

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

Return to Llansannor



2016 Charter Day trip

A great start to 2016

Of Cabbages and Kings

As usual, the year has started with some inspiring lectures at our monthly meetings in the Lesser Hall. This is hardly surprising when you consider that our first three speakers of the year were all professors! However, Gwerfyl Gardner, the only non-academic of the bunch as well as the only female, kept up her end extremely well in April, when she filled in for the indisposed Beverly Tonkin and talked fluently on the subject of “Dyffryn and the Cory family”.

In January, Chris Williams of Swansea University spoke about the work of Western Mail cartoonist J M Staniforth, whose syndicated cartoons were published in newspapers throughout the UK and offer the historian an alternative viewpoint on the First World War and other historical events. Gloucester-born Staniforth trained at Cardiff School of Art, and his career as a cartoonist was a long one, stretching from 1889 until his death in 1921, producing around 15,000 cartoons in all. His career took in the whole of the First World War period, but he was not a campaigning cartoonist; his work tended to reflect the conservative view rather than challenging the reasons for going to war or standing up for the working-class soldier. The nuances to be found in his political cartoons are many, and Professor Williams explained the background and symbolism in many of these.

To be honest, despite the heading, cabbages have not had a mention in this year’s first few monthly lectures, although they could perhaps have been fitted into February’s talk on Garden Suburbs, given by our Chair, Dick Buswell. I think everyone was surprised to learn how many such suburbs exist, almost on our doorstep. Rhiwbina and Barry Garden Suburb were just two of those described by Dick, with photographs to illustrate their distinctive features.

In March, Ralph Griffiths set us straight on the real historical background to the life of King Richard III. It was refreshing to hear a non-revisionist view from a true historian who has approached the subject with a thorough knowledge of the times in which King Richard lived, rather than accepting the kind of conspiracy theories we have been inundated with by historical novelists in recent years. Having said that, in spite of my experience of the pre-research that goes into most archaeological excavations, I admit to having been astonished that the king’s body was found so easily. (Unlike Professor Griffiths, I find it easy to accept that it is the *right* body.) The discovery of the skeleton demonstrated two things:

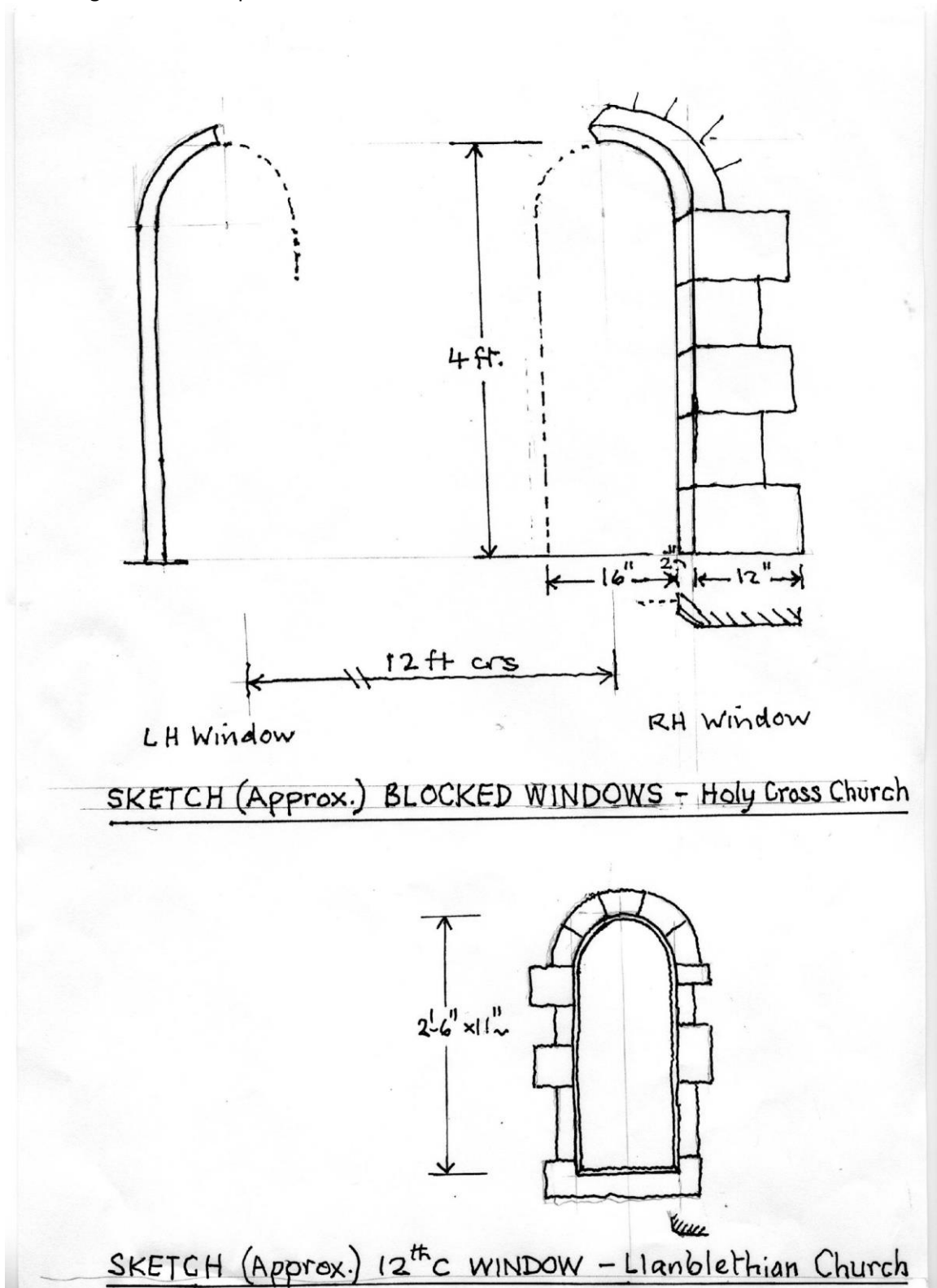
- The Tudor “propaganda” was correct in suggesting that Richard had a severe spinal deformity; *and*
- The tradition that Richard’s body was thrown into the river during the Reformation was incorrect - it remained where it had been buried, although the original marble and alabaster tombstone paid for by his successor, Henry Tudor, was probably demolished along with the church.

Richard III leads us neatly on to the subject of Holy Cross Church, and committee member Robert Cope has been investigating the architecture of the building in some depth. Robert believes that the displaced window that was, until recently, hidden by a tree is a possible indication of an earlier date for the church than was previously thought. As most of you will know, King Richard, having acquired the Lordship of Glamorgan through his wife, Anne Neville, granted the appointment of a permanent chaplain to the church in 1484, halfway through his short reign.

The window came to Robert’s notice when he was asked to draw it, and has drawn the church before and after the removal of vegetation; his detailed drawing of the window is shown overleaf. He thinks that its “Romanesque” style may indicate that this section of the church has a date earlier than the 13th century, and indeed a Glamorgan Historic Churches Survey carried out by Cadw allows this possibility; it is known that a church existed on the site prior to the town charter of 1254. Other experts have differing views, pointing out that more remote parts of Britain would have lagged behind in adopting new architectural styles.

The drawings compare the blocked window with a window at Llanblethian Church that has been dated to the 12th century. It is hoped that CHS will eventually be able to publish the results of Robert's research in some form.

Drawings © Robert Cope 2015



Charter Day trip - CHS visit to Llansannor, 13 March 2016

On our front cover, you can see a few of our members gathered outside St Senwyr's church, after which the village of Llansannor is named. The photo was taken by Dr Martin Page, who went on the visit in my place as I was otherwise committed. Although it was a disappointment, I have been lucky enough to visit Llansannor Court previously, with the former Cowbridge & District Local History Society. Here is a report from Beverly Tonkin.

Each year the Society celebrates the granting of the Charter to Cowbridge on 13th March 1254 - some 762 years ago - by going on a trip to a place of historic interest. This year we were lucky enough to visit Llansannor Court and St Senwyr's Church.

We were welcomed by the owners of the house, Mr and Mrs Eddershaw, with coffee and a run-down on the history of the house from its medieval origins through Georgian and Victorian additions to the present day with details of some of its more influential occupiers and its featuring in several TV programs. The house is Grade 1 listed, and is believed to date from about 1500, with home improvements being made regularly, right up until the 19th century when another extension was added. The Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales calls it "a great rarity for Glamorgan".

Dick Buswell writes below about the Gwyn family, former residents of the house. The most interesting member of the family is probably Francis Gwyn, who lived at Llansannor Court in the late 17th century.

We split into two groups and were given guided tours of the house and the church by Mr Eddershaw and Scilla Williams respectively. It was interesting to hear about the effigy near the altar and the search for information as to who it might be, as well as learning about the several connections between the Church and former parishioners who now hail from New Zealand. We were then plied with drinks before setting off for an excellent lunch at the Red Fox in Penllyn.

It was a glorious spring day and we all enjoyed seeing the buildings and hearing of their history as well as the generous hospitality of our hosts and we were able to donate £150.00 towards the maintenance of the fabric of the Church.



Society members outside Llansannor Court (Photo © Dick Tonkin)

Bev Tonkin

Francis Gwyn

Born in about 1648 at Combe Florey in Somerset, Francis Gwyn was the first son of Edward Gwyn and his wife Eleanor of Llansannor Court. He was educated at Christ Church, Oxford and the Middle Temple where he qualified as a lawyer. After service in Wales he was to rise as a major figure in British politics both as a servant of the Crown and a Member of Parliament. Perhaps what was so remarkable in his turbulent age - from Civil War through the Restoration to the so called "English revolution" - was his longevity or better still, his political survival. He died in 1734 at the age of 86.

First elected for Chippenham in 1673, he soon sought, in an age of "jobbery", an office which gave access to an income and a pension. Both his election and his appointments were probably procured by what nowadays would be deemed to be bribery, a common route to success before the Parliamentary reforms of the 19th century. One example was his purchase of a clerkship to the Privy Council in 1679 for £2500. This saw him made Under Secretary to Lord Conway but when his patron fell in 1683 Gwyn went with him. It is reported that a Glamorgan gentleman observed:

*" There's Frank, who of late Knew secrets of state,
Though now he's turned out of employment.
Since that he finds time to ply women and wine,
Which will prove a more lasting enjoyment."*

In 1685 he sold his office on the Privy Council and via a new patron, the Earl of Rochester, obtained a post at the Treasury looking after Irish finances. It was at this time that he developed his political interests in Glamorgan being recommended for the Cardiff Boroughs seat by Sir Leoline Jenkins, second founder of Cowbridge Grammar School. He remained a Tory and supporter of James II, continuing to adopt an anti-Catholic stance.

Francis Gwyn's bookplate



However, his loyalty was not to pay rich dividends as the Revolution of 1688 saw James deposed and sent abroad and William of Orange (William III) installed as constitutional monarch. The Irish colony proved a rich source of income for Gwyn. By the end of the century he was made Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and in 1703 was a member of the Privy Council in Ireland. When raised to the office of Lord Commissioner for Trade and Foreign Plantations this gave him an income of over one thousand a year. On the Hanoverian succession to Anne, Gwyn lost all his offices and his seat and did not return to Parliament until 1717. Here he sat for Welles in Somerset until 1734 when he was succeeded by his son. During his long life he sat through fifteen parliaments and represented six different constituencies, some of them on many occasions. To many he is seen as one of the founders of the Tory party. Perhaps his most important offices were as Clerk to the Council and as Secretary

of War during the time of the later Stuarts.

Llansannor and other estates did not provide a significant income for Francis Gwyn but his marriage in 1690 to Margaret, the fabulously rich heir of Edmund Prideaux of Forde Abbey (formerly in Devon, now in Dorset), most certainly did. Prideaux was a Parliamentarian and supporter of Cromwell. He acquired this former monastic estate in 1649, made major improvements to the house and created its gardens. Sadly his son - another Edmund - was said to have been involved in Monmouth's rebellion of 1685 and after a spell in the Tower was brought before

Hanging Judge Jeffries and fined £15000. It was this that probably led to the need for Margaret to find a husband and for Gwyn thereby to access her riches.

Right: The front facade of Forde Abbey today

They and their descendants inhabited the Abbey throughout the 18th century making few changes to the house. However, they created the gardens. The last Gwyn at Forde Abbey was John Fraunceis, who was forced by reduced circumstances to rent out the house. It was leased by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who hosted some of the great thinkers of the 19th century during his tenure here, men like John Stuart Mill and legal reformer Sir Samuel Romilly.

The last Gwyn died in 1846 and the entire contents of the house were sold to a wealthy merchant who used only five rooms, allowing the rest of the house to moulder away. It then passed through generations of the Roper family, who helped restore it and its glorious gardens to something approaching their former glory.



Francis Gwyn, then, is a good example of the rise of a very able man who could take advantage of the political and social circumstances of his times to rise from relative obscurity in the Vale of Glamorgan, with the marked advantage of a most fortunate marriage, to positions of some political and administrative eminence through the reigns of five monarchs and one republican leader.

Sources:

- Henning B.D: "Gwyn, Francis (c 1648-1734) of Llansannor Glamorgan and Scotland Yard, Westminster", <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690/member/gwyn-francis-1648-1734>. Consulted April 3 2016.
- *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, National Library of Wales.
- Wikipedia
- <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cardiff-records/vol5/pp482-507>
- Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Wales) (1981): Llansannor Court. vol.IV, Pt 1 167.

*Dick Buswell
Chair*

Vote vote vote...

I'm sure everyone knows by now that there are elections coming up - not to mention the referendum. But how much do you know about the history of Parliamentary representation in Wales? Read Don Gerrard's article to update yourself.

Cowbridge, the Vale, and Parliamentary representation, before and after the Great Reform Bill

Wales was not represented in Parliament before 1536 (the first English Parliament was the 'Model Parliament' of 1295). The Act of Union gave the Principality 24 seats, one for each county and one for each of twelve boroughs, which were newly created. Several of the borough constituencies were made up of a number of small boroughs

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grouped together to elect one member. This was the case with Cowbridge, which was part of the Cardiff or Glamorgan Boroughs constituency which comprised the boroughs of Cardiff, Swansea, Llantrisant, Kenfig, Aberavon, Neath, Loughor and Cowbridge.

The Welsh electoral system was not as full of abuses as was that of England. In England, some constituencies were virtually uninhabited (e.g. Old Sarum in Wiltshire) but still returned two members, while large towns such as Birmingham and Manchester were unrepresented. However, the Welsh system of representation also had little to commend it. The voice of Wales at Westminster was weak - a total of 24 MPs compared to 44 from Cornwall. Radnorshire had 25,000 inhabitants in 1801 and Glamorgan 127,000, but both had the same representation. Merthyr, with a population of 22,000 in 1831, was outside the system of contributory boroughs, whereas the population of Cowbridge in 1831 was 1,097 and yet it was part of the Cardiff or Glamorgan Boroughs. The total Welsh electorate in 1801 was approximately 19,000.

The Welsh county franchise was the same as that in England - the freeholder of land worth 40 shillings per annum. This varied so much that he could be a man of considerable substance or the owner of a cabbage patch. The franchise for the Welsh boroughs was determined by a complexity of rules and tended to be a mixture of freement, scot and lot (payment of a local tax) and corporation boroughs. In practice they were all under the control of local patrons and contested elections were rare. A tight group of some twenty families controlled parliamentary elections in Wales and they were generally decided not by the casting of votes but by private arrangements which ensured the emergence of a single unopposed candidate.

By 1801, Glamorgan County, which had 2,000 voters, was under the control of the Bute family. Representation was contested only twice between 1536 and 1802. The Cardiff (Glamorgan) Boroughs were under the control of the local councils or corporations. There were 800 voters in 1801, and they too were contested only twice between 1526 and 1802. In Cowbridge the freemen, who had the right to vote, were those holders of burgage plots allocated to the first settlers in the 'new' town from the mid 13th century at a rent of one shilling per year. In the General Election of 1830, not one of the Welsh constituencies was contested, and when voting did occur it was done publicly. In 1831 one candidate in Cardiff spent £15,000 in the taverns of the town and the surrounding area in order to purchase votes.

The demand for parliamentary reform had begun in the 1760s, as a result of the tremendous rise in population in the 18th century, and the shift in population from the South and East to the North and West, with the Industrial Revolution. This demand became widespread after 1815, when parliamentary reform was seen by the working classes as a panacea for all their ills. Agitation was immense, for the period was one of deep social distress, both in England and Wales.

The hard winter of 1830 was one of severe depression in the Vale of Glamorgan, and there were widespread protests by agricultural workers. The typical farm in the Vale was small, but at the same time less than 2% of the land was enclosed. High corn prices after 1790 (when Britain was unable to import corn from Poland and Russia because of the Napoleonic Wars) meant that demand for butter and bacon from the Vale fell off, and the high duties on salt hindered a development of trade in salted provisions. Wages of agricultural labourers in the Vale had fallen. In 1767 Arthur Young, in his *Annals of Agriculture*, said that "labour in Cowbridge was 10d a day all year round, the cheapest I have met with in South Wales. At Bridgend the wage was one shilling a day in winter and 1/6d in harvest." By 1820 wages in Cowbridge had actually fallen to 8d a day in winter and 1/3d in summer.

There were quite serious riots when enclosure of land was attempted - when the Earl of Bute attempted enclosure at the Heath in Cardiff and the Earl of Plymouth wished to enclose land on the outskirts of Cardiff in what is now Ely. There were outbreaks of rick burning at Bonvilston and Llanmaes - not quite on the scale of the "Swing Riots" in Southern England, but nevertheless evidence of the distress and poverty felt in the Vale.

Welsh periodicals were drawing attention to the abuses of the electoral system in the 1820s, and in 1830-31 reform meetings were held throughout Wales. Industrialists in Glamorgan - who resented the power of the landowners - were particularly vocal. When Earl Grey's First Reform Bill was defeated in April 1831, there was a ferocious reaction in South Wales. A riot occurred in Carmarthen, and in June 1831 a great upheaval shook Merthyr. The Merthyr Rising was the most savage and bloody event in the history of industrial Britain.

When the Reform Bill eventually became law in June 1832, the Vale celebrated with bands marching and church bells pealing. The Act gave Wales five additional members. The representation of the counties of Glamorgan, Carmarthen and Denbigh was raised from one to two members. A borough seat was created for Merthyr and the Glamorgan Boroughs were split into two, with one seat centred on Cardiff and the other on Swansea. Although the working class had campaigned vigorously in favour of the Reform Bill, hardly any of them obtained the vote as a result of it. Before 1832 one in eight adult males had the vote, after 1832 one in five. There was no secret ballot, so the ability of landowners to control the parliamentary elections in Wales was hardly impaired.

Don Gerrard

And from the Local History Studies Room...

Phil Bradshaw has kindly donated several headed bills/receipts from the 1960s and '70s, which may not seem too long ago to some of us, but which make us realise just how much has changed with regard to the town's shopping and business ventures. Coffee shops, restaurants, hairdressers and certainly dress boutiques were almost non-existent then. How on earth did we manage? Our retiring Town Clerk, Andrew Davies, has passed on several old town guides of around that period, and photos of his ancestors, reminding me of his long-established roots here.

David Jones has kindly given us an immaculate copy of Colin Chapman's book *The Cowbridge Railway*, published 1984 to sell for History Society funds (we already hold one copy in the room); if anyone would like to purchase this for a suggested sum of £5, please get in touch. I would remind society members that there are a good many excellent books on Cowbridge and district in the History Room, available for members to borrow. Do please make use of this facility.

Recent visitors and enquirers have included Irene Jenkins, who grew up in one of the cottages (now demolished) at the top of Primrose Hill and gave us a vivid description of the little terraced row, the families who lived there, and the life the children led there coming up to World War II. A visitor from Llanharry gave an account of his brother who ran the Bridge Garage. People moving into Llanblethian houses have sought information on the history of their properties. Details of various former Grammar School pupils has come in from interested visitors, and is valued.

There have been enquiries about a Tonkin family (no relation to Dick) in Cowbridge in the 1850s, and from Australia about the Collins and Swampton families of Eastgate of around the same period. Why should a young gentleman called Richard Mason have been buried in Holy Cross churchyard in 1826? were asked. He was "of Herefordshire"; perhaps he was working temporarily here.

Digitisation of our archive progresses slowly but surely. Following my last appeal for help, Malcolm Francis has come forward and joined us. OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software by the History Society enables us to scan documents to produce searchable or editable text – an invaluable facility for the archive collection. Malcolm is working through one of the "diaries and memories" files, whilst John and I have at last completed scanning and recording all the buildings along High Street, and are now starting on Eastgate. Dick Tonkin is gallantly working on the Cowbridge and Llanblethian wills and inventories of the 16th to 19th centuries, and Frank Hartles is scanning slides of carnivals and civic events, recent donations from Phil Bradshaw. The History Society computer now holds over 2000 files, each with our special accession number, and this facility is used to respond to an increasing number of requests. Such is the marvel of the electronic age!

Betty Alden

**Cowbridge History Society meetings take place in the Lesser Hall, Town Hall, Cowbridge
Talks start at 7.30pm on the first Friday of each month unless shown otherwise.**

6th May

AGM at 7.00, followed at 7.30 by:

“Protestant Dissenters in an Age of Persecution - 1485 to 1603”

Don Gerrard

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to dicktonkin@btinternet.com for potential publication in the next newsletter, or brought along to the next monthly meeting.