim at the pony's head and fired. A loud gunshot rang out, and the pony dropped dead onto the ground. So surprised was Mr Llewellyn by the noise that he blinked and gasped. After that, although he knew who had shot his pony, and obtained recompense, poor Mr Llewellyn was always afflicted with a blink and a stammer.

6. Mischief at Gedeon Chapel

One Saturday night the windows of Gedeon Chapel were smashed in. Of course the members of the chapel congregation were mortified when they turned up for Sunday worship. After the service there was a meeting of the deacons, including Dr Joseph Harries, to consider what steps might be taken. He asked his fellow deacons to leave the matter in his hands, declaring that the evil doer would be appropriately punished.

That afternoon Sunday School was proceeding as normal when, all of a sudden, the children and adults present saw — through a broken window — a man running back and forth through the gorse bushes, yelling for dear life, bare footed and bleeding profusely. "Haha!" said the doctor. "The old fox is earthed." Needless to say, he admitted his crime when Joseph released him from the spell, and duly paid for all the damage he had done.

7. The Robber on Trenewydd Mountain

The doctor had been called away to Casmael (Puncheston) to attend a sick man. It was late in the evening when the message came. By the time the doctor was ready to return home, it was drawing towards midnight. On the way home he had to cross the lonesome, bleak

Trenwydd Mountain. When he was advancing towards Bwlch Heol y Feidr a man sprang out from the grip, and caught hold of the reins of his pony, and demanded his money.

"Deliver or die!" was the harsh command which fell on the doctor's ears — words calculated to terrify any ordinary human being under the same conditions. But the brave doctor's nerves were more highly toned than those of the general run of mortals. "All right," said he coolly. "I'll deliver, if that's the case, rather than die here." He put his hand in his pocket, pretending to be in pursuit of his purse. He pulled it out and the robber stretched out his hand to receive it. Just as the robber received the purse, the doctor with the smartness of a professional and a practitioner, drew a fleam (a sharp blood-letting knife) across his wrist, and at the same moment spurred his pony and galloped away, leaving the robber yelling for help.

The next day, very early, a knock was heard at the surgery door at Werndew. "Who is there?" was the question from within. "I am, sir," came the intelligent reply. "What can be the matter with you at this time of the morning?" "I've cut my wrist, sir....."

The doctor was down in a moment, and carefully dressed the man's wrist, which was still bleeding profusely. "How did you get into this mess?" asked the doctor. "I was cutting furze, sir, and the billhook slipped with me."

When the doctor had finished dressing the man's hand, he said to him, "We have met before, not so very long ago, have we not? It was very dark at the time." The man realised then that he was face to face with his intended victim. "Now, my man," continued the doctor. "Go home and be very careful with your wrist, and let me give you one word of advice: - No more wickedness on Trenwydd Mountain, if you please. Remember, the pit is at the the end of all evil deeds, especially for highway robbers."

Needless to say the man was a reformed character from that time forth. ‘

8. William John's Aerial Journey

When the Rev Meredith Morris lived in the Gwaun Valley as a child, his uncle William John lived at Trewern, about a mile from Pontfaen. In 1872 William's wife fell seriously ill with inflammation of the lungs, and it transpired that the local doctor could do little to help. William became desperately worried as her health deteriorated, and at last it was suggested that he should go to see the famous magician Dr Joseph Harries of Werndew, near Dinas. It was too dark to take his horse, so William had to walk all the way, down into the Gwaun Valley, up the other side and over the wild moor of Mynydd Melyn.

At last he arrived, very late at night. He hammered on the door of the doctor's house, and the famous man let him in. He listened intently to William's account of his wife's symptoms, and immediately poured some special potion into a small bottle. He gave it to William. "Now," he said. "Get back to your wife as fast as you possibly can, for she is close to death even as I speak." William's heart sank. "I will, sir," he replied, "But the road is in a bad state, and the old footpath over Mynydd Melyn is even worse. There is no moon, and I can hardly see where I am going." The doctor nodded. "All right, I understand," he said. "Make your way as best you can to the top of the lane past Bryn, and then you will have a lift."



Trewern as it looks today

William John puffed and panted up the muddy lane, and when he reached the top he was utterly surprised and bewildered to be lifted upward and carried along through the air by some mysterious force. When he reached Trewern he looked at his pocket watch and discovered that his aerial journey in the pitch darkness over a distance of 5 miles had taken only a few minutes. He was just in time to give the medicine to his wife, who had only a spark of life left in her. The medicine worked like magic, and very soon she was restored to full health.

9. The Mystery of the stolen painting

The best-known soothsayer or *dyn hysbys* in Pembrokeshire in the later years of the nineteenth century was Dr Joseph Harries of Werndew, near Dinas. Some people believed that he was in league with the devil, but there are no tales of him doing evil and indeed he seems to have had a substantial reputation for righting wrongs and assisting in the recovery of lost animals from local farms. Stolen property seems to have been a particular speciality.

One day a wealthy woman came up the track to Werndew in her carriage and reported to the soothsayer that a very valuable painting which had hung in her house had disappeared. There were no signs of a burglar entering the house, and no damage had been done. On hearing the story from his client, Joseph at once suspected an "inside job." So he got out his magic mirror, and said to the lady "Now let's see what can do!"

The two of them sat in the living room and watched the mirror. After a time, an image appeared in the mirror and the lady exclaimed that she recognized a very good friend of the family. She could hardly believe that such a person could have been guilty of the theft, but she confirmed to Joseph that the family was in financial difficulties and that her friend might have been driven by desperation to the theft of the painting. No doubt she hoped to travel to London with it and to sell it there.

Having asked his client for the name of the culprit, Joseph wrote it onto a piece of paper, and pierced it with a needle. He then turned to the lady and said "Your friend will now start to feel ill, and she will know that if she does not return the painting immediately she will be eaten up with a strange disease. I suggest, Madam, that you go home and await developments."

The lady was somewhat taken aback by this turn of events, but she agreed to do as the wizard suggested. She took her leave of the good doctor, returned to her coach and clattered off down the track towards Dinas. She lived a fair distance away, and by the time she arrived home an hour had passed. As she alighted from her coach she was met one of her servants, who handed to her a large flat parcel wrapped up in brown paper. He said that a strange horseman with a great scarf over his face had ridden up to the house at high speed just few minutes before, and had left the parcel without saying a word before galloping off again. Naturally enough, when the lady opened the parcel, she found her precious painting inside.

A week later the lady and her guilty friend met socially, and the lady asked after her health. "Oh, I feel much better, thank you," came the reply. "I had been planning a trip to London, but a week ago I suddenly came over feeling very ill, and had to cancel my plans. But I have been getting better gradually, and now I feel quite well again."

10. Joseph and the Salty Bones

We still do not know what sort of medical training Joseph might have had, but there is no doubt that he was a skilled pharmacist and physician. He must have been a student of human anatomy (and of the anatomy of animals, since he sometimes served as a veterinary surgeon as well), but his studies of the human body got him into serious trouble in the community. During his lifetime the old churchyard adjacent to St Brynach's Church in Cwm-yr-Eglwys was being eaten away by the sea, and occasionally bits and pieces of coffins, and human remains, were exposed in the eroding cliffs. The bones collected from the beach were normally re-interred in the sanctified ground of the churchyard or in some other location, but occasional bones were collected as gruesome souvenirs by local people and visitors. It seems that Joseph had a collection of such bones at Glan-y-Mor, and of course there were rumours that he was not just using them for academic research but for occult practices in the pursuit of the black arts. Some said that he ground the bones up and used them in magic potions.



Cwm yr Eglwys — gable end, some of the churchyard, and some of the graves remain in position after a stormy past

During the “Royal Charter” storm of 25/26 October 1859 (one of the worst storms ever recorded in the British Isles) the gable end of the church fell into the sea and a large part of the churchyard was consumed by the waves, no doubt leaving a litter of bits of coffins and a scatter of human bones on the beach. After that, it transpired that Joseph was in possession of a complete skeleton, and the rumours about his activities intensified. He was confronted by some of the locals, and there were complaints in the local press — but he refused to hand the skeleton over to anybody else, argued that he had done nothing illegal, and said that the skeleton was necessary for his own practice, to help him in the re-setting of bones and the understanding of human physiology.

There was further serious damage to the graveyard by the sea in the decades that followed, as reported in the “County Times”: “The sea made incursions into the graveyard in Cwmyreglwys in the sixties and seventies. Torn coffins with human remains protruding from them, were hanging in the bank above the beach. Pieces of coffin and human skeletons were strewn all over the shore. The sight was harrowing and ghastly!” Maybe during this time Joseph added to his bone collection.....

It is not known what happened to the skeleton — or the other bones, for that matter — but it was reputed that later on all the human remains were buried in the garden of Glan-y-Mor.....

11. Fairy Helpers for Dr Harries

There is a strange little tale about Dr Harries, the magician of Werndew (near Dinas), in which the great man is assisted in his divination by fairies. This is most unusual, since magicians were traditionally supposed to be in contact with the devil and his cohorts rather than with the Tylwyth Teg.

However, the story is as follows. A farmer from near Carmarthen travelled to Werndew and explained to Dr Harries that he had lost his cattle. The magician immediately summoned the fairies, and explained that they were exceedingly clever at foretelling the future, discovering secrets, and finding lost property.

So he consulted them about the lost cattle, and then told the farmer to go home as quickly as he could and look for them in a certain place. The magician described the place in so much detail that the farmer immediately recognized the spot, and referred to it by name. He rushed back to his farm near Carmarthen, to the spot, and sure enough, recovered his cattle.

12. Tragedy on Frenni Fawr

Almost 150 years ago a young shepherd boy was looking after the sheep on Frenni Fawr, not far from Crymych. Unfortunately he stepped into a fairy ring, and disappeared. When he did not return home his parents went looking for him, and when they discovered the circle of mushrooms they feared the worst. Not knowing what to do, they decided to consult the famous dyn hysbys (magician) Dr Joseph Harries, who lived in a cottage at Werndew, near Dinas. So the father set off to visit him.

Dr Harries heard his story in silence, and then he shook his head. "I do not think I can help," he said gravely. "It is said that those who are taken to fairyland might as well be left there, for if they are rescued they are sure to die, having become used to fairy foods and fairy living." But the father of the missing boy was adamant. "At the moment we have no son anyway," he said. "If we rescue him and he then dies, we are no worse off. And at least we will have the small compensation of knowing that we did what we could."

So Dr Harries reluctantly agreed to help, and told the father that he and his wife must return to exactly the spot where their son had disappeared, exactly a year after his disappearance and exactly at the time when the sun was at its highest point in the heavens. They would see their son dancing inside an enchanted circle with the Tylwyth Teg. They must stand outside the circle, taking care not to touch it. They must wait until the boy came dancing close to them, and then they were to grab hold of his coat tails and pull him out. "After that, I cannot control what happens," said the magician, "for the powers of the fairy folk are great indeed."

So the boy's parents did exactly as they had been instructed. And it came to pass just as the magician had predicted. Once outside the ring, the boy looked surprised and then disappointed, and said: "Oh father, you have spoiled my pleasure." His mother ran up to embrace him and console him, but as she reached him he disintegrated into a small heap of ashes at her feet.

13. Joseph Harries and the ghostly reverberations

When the wizard Joseph Harried died at Werndew on 29 November 1890 -- probably of kidney failure -- some very strange things happened. He had written his will 8 days earlier, so he must have known that the end was near.....

In the throes of death he groaned and screamed, as if he was refusing to die. On that day the horses on the farm went wild and unruly and the pigs refused to eat. The locals thought that the devil had come to take him. There were rumours that the family had put something on the fire and that the smoke had choked him -- and that suggests that he was not greatly loved by his nearest and dearest. A couple of months later, when his possessions were sold by auction, people were very reluctant to bid, assuming that somehow to bring any of his things into their own houses would bring the devil in too.

Not long after the death Rev Benjamin Rowlands was at Glan-y-Mor, where he heard a horse arrive at the trot at about 10.30 pm in the pitch darkness. The sound became more distinct but slower, and then faded away, and there was no sound of the horse leaving again. The reverend gentleman went to the inner door of the porch and shouted "Who's there?" to which there was no reply. He did the same at the outer door, again with no response. This happened on several later occasions.

Around Christmas and New Year of 1891/92, just over a year after Joseph's death, a student called James Beynon Williams came to stay at Glan-y-Mor as a guest of Rev Benjamin Rowlands. He was very sceptical about some of the things he had heard about Joseph from his host. One evening they went off to bed, leaving the dog on the mat in the kitchen across the door. At 10.30 they were awoken by the dog howling. They heard the door latch, footsteps, harness being hung up, boots coming off, more footsteps, and another door being opened. Both men left their rooms to investigate what was going on, but their candles were both extinguished. James Williams was speechless and terrified, and afterwards they found that the dog had shifted its position to lie on the mat by the front door, which is where it would lie when Joseph came home when he was alive. After that Benjamin Rowlands accepted that 10.30 was the "haunting hour" and always endeavoured to return home after 11.30 pm.....

On 13th March 1892 a lad called John Thomas was staying at Glan-y-Mor -- his sister was engaged to marry Rev Benjamin Rowlands. At 11.30 pm he clearly heard a pestle and mortar being used in the room that had been Joseph Harries's dispensary and surgery. The sound continued for about 30 minutes.

Late one night -- around the same date -- a passer-by from Newport heard groans and screams, as if from somebody on their deathbed, coming from Glan-y-Mor.

At Glan-y-Mor Joseph's bedroom was the one above the entrance -- and after his death it was reputed to be haunted -- referred to locally as "The Devil's Room".

It was reputed that in the garden of the house a Bible was kept "in a burrow" -- presumably because Joseph did not want it inside the building. It was also reputed that a skeleton collected by Joseph from the beach at Cwm yr Eglwys (derived from the churchyard as it was being eroded away by the sea) was also buried somewhere in the garden.

(Information kindly provided by Stephen Evans and Hywel Bowen-Perkins)