

COWBRIDGE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No 64: SEPTEMBER 2007

Programme for 2007 - 8

2007

September 7th

AGM and

'Glamorgan County Constabulary –
Foundation and Early Years'

Don Gerrard

followed by fruit tart and sparkling wine

October 5th

'Excavation of Neolithic enclosures at Ewenny and
Norton and a barrow cemetery at Monknash'

Richard Lewis (Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological
Trust)

November 2nd

'Brunel in South Wales'

Stephen Jones

December 7th

The Maud Gunter Memorial Lecture

'Princes of Wales'

Deborah Fisher

followed by mince pies and punch

2008

January 4th

'The History of Penllyn'

Stephen White

February 1st

The Don Wallis Memorial Lecture

'Rees Baldwin and the National Library of Congress'

Jeff Robinson

March 7th

'The Aberdulais Falls'

Roger Sellick

March 13th

Charter Day visit to Treguff

April 4th

'The Red Book of Hergest'

Professor David Davies

followed by wine and cheese

Please note that this year meetings will start at 7.30pm – in the Lesser Hall, Cowbridge.

You will note that we are continuing with the idea of special refreshments for three of our meetings – coffee and biscuits will be available on the five other occasions

Dick Tonkin has once again organized – meticulously – a very varied, stimulating and interesting programme. Our sincere thanks to Dick for all his hard work.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE WEEK

We have been asked to take part in an exhibition, to be held in Holy Cross Church, to celebrate European Heritage week. We have decided to focus on a series of photographs to illustrate 'Cowbridge Past and Present'; this will be an opportunity for people to see once again the photographs which were so generously donated to the Society by Cowbridge Camera Club.

Beverley Tonkin is co-ordinating the exhibition. If you would be willing to help, please contact Beverley in the first meeting,

or turn up at the church at 10am on Monday September 10th.

The exhibition will run from September 10th to Saturday September 15th; we would also like volunteers to man the stands on the Saturday.

CONTRIBUTORS

Our thanks to Luke Millar for his entertaining look at The Torrington Diaries, and to Stephanie Harris of Newport for permission to include WE Thomas's poem.

AGM Agenda : 7th September 2007

1. Apologies for absence
2. Confirmation of the minutes of the AGM of 1st September 2006
3. Correspondence
4. Chairman's report
5. Annual financial report
6. Election of Officers and Committee for 2007-8

Officers and Committee for 2006-7 were:

Chairman	Mr Jeff Alden
Hon Secretary	Mr Don Gerrard
Joint Hon Treasurers	Mrs Ivana Locke and Mrs Val Pugh
Programme Secretary	Mr Dick Tonkin
Publicity Officer	Mr Bob Cope
Editor of the newsletter	Mr Jeff Alden
Representative: Vale Conservation Advisory Group	Mr George Haynes
Committee: Mrs Betty Alden, Professor Dick Buswell, Mrs Marilyn Cope, Mr Keith Jones, Mrs Beverly Tonkin	

BYNG'S TOUR IN SOUTH WALES

August 1787

Among the various recorded tours of Great Britain undertaken by eighteenth-century gentlemen, some of the undeservedly lesser-known are those undertaken by the Hon John Byng (1743 – 1813) who travelled through much of England and Wales between 1781 and 1794. His records were published as "The Torrington Diaries", in four volumes, for the first time, by Eyre and Spottiswood in 1934.

John was an aristocrat, second son of Viscount Torrington, inheriting the title himself a fortnight before his own death in 1813. His childhood was unhappy, because both his beloved parents died, and he was entrusted to an unkind uncle, the admiral who was famously shot for failing to recover Minorca from the French in 1756. The uncle was, in his nephew's verse,

*To my faults open, to my merits blind,
'a little more than kin and less than kind'*

After a career in the army, attaining the rank of colonel, he left in 1780 and took up an Inland Revenue appointment in 1782, a career which, though actually quite varied and interesting, he summarised as:

*'His early days were spent in Camps,
His latter days were pass'd at Stamps'.*

Although Byng professed a lack of learning, in fact he read widely, wrote passable verse, and like many army officers was a competent draughtsman. He was a traditionalist, loving old buildings, especially castles, and old ways, which he characterised as Gothic, and hating pretentious modern manners and modern architecture (ie., Greek revival classicism). His writing is anecdotal rather than scholarly, but with a keen and critical eye.

He travelled mainly on horse-back, often accompanied by a friend or a local guide, and supported by two or more servants with the luggage in a post-chaise. He entered South Wales via Monmouth, Newport, and Cardiff, staying at the Cardiff Arms, and making excursions to Llandaff, Caerphilly and Pontypridd. Space here precludes description, but he comments in general:

In our ride I ask'd questions of several people, who did not understand English -- From the quantity of lime made in this country, most houses are whiten'd, which gives a gay appearance, as also the very roofs of the houses and churches; dazzling the eyes, and appearing like undissolv'd snow... The town of Cardiff is pav'd by Act of Parliament, as all towns should be, where stone is plenty ... the round hats worn by the Welsh women are when new, very becoming; and being enlarged, the modern fashion in London.

He is critical of Lord Mountstuart's modern work in Cardiff Castle, and compares re-building in Llandaff Cathedral to a "ball-room", the lead from the roof and most of the bells having been "melted down into the Chapter's pocket". Corrupt or absentee clergymen were another of his pet hates. Noting the declining population of a Welsh chapel, he comments:

"...but such is the decline of that language (soon to extinguish like the Cornish) This must necessarily happen from the great intercourse with England, and from their Militia having dwelt in English camps. Harping also is in the wane..."

He made observations on coal, and its uses:

Coals are sold at the interior pits of this country, at 2½ d the sack, containing three bushels: the gentlemen send their workmen to their own pits ... we got amongst the coal pits... and soon mett with numbers of laden horses... All the smaller coals are burnt in the lime kilns, and their lime is reckon'd so strong, as to be sought for all buildings under water; and was used in the building of Westminster, and Black-Fryars bridges. The hay carts, built upon shafts, are well adapted for steep descents, and narrow bridges ..

Another comment may comfort the present-day reader:

As for the weather, that will never clear up; eternal rain, clouds and chill: - surely summers were different formerly; or is youth the season of sunshine? For then I thought the summer gay, and warm; but now in my age, they appear cold, and cheerless.

Byng comments on the "superior beauty" of the Taff and Rhondda valleys, where the woods were full of woodcock in season, and on the ingenuity of Edwards's bridge. Travelling westwards:

Steep and stoney roads brought us to the village of Clay-Hill, at the end of which stands Denny's Pows Castle; (for here were formerly as many castles as villages) ... an arched entrance over a square space...

His visit to Wenvoe Castle provokes a typical reaction against "modern" building:

...this Wenvoe Castle... has been lately purchas'd by Mr. Burt, born in Berkshire, and with the air and pomposity of newly acquired wealth... seeing us in the grounds, he rode up, and desired us to come in, and survey his new-built house... it is a single house, with (of course) an immense front ... throughout, it exhibits a charming effect of bad taste and bourgeoisie: most glad was I to get away from the owner...

Proceeding westwards, he passes through:

A very pleasant common; adjoining the turnpike road, whence are grand views over the Glamorgan Vale, the Bristol Channel, to Cardiff, and the (white looking) town of Llantrissant... on a hill, at the end of the vale... especially that towards Hensoll Park, and that to St. Faggons village... We next passed through the rural village of St Nicholas, and then by the green and wooded park of Sr. J. Aubrey, not far distant from Cowbridge race ground; whence we descended a long hill into the town of Cowbridge; - where we were glad to find that Mr. O (their local guide, seemingly a Mr. Osborne, collector of customs) who had trotted forward, had hasten'd our dinner, at which I eat, for the first time, of a fish call'd sewen, of the small salmon species, and only caught in this neighbourhood.

Although not mentioned in the text, Byng's synopsis notes record that he stayed at the Bear. Sadly for us he made no further comments on his accommodation. Of course, he was misled about sewin, not realising that it was what in England he would have called sea-trout. To proceed:

Being left to myself I took to castle hunting (not building), and walk'd a mile to St Quintins or Llanbythian castle and around the old walls and ruins, below which is the rural village of Llanbythian; and then through some pretty meadows, where, beneath the castle hill, I laid myself down to observe the hay making, and the gratifying view on every side: a rivulet at the bottom of the hay-making field; a rock opposite with the ruins of Llandoube Castle; many milk maids in the vale; with the town of Cowbridge at the end of the meadows, to the right; --quite a scene for the fan painter! The east and western gates of Cowbridge have been lately pull'd down, at the new paving of the town; but the old wall is almost everywhere remaining.

Some real meat for us here: ruined Llandough Castle visible from below St. Quintins? given that the present tree screen may not have been there, was the house not built by 1787? And by old walls remaining, does he mean the real mediaeval walls or the Edmondes re-build; are our recent dating of this in the 1770s correct? Going on, though:

I eat today at dinner, and at supper, some excellent blue cheese made near here, which is much to be admired, and resembles, both in color and taste, the blue mold of Cheshire cheese.

They boast in Wales, that bugs are unknown; as serpents, &c in Ireland.

But a few years since travellers were scarce in this country, and post-chaises unknown; now, the country in these southern parts is become a high road to Ireland; Newton and Swansea are bathing places; and strolling players, with all their mischiefs, will get, nay have got, amongst them.—Their language kept them innocent, and at home; that lost, they read, hear plays, debauch, and emigrate! Whilst the Erse, and bad roads lasted, the Scotchman kept to his country

But when people read of riches, and luxuries, they will hunt after them, tho' they perish in the pursuit.

No comment! A topic for debate, perhaps. One thing is sure, that although Byng elsewhere laments the passing of “civility, honesty and good cheer” experienced by the traveller “before the baneful luxury of turnpikes”, the road travel revolution resulting from the activities of the turnpike trusts made his own and other traveller’s activities possible. Wales was still foreign to him though:

Our servants inveigh bitterly against Wales, probably, because they, too, are accounted as plunder: T.B said, this morning 'Here's a fine house, Sr, without a cloaths brush in it!' And Mr O's man looking over the rich Vale of Glamorgan, exclaims 'It is a very barren country!'

Despite his servants prejudices, reinforced by exploitation, Byng recorded feelings about supposed changes in the South Welsh temperament since the writing of his quoted poem, “The worthines of Wales” by Maister Thomas Churchyard, 1587:

But times, since Mr.C days, are much changed!—To me the Welsh appear'd as inferior to the common English in civility, as they are in stature and comeliness: particularly the women, who are very ugly and dwarfish. —After this my true description of the human race, I may add that the markets are disgraced by the worst appearance of lean yellow mutton, and starved fowls; that the butter is salt and rancid; and the bread soft and tough, by being baked in cabbage leaves.

Moving on, space prevents us from pursuing him to Pyle, Margam, Neath and Swansea, etc. His account of Ewenny Priory, however, perhaps tells us something more about him too:

...I spy'd Wenny Priory, (a religious ruin) to my right... never can be exhibited a scene of greater misery than it now affords! . . . the church (once a place of respect and grandeur) loathsome and dark and rough as a fallow field! —Some noble monuments mouldring in wretched decay!

This account was written within a few years of Turner’s magnificent watercolour of the interior of Ewenny Priory, portraying a scene of romantic decline. Byng’s contrary view perhaps displays an earlier, Augustan eighteenth-century taste; his writings about castles in particular are descriptive and historical. No “crotchet Castles” here.

Above all, however, the diaries give a vivid and entertaining insight into the essence of eighteenth-century daily life. To finish, here is his description of an enforced coach trip, on his way home, caused by the failure of his horse:

Walking: -- or riding, on a tolerable horse, are delights to me; but box'up in a stinking coach, dependant on the hours and guidance of others, submitting to miserable associates, and obliged to bear their nonsense, is great wretchedness! However, the vulgarity of women is, at all times, better than the brutality of men: two women were my companions, and harmless enough -- tho one eternally threatened to be sick.

Luke Millar

THE HAYES PICNIC

One of the sad losses among the department stores of Cardiff in recent years has been the closure of David Morgan and Company. In 1890, William Edgar Thomas, the 17-year-old son of Mrs Margaret Thomas of the Cowbridge Arms hotel, Cowbridge, was apprenticed to David Morgan. This poem was apparently written by William Thomas, and paints a fine picture of a works outing in the Vale, which predates Dylan Thomas's *The Outing* by over half a century (but seems to have been a similar 'boozy do'). The poem continues the theme of travel in the Vale discussed above.

The Hayes Picnic

It was the morning of our picnic, on the ninth day of July,
When the rain came down in torrents and dark clouds filled the sky,
Many were the hopes and queries, that the rain would clear away
But in their heart of hearts, the answer seems to tell them nay.

Now half past one, the time for starting, had definitely been fixed,
But it was near upon two o'clock before all were in the breaks.
Then with a long and peculiar note, from our noble Harding's horn
Away we went right merrily, in the good old coaching form.

Down through Cowbridge Road and Ely did our gallant horses fly
Nor did we draw rein until the Tumble Downs we espied.
Then away again we started, through St Nicholas in such style
That the natives all stood gaping as they saw us racing by.

For such racing they had never seen more, since John Gilpin's days
Then away through hills and valleys, never once stopping to think,
Till The Old Post we arrived at, there to have a drink
Oh! The enjoyment of that reviver, I shall never forget I think.

Then once more away we started, to the music of the horn
Hedges flew by, wild birds started, as we madly tore along,
Until at length Cowbridge we sighted, snugly lying in the vale
At the Bear Hotel we alighted to partake of Tom's Bass ale*.

*Tom Thomas, landlord of
the Bear

But onward, onward, ever onward, seems our battle cry
While the horn was lustily sounded, and the horses seem to fly.
At last we arrived at Llantwit Major, just one hour after time
There the hostess of the King's Head, to us to the Hall to dine.

Oh the pile of tarts we swallowed, not to mention legs of ham,
Currant cake, and thin bread slices, thickly covered o'er with jam.

When at length our feast was ended, we all gathered by the church
Where we had our photos taken, after which we all dispersed.

Then we took a little ramble, just to see what kind of place
We had come to have a picnic, from D M & Co the Hayes.
When it came the time for starting on our journey home
It was found that one was wanting*, what was to be done?

*Local nickname for Llantonians

The bugle sounded, we vainly waited, at last the one wanting was found
Then with three cheers for our hostess, we quickly traveled o'er the ground;
Down through Cross Inn and Lisworney fairly flew our noble steed
Nor till Cowbridge Arms* we arrived at, thought we once of slackening speed.

*inn run by Mrs
Morgan Thomas,
mother of the poet.

Then thanks to a mild reviver, in a glass of good home brewed,
Not forgetting a blue for the driver, again we started on the road
Oh the shouting and the yelling that came from the bachelor's brake
Though the bulk I don't mind telling, they felt slightly elevated.
When at length we came to Cardiff, we all swore with one accord
That our picnic was the grandest, and the finest on record!

W.E.T.

PORT AND STARBOARD

If you stand on the deck of a ship and look towards the bows, the starboard side of the ship is on your right and the port side on your left – but why not just 'right' and 'left'?

In medieval times, ships were small and were guided by a steering oar which lay on the right or 'steerboard' side of the stern. The other side of the ship, over which goods were loaded and unloaded when the ship was berthed against a quay, was known as the 'landboard' side. These terms later became 'starboard' and 'larboard' and then, later still, to avoid confusion in storms or in the noise of battle, 'larboard' became known as the 'port' side. The Royal Navy formally adopted the term 'port side' in 1844. 'Port' and 'starboard' are today terms which are used throughout the English-speaking world.

Alec Jones

BOVIANS IN THE LIBRARY

Members will be pleased to see that the bound volumes of the Grammar School magazine (which once belonged to headmasters Richard Williams and Idwal Rees) have been placed in the local history section of Cowbridge library.

STRIKE

Why do we call the organised withdrawal of labour a strike? As often happens, the origin of this particular use of the word comes from our armed forces of many years ago. In Tudor and Stuart times, and indeed up to the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy was about ships, not the seamen who provided the crews.

The Navy Board built and maintained the ships, the Admiralty commissioned experienced sailors as captains and officers who, in turn had to find their own crews.

Captains of the time relied heavily on brutal press gangs. Life as a sailor was dangerous, often short, and at the end of a voyage he was the last to be paid, if at all. Unpaid crews would often 'strike' or take down a ship's sails and not return them until their wages were forthcoming and ever since, throughout the English-speaking world, workers have gone 'on strike' in support of unresolved disputes with their employers.

Alec Jones

[I had built a small store of "Alec's space-fillers" which so many people enjoyed reading. Sadly the store is now exhausted!]