

COWBRIDGE AND DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 21 - February 1985



FUTURE MEETINGS

All meetings are held on Fridays  
at 8pm in the Lesser Hall,  
Cowbridge,

February 1st: The history and role  
of the Privy Council - David Rogers.

March 1st: Traditional Welsh crafts  
- John Williams-Davies.

\*\*\*March 29th: Creatures strange  
and small - D.K.H. Martin.

\*\*\* This is the final meeting of  
the session, and there will be no  
members' evening in May.

EXCURSIONS

Tentative date - Tuesday, 2nd April  
to Houses of Parliament, including  
the Speaker's House, lunch, and a  
conducted tour: for further details  
see or phone Mrs Carthew (991-760296)

Summer Excursion - details not yet  
finalised, but possibly to  
Tewkesbury.

Excursion with the Victorian Society  
to the Big Pit, Blaenavon, on 19 May.  
Details from Mrs Weeding.

\* \* \* \* \* CHARTER DAY \* \* \* \* \*

This will be celebrated this year on  
Saturday, March 9, at 8pm in the  
Town Hall. The cost of £5.50 includes  
the meal and home-made wine. More  
information from Mrs Diane Lloyd (C 4093)

OFFICERS 1984-1985

President: Revd Norman Williams,  
Cowbridge 2107

Chairman: Mrs Yvonne Weeding, C 2878

Hon Sec: Mr John Miles, C 2270

Hon Treasurer: Mr Neil Shannon, C 5957

Excursions Secretary: Mrs Lilian  
Carthew, Peterston-s-Ely 760256

Programme Sec: Mrs Gwynneth Keay,  
C 2879

Museum Curator: Mrs Marion Eveleigh,  
C 2995.

THE DRAGON HAS TWO TONGUES

Many members will have started to  
watch the television series - on  
S4C, HTV and Channel 4 - subtitled  
A History of the Welsh, and presented by  
Wynford Vaughan Thomas and Professor  
Gwyn Williams.

The society has formed a  
discussion group which will meet  
three times:

-on Tuesday, 5th February at 8pm,  
at Tan y coed, Welsh St Donats, the  
home of Mr and Mrs L. Ginn (C 3058)

-probably on Tuesday, 5th March at  
8pm, at Strone Cottage, Colwinston,  
the home of Mr and Mrs R. Toogood  
(Bridgend 5236)

-probably on Tuesday, 2nd April, at  
an address to be decided.

T H E F R E N C H C O N N E C T I O N

The Secretary has recently received a letter from a Mr Howell J. Hawkins of 43 rue Monsieur Le Prince, Paris. In the hope that some member may be able to help him, I print his letter in full:

"Dear Sir,

There lived in Cowbridge in the 1740s my direct ancestor, Mrs Heather Wilkins, formerly Hawkins, nee Sherman. Her first husband, Thomas Hawkins, gentleman, of Neath, was Chief Agent and Steward to Sir Humphrey Mackworth of the Gnoll, the first Chief Accountant of the Company of Mine Adventurers, and Under-Sheriff of Glamorgan in 1706. Mr Wilkins, her second husband, was a lawyer of some substance.

The lady was a benefactress of Cowbridge church, and one of the bells is dedicated to her. She was once robbed of silver plate and a diamond encrusted gold cross. The thieves were arrested in Carmarthen, and hanged.

I will be most grateful if you would be so kind, on the occasion of a meeting of your local history society, as to bring the above to the attention of your members in the hope that one may be able to let me know more about this ancestor.

If anyone can help, please get in touch with Mr John Miles.

\* \* \* \* \*

CROMWELL ASSOCIATION (WALES BRANCH)

The secretary of this newly-formed branch, Mr J.L. Atkins, of 2 Tordoff Way, Barry, has written to the Secretary to inform us of the branch's existence, and to appeal for details of Civil War activities or anecdotes in our area. One of the purposes of the association is to erect commemorative tablets: in February (no date given) one is to be placed on the Griffin Inn in Cardiff. Others are planned for St Fagans, Penmark Castle, and Cromwell House, Chepstow.

P U B L I C A T I O N S

The guide to Holy Cross Church should appear this year; we are now in the stage of organising the illustrations. The text has already been set by the printers, so I look forward to the appearance of the booklet which should be of some interest to the many visitors to Cowbridge Church, as well as to the residents of the town.

In addition, plans are being made for the preparation of a tourist brochure on the town; the history society is represented on the committee. If it proceeds as planned, it should be a most worth-while publication.



'A.N. OLD BOVIAN V.C.,'

Cowbridge has undergone an astonishing change of character over the past decade, which reflects not least an influx of new residents in numbers enormous in comparison with the previous few centuries. The days when the School Bell divided up the day as surely as the cattle-market divided up the week must surely seem extremely remote anti unreal to the inhabitants of Toytown-on-Twee (for this is how many seem to regard the place, I regret to say).

It is every year more obvious, therefore, to those who take some interest in Cowbridge, now great a blessing it was that Iolo Davies wrote his masterly history of Cowbridge Grammar School shortly before our elected representatives saw fit to dispose of it. No prophet is accepted in his own country; and, just as few, perhaps, realise how prestigious an institution the School once was, long years ago. so few, too, are aware that A Certaine Schoole (note 1.) is not just a collection of anecdotes filling out a list of names, but a finely-written and authoritative history, carefully researched and, where necessary, closely argued.

There are, nevertheless, a number of loose ends. Some of these may be retrieved in the original manuscript of the book, for much information had to or omitted in order to keep the final draft

within reasonable limits (note 2.). But other problems cannot be solved with ease. For example, Iolo disposed once and for all of the myth of the School's origin as a bangor, a seminary or "university", attached to the class of St. Illtud at Llanilitud Fawr. But he could not entirely exclude the possibility that a chantry-school existed in the town prior to the Stradlings' foundation, the latter being intended to improve upon it or replace it after its dissolution. (Hopkin-James made great play of this idea in his own version of the myth). Similarly, Iolo did not fully explain how the School continued to function while the original Schoolhouse was demolished and the present building constructed, in the mid-nineteenth century. This gap led someone to propose that parts of the original building were actually preserved and "built: into" its successor, a notion used in a recent and ludicrous article about "the Ghost of Lost. Dorm." in The Vale Star. I should mention, therefore, that the School house of the Stradlings was totally demolished (apart from the building immediately to the east of the South Gate, lately known as "the Boot-House", which includes part of the Town Wall). During the reconstruction the School continued in Caercady House, now the residence of Dr Meller and her family (note 3.).

One of the most enigmatic of such problems is the identity of the Old Boy who, in the nineteenth century, was awarded the Victoria Cross, and I should say at the outset that, very sadly. I have not been able to solve: it. What I have arrived at is the name of the most likely candidate, and I strongly suspect that that is where the matter will rest for eternity.

The award in referred to in A Certaine School thus (1,pp.115.123): "More important...is the information about the working of the School...in the latter part of 1864 and after, preserved in a survey published in 1870 Reports of Schools inquiry Commission. M.A.K.D.]...

Under the heading of Distinctions gained "elsewhere" there are two entries only. Here it seems particularly unfortunate that this Survey rigidly avoided using the names of pupils, for one of these two distinguished Old Boys should by rights have a specially honoured place in the School's history. I refer..

to the one... who, on some farther field, had won the Victoria Cross. '

Apparently, the information provided in the Survey related to 1864, inspection of premises taking place at a later date.

The Victoria Cross itself was instituted on January 29th 1856, and since the Old Bovian recipient must have left the School by late 1864, eight years need be considered in the search for his identity. But the situation is more complicated than such a short period would imply. During the whole of World War II, for example, only one member of the Welch Regiment (that was the official spelling) received the award it was Lt. Tasker Watkins, of Heol Shringig, Nelson and Pontypridd Grammar, now Lord Justice Watkins, V.C.); during the Great War, when many, many more fell, there were still only three recipients in the Welch. In early days, however, the Victoria Cross was used much as the Military Cross and its equivalent, the Military Medal, are used today. This is not to devalue the award in any sense. But it does mean that what would be a very easy task, had the Old Bovian received the decoration this century, is rendered difficult in the extreme.

Luckily, there exists an important source, V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments (note 4.). This book, the work of a retired officer, is obviously a labour of love, and it records brief biographies of recipients of the Victoria Cross qualified for inclusion, giving their places of education, if known. The book is wide-ranging, for as well as those who served in regiments described as "Welsh", including those prior to the period when they were so described (the Welch Regiment was not always called thus, for instance, and originally had no Welsh connections at all), the author cites anyone who hailed from Wales or resided there when the award was made.

I have made certain assumptions in my attempt to find the Old Bovian in question, which are not entirely valid. These I will now discuss.

1. During the mid-nineteenth century, Cowbridge School was in a reasonably good state. For almost the entire first half of that century, the Rev'd Dr William Williams, the aptly nick-named "Old Doctor", was Headmaster, but he was



assisted in his declining years by his Second Master, the Rev'd Thomas Edmondson, who effectively ran the place. There is evidence that it continued to flourish, despite Dr Williams' **great** age, until his death in 1847. Subsequently, **the** Rev'd Dr Hugo Harper became Headmaster; he was a **remarkable** man, who moved to Sherborne after a **mere three** years and transformed it - it had less than five pupils when he arrived, although he took several Bovians with him - into one of the country's leading schools. Finally, **there** was the Rev'd W. Holt Beaver, who maintained something, at least, of the standard to which **Harper** had raised the school for a while.

In short, the School was attractive to parents. On the other hand, it was not a Harrow or a Winchester, not ever; and Wales itself appeared to be semi-barbarous to the majority of Englishmen at that time - it was in 1847 that the famous, or infamous, Report on Education in Wales known to Welshmen as Brad y Llyfrau Gieision was published.

2. It seems very likely, therefore, that most of the boys at Cowbridge would have been Welsh, or had connections in Wales - relatives living locally, perhaps.

3. For similar reasons, Cowbridge School would not have attracted those of high station in the society of those days - the sons of peers and baronets.

These suppositions are confirmed from the list, of forty (out of forty-four) boys contained in the Report of 1870 which mentions the recipient of the 'Victoria Cross (l.pp. 117-118). All the dayboys, obviously, are local (though these, too, might have included boys staying with relatives); three of the boarders are from London, of whom two are possibly brothers, while the rest hail from South Wales. They are all from backgrounds that would now be described as "middle class".



This being the case, it seems likely that the recipient of the decoration from Cowbridge School would appear among the "V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments".

5. One can certainly exclude those recipients whose education is described as "rudimentary" or were illiterate (not a few).

After eliminating recipients on these various grounds, only three possible candidates remain. Two of these are Scottish, and there seems to be no reason why they should have been to Cowbridge. One man is left, and he has a few points in his favour, in addition.

Henry Raby was born in Llanelli, where his grandfather was a pioneer industrialist, in 1827; his father had business in France which kept him, and his wife, abroad for lengthy periods, and Henry and his brother, Arthur, seem to have made their home at their grandparents' house. Only one year of his education is accounted for - 1840-1841 - when he attended Sherborne School; after this, presumably, he was bought a commission as a midshipman (an officer-cadet, to all intents and purposes), for he was by then in his fifteenth year.

A naval detachment fought on land at the Battle of Sevastopol, and amongst them was Henry Raby, now - e Commander. On June 18th, 1855, he led two ratings in a victorious skirmish under heavy fire, personally rescuing a wounded soldier from open country. For this action, he and his two companions were each awarded the Victoria Cross. Raby subsequently played an important part in the suppression of the slave-trade and was wounded in a ship-of-the-line off the China station. He retired as a Rear-Admiral, remaining on the Retiree list until his death at Southsea in 1907; by then, he had received Turkish and Sardinian decorations, and been made a Member of the Order of the Bath and a Chevalier of the Legion d' Honneur .

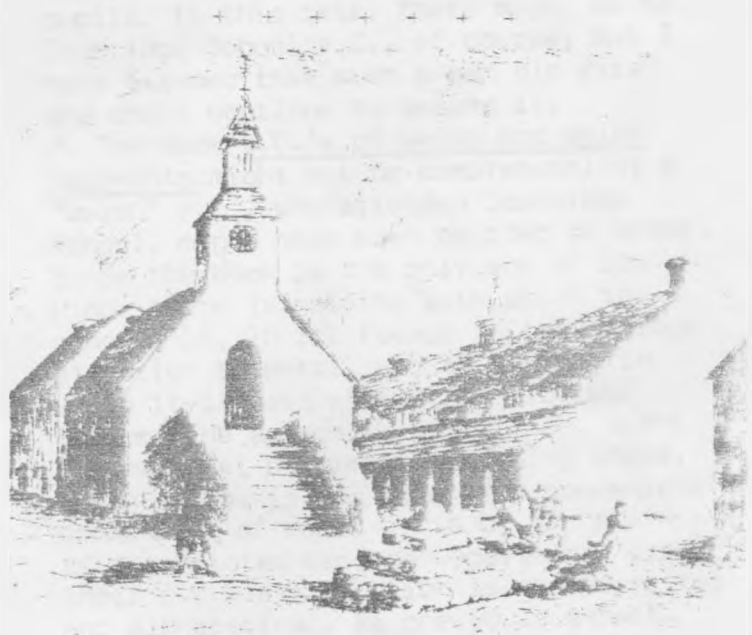
Raby was obviously a faithful servant of the Empire or which the Sun Never Set, and his brother, likewise an old Sherburnian, was cast in a similar mould. He served in the consular service at Maine, U.S.A.; Scutari, on the Black Sea; Jedoah, in the Khalifa; and on the Dardanelles. Eventually he too was decorated for faithful service as H.R. Consul-General in Livonia and White Russia.

What is uniquely interesting about Henry Raby, the old sea-dog, is that he was the first man ever to wear the Victoria Cross. Although not the first man to be cited (and it is after the citation in the London -Gazette that one is entitled to use the letters), he was the senior officer of the Senior Service present at the first investiture, on June 29th, 1857, and therefore the first to receive the decoration from the hand of the Queen. It is recorded that Her Majesty was so excited that she thrust the pin through Raby's uniform jacket and into his chest, apologising when she drew blood; but Raby remained stoutly at attention and did not flinch, replying, in the finest British tradition, "Never fear, Ma'am!" Raby's decorations are in the Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth; his grave is at Southsea. It should be noted that the boys of Sherborne School were given a week off in his honour when he received his award, at the express command of the Queen.

(to be continued)

Notes :

1. Iolo Davies : A Certaine Schoole.  
**Cowbridge : D.Brown and Son. 198-**.
2. These manuscripts are available for examination at the Recod Office, Mid-Glamorgan County Hall, Cardiff.
3. Iolo Davies ; personal communication.
4. W.A.Williams : V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments. Wrexham : Bridge Books, 1984.



the Old Town Hall and High Cross  
(copied from an old painting)



'A.N. OLD BOVIAN V.C.'

[In this article Dr Michael Duggan follows up the story in our last Newsletter to give further information on his search for the identity of the 'Old Bovian V.C.']

The evidence in favour of Raby's being the Old Bovian V.C.' is largely circumstantial, He was of a middle-class background; he came from the area (i.e. South Wales) that supplied all but a few of the pupils at Cowbridge: his parents were away from home a great deal and might have thought a residential school more desirable than "dunting" the boys on their grandparents and paying for private tuition.

There is, however, the question of why Raby (and possibly his brother) should have transferred from Cowbridge to Sherborne in 1840 in the case of Henry), Many Cowbridge boys accompanied or followed Hugo Harper to Sherborne, but that was ten years later. Raby, if he were at Cowbridge at all, would have sat at the feet of the Old Doctor or of his deputy, Thomas Edmond. As pointed out, Cowbridge School was flourishing at that time, while Sherborne was in almost terminal decline. But of course, the same objection would apply, to a lesser extent, if Raby had been sent to Sherborne directly from home. No details of the education of either or the Raby brothers, prior to their entry, are preserved at Sherborne School (5).

I consulted the records held at the Imperial War Museum for further information about Raby, but I found little new, save a splendid picture of him in old-age, covered with his decorations and looking, in high collar and epaulettes, the very epitome of the Victorian establishment. Similarly, the Dyfed County Archives hold no information at all about Raby or his family, while the Llanelli Public Library could only supply some newspaper-cuttings about Raby himself, covering the same ground as the documents I had seen, and an essay on the Raby family, relating their contribution to the town's industrial development (6). The family left Llanelli altogether after the death of Raby's parents, and the only descendant of whom I could find mention was an unmarried centenarian who died in Bath early this century. There seems little chance of tracing more information about Henry Raby's early education, for this would relate to a period one hundred and forty years ago; almost certainly, it no longer exists.

Within the limits of the assumptions I have made - reasonable, as I believe them to be - Raby is by far the most likely candidate. But there are two or three other suppositions, which further undermine my position;

1, It is possible that the compiler of the Report of 1870, one Mr Bompas, made a mistake in correlating the information he received about Cowbridge School, or even that his informant, the Rev'd W. Holt Beever, made a mistake about past pupils. In this case, there might be no Cowbridge School V.C., of course; but I have assumed that such a man did exist and shall continue to assume it.

2. The book V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments might not be comprehensive; a "Welsh" V.C., who attended Cowbridge School, might have been omitted in error. Since the book is the only one of its kind, there is nothing with which to compare it. In its favour is its obvious attention to detail and the regard in which it is held at the Imperial War Museum. The author, W.A. Williams, spent a great deal of time researching there, and his book is now used as a convenient compendium of Welsh V.C.s by the staff of the Printed Records Department, since their own classification is chronological and alphabetical, as one would expect.

3. It is possible, if unlikely, that the Old Bovian in question had few Welsh connections, or none at all, and that he did not belong to a Welsh regiment.

Tracing him would then involve examining the records of all those awarded the Victoria Cross in the relevant period. I made some attempt to do this at the War Museum, but I cannot say that I might not have overlooked someone - there is a very large number to be considered. Further, the educational details of many are incomplete. I can say only that I did not find anyone who was supposed to have attended Cowbridge School, nor did I find any recipient with Welsh connections who had been omitted from V.C.'s of Wales and Welsh Regiments. It is obviously quite beyond my means to research further into everyone who had received the decoration up to 1864; it would take many years, and, ultimately, the relevant information might simply be unavailable.



The South Gate and the Toll Gate  
{copied from an old painting}.

Unfortunately, Canon Lummis, the greatest authority on the Victoria Cross, died just as I started my research. His papers were all deposited at the Museum, and were among the documents I consulted; W.A. Williams had corresponded with him when writing his own book. But I was advised that he might have been able to recall some additional helpful detail from his vast memory, for he had made a lifetime study of the subject. Such was not to be.

Notes :

5. This information was kindly supplied by Mr M.R.G. Earls-Davis, sometime Assistant Master at Sherborne School, and Honorary Secretary of the Old Shirburnian Society, together with a reprint of Henry Raby's obituary from The Times, February 14th, 1907.

6. Letters from Ms E. Twist, Archivist-in-charge, County Record Office, Shire Hall, Carmarthen; and from Mr D.F. Griffiths, Borough Librarian, Llanelly

There, I think, the matter will remain. I am certainly in no position to recommend to Mr Tames, the Headmaster of the Comprehensive School, that he commemorate Henry Raby in some prominent place in the museum he has established, for that would be a totally unwarranted "borrowing" of a distinguished Old Shirburnian. What I can say is that Raby is very likely to have been the man referred to in the Report of 1870, and that it is a great pity he cannot be established with certainty as the Old Bovian V.C., in view of his unique distinction.

I am most grateful to those persons whose names are recorded in the notes - appended to the two instalments of my article for the information supplied, and to the staff of the Department of Printed Records, Imperial War Museum, for their consideration and help. It goes without saying that the comments of Iolo Davies, my friend and mentor, were invaluable.

M. A. K. D.

It is ironic, in any case, that this remarkable Old Boy, whoever he was, should have remained unnoticed until his School had been destroyed. Perhaps it is appropriate that he remain anonymous in an age that cares for none of these things and has set its face resolutely against its past.

M. A. K. D.

