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COWBRIDGE WITH LLANBLETHIAN TOWN COUNCIL

CATALOGUE OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY COWBRIDGE WITH LLANBLETHIAN TOWN COUNCIL AND ITS PREDECESSOR COUNCILS TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF ST. QUENTIN'S CASTLE, LLANBLETHIAN

SEPTEMBER, 1960 Llanblethian Community Council asked the Ministry of Works to take over responsibility and guardianship of the castle. At that time it was readily admitted by the owners that the castle was in a dangerous condition and letters were sent to the Heads of schools and the Police warning them of the risks and danger to children who frequently played in the vicinity and in the castle. Notices were also erected warning visitors to keep out, and exonerating the owners of any responsibility in the event of accidents or injuries.

1964 The castle was sold by the Executors of the late Mansel Evan Edwards and purchased, apparently by Mr. M. Boland.

NOVEMBER, 1974 A request from Llanblethian Community Council, supported by a petition signed by 60 local residents, was submitted to the Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Department of the Environment, to consider acquiring the castle and surrounding land by compulsory purchase. In reply, the Inspector had indicated his intention to prepare a scheme for treating the dangerous parts of the gatehouse. The department did not have powers to compulsorily purchase, although it did have powers to take the monument into care if it was suffering wilful damage or neglect.

DECEMBER, 1974 Llanblethian Community Council gave consideration to the purchasing of the castle for use by the public as an Open Space, if the Department of the Environment could guarantee to take the castle into guardianship and make safe the dangerous parts. It became obvious that the owner did not wish to part with the site and further discussions took place between the owner and the Department.

JANUARY to DECEMBER, 1975 Numerous requests from the Community Council to the owner to negotiate.

FEBRUARY, 1976 The Department experienced difficulty in gaining access to the



site in order to prepare a report on the condition of the castle and the work considered necessary before making a recommendation concerning guardianship.

MARCH, 1976 Llanblethian Community Council resolved to request the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council to compulsorily acquire the Castle on their behalf.

SEPTEMBER, 1976 Llanblethian W.I. submitted a petition to the Welsh Office regarding the condition of the monument. A proposed schedule of works, produced by the owner's architect for the long term stabilization and preservation was examined. The owner was asked to agree to undertaking approved preservation work over a period of 5 to 10 years with the Department of the Environment bearing a share of the cost within a specified limit.

MAY, 1977 The District Valuer was asked to negotiate on behalf of the Community Council but reported that the owner had no intention of selling and had agreed future preservation work with the relevant department. It was later reported by the Welsh Office that efforts to reach agreement with the owner on measures to ensure the future preservation were inconclusive.

NOVEMBER, 1978 PRESS STATEMENT 'The Secretary of State for Wales has stepped in to help save the crumbling St. Quentin's Castle from further deterioration. The risk of rapid further deterioration is such that it was thought advisable that an Interim Preservation Order should be made. The notice stated that the monument was under the protection of the Secretary of State under Part 11 of the Ancient Monuments Act. The department had confirmed that the monument was in danger from neglect and that its preservation was of national importance.

JULY, 1979 The Welsh Office, Ancient Monuments Branch, the owner and his architect discussed a programme of preservation works which would be satisfactory to the department and which might be grant aided.

MARCH 1979 The Welsh Office published the draft of a proposed Preservation Order with the object of maintaining its long term interest in the monument under existing legislation. Objection to the proposed Order was entered on behalf of the owner, which was neither resolved or withdrawn. Meanwhile, agreement had been reached on the estimate and elements of a long term programme to extend over a period of about 10 years, of preservation and conservation works.



The owner's reply to the departments's offer to share the cost of the 1st year's work equally with him up to a specified amount in 1979/80, was awaited. At this stage it was hoped that a tangible result to the negotiations would be seen shortly.

JANUARY, 1980 The department reported that the owner, his architect and mason had met with servants of the department, discussed and agreed a programme for the initial stages of the preservation works. Long awaited commencement of the conservation works would at last be carried out !

NOVEMBER, 1980 The Welsh Office reported that the condition of the site of the castle had, for some time, been of great concern to the department and considerable efforts had been made to persuade the owner to put the site in order. The main interest lay with the ruins which were deteriorating slowly through neglect. The department stated 'unfortunately, there is nothing we can do at the present time to improve the situation although we will continue to negotiate with the owner to agree and implement a programme of works.

FEBRUARY, 1981 Interim Preservation Order had expired. The Welsh Office confirmed its awareness of the local concern and stated that the efforts in trying to persuade the owner to implement the initial stages of the preservation work were continuing.

SEPTEMBER, 1982 Consideration was being given by the Welsh Office to the most appropriate form of action which could be taken under the Archaeological Areas Act, 1979.

FEBRUARY, 1983 A meeting of representatives of the Welsh Office, Vale of Glam Borough Council, Town Council and the owner took place - report attached.

MARCH, 1983 Mr. Boland was warned 'In view of the length of time this proposal has been under discussion, if work has not started within six weeks the department will consider using its powers either to enter the monument to carry out works which are urgently needed or to compulsorily acquire the castle.' Further letters were sent in April, July and August, but no reply.

OCTOBER, 1983 The Town Council drew the attention of Lord Parry of Neyland, and Sir Raymond Gower, M.P. to the matter. Both made representation to the Welsh Office.



NOVEMBER, 1983 The Town Council, Local History Society and local residents held a demonstration at the castle. The owner had failed to respond to the latest request for an application for scheduled monument consent to be submitted for approval and in the circumstances, the case was submitted to the Secretary of State for guidance on how to proceed.

On 24th November, 1983 the Welsh Office received a directive from the Secretary of State to acquire by means of a Compulsory Purchase Order. It was noted that the owner might request a public inquiry and was acting illegally by laying vehicular access, etc.

JANUARY, 1984 Petition of 274 persons submitted to Welsh Office

JANUARY, APRIL, MAY, AUGUST, & SEPTEMBER Council enquired re progress and the Welsh Office reported that the matter was in the hands of the Legal Department.

APRIL, 1985 Further enquiries from the Town Council re progress and information requested by the Welsh Office was given.

JUNE, 1985 C.A.D.W. was considering options to ensure the future maintenance and preservation and confirming certain details to ensure correct procedures.

JULY, 1985 The Town Council enquired as to the reasons for the delays and expressed surprise that no preservation works had been carried out.

AUGUST, 1985 Town Council enquired again. C.A.D.W. replied that the decision to acquire the castle by C.P.O. was taken in the knowledge that the only real alternative was the execution of urgent preservation works a path that was rejected because, in view of the nature of the statutory provisions, the urgent preservation works that could be carried out would be very limited. It was anticipated that the draft orders for the compulsory purchase would be ready soon.

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER, 1985 Reminders and enquiries to C.A.D.W.

JANUARY, 1986 C.A.D.W. stated that instructions were still awaited from legal department of W.O.

FEBRUARY, 1986 Still no positive action. There are complications which are proving difficult to resolve and the W.O. cannot promise an early conclusion.

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## Morris steps in to help preserve castle

THE Secretary of State for Wales, Mr. John Morris, has stepped in to help save the crumbling St. Quintin's Castle, at Llanblethian, from further deterioration.

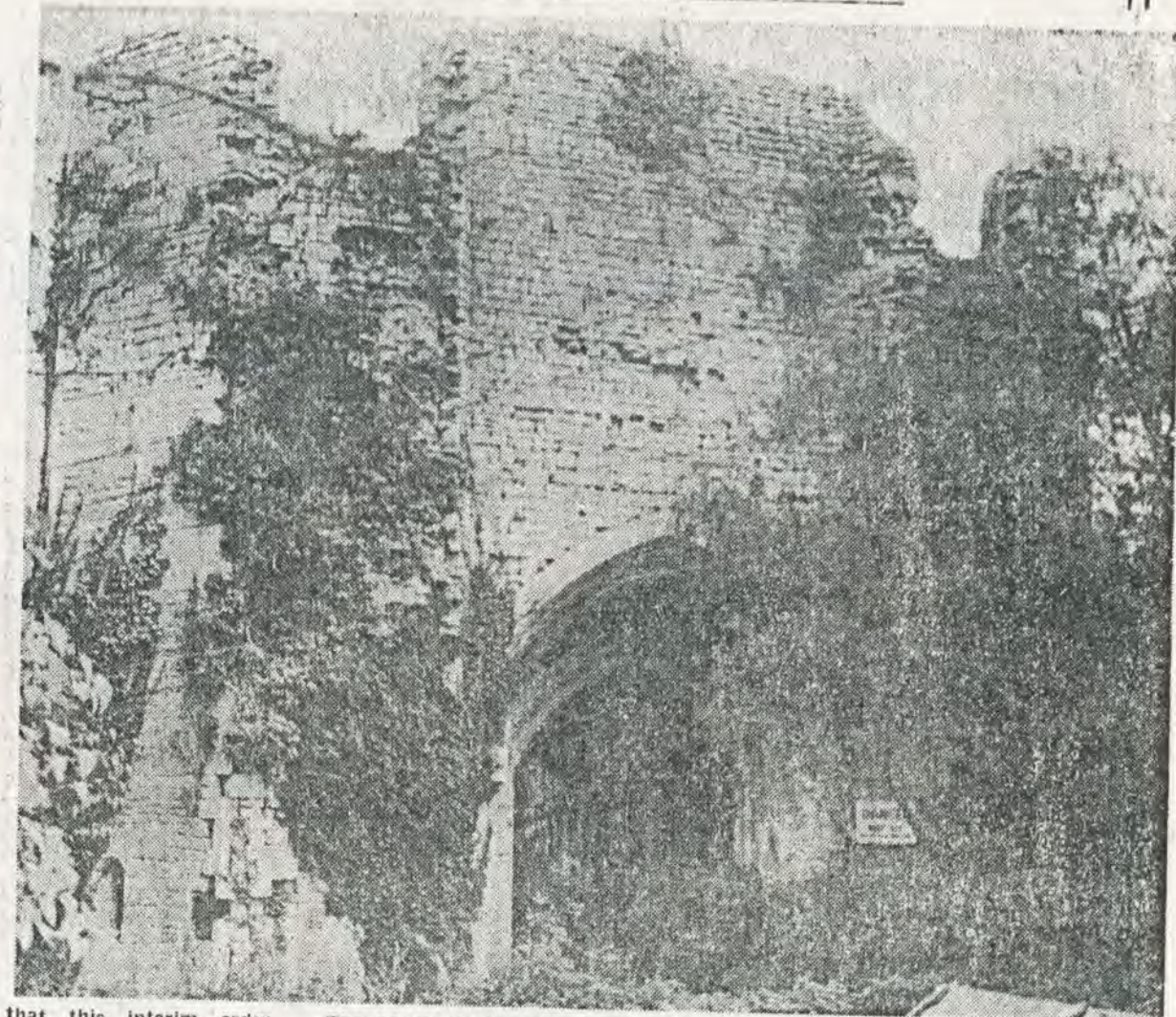
An interim preservation order has been placed on the early 14th Century building which Mr. Michael Boland, of Hickman Road, Penarth, has owned since 1965. The notice means that nothing can be done to the castle for 21 months without permission.

### Advisable

The castle is noteworthy for its gatehouse, but the Welsh Office say that its keep and walls have eroded and become overgrown.

For 15 years, a statement said, the Ancient Monuments Branch had been in negotiation with the previous owner, his executors and with the present owner about the castle's upkeep and the possibility of taking it into the Secretary of State's guardianship. But these negotiations have come to nothing.

A Welsh Office spokesman said: "The risk of further rapid deterioration is such and the value of the monument is such that it is thought advisable



that this interim order should be made.

"This will give time to consider what should be done either to negotiate an agreement with the owner for its repair and maintenance or to place a permanent preservation notice on it under which the Secretary of State will take the whole of the castle into his guardianship and pay compensation to the owner."

The notice of the order refers to the "danger of damage from neglect" that threatens the monument which is "of national importance."

Mr. Boland would make no comment, but the people who live near the castle have welcomed the notice.

Mrs. Vera Rees, of Four Hedges, Llanblethian, said she had lived there for 11 years and that the shape of

the ruin had changed noticeably. "We would definitely like to see it preserved properly," she said.

Mrs. Hilarie Gilbertson, of Castle Cottage, said: "Future generations would feel very hard done by if the castle was allowed to crumble away. It is going to cost a lot to put it right, but it is well worth preserving."

"It is not only an interesting ruin but it is

set in a magnificent position overlooking the River Thaw, and in the valley below the bowmen of old used to practice.

"The trouble has been that over the years people have fished stones from the castle and, in fact, I think my own home was partially built with its material. But, as it is now, it's certainly very dangerous and stones could fall off it at any minute."



NOTES OF A MEETING BETWEEN WELSH OFFICE, VALE OF GLAMORGAN BOROUGH COUNCIL, AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES CONCERNING ST QUENTINS CASTLE LLANBLEDDIAN. 23/2/83

Welsh Office concern over the deterioration of St Quentins Castle allied to the lack of restoration work carried out by its owner, Mr Mike Boland, had prompted them to call this meeting. By way of a prologue, the local view was asked, and in each case the representatives reaffirmed the concern felt by the community over the decline in the standard of the castle. A general base was quickly established whereby it was agreed that the castle was of national importance, both historically and architecturally, and that it should be saved for the nation if at all possible. Proposals were then put to the meeting as to what could be done by the Welsh Office. These were as follows:

- (1) the present owner could undertake to carry out restoration work himself. In 1979, following discussions with Mr Boland, the Welsh Office had made an offer of £50,000 as a 50% cost to the work necessary. This had not been taken up by the owner. It was now agreed that the value of restoration work would be in the region of £250,000, and it was doubted that a private individual would be able to foot such a bill.
- (2) Agreement could be reached with the owner, whereby the Secretary of State for Wales became the official guardian of the structure. Under this, the Secretary of State would be expected to maintain the building. It was a legal agreement drawn up between the owner and the Welsh Office, whereby the owner retained the land, but the structure itself was passed over to the nation.
- (3) The Secretary of State for Wales could instigate urgent works to protect the building if it became necessary. However, it was pointed out that only work within the Public Health Act could be undertaken, the Department would bear the full cost and could only be undertaken after written notice of seven days had been given.
- (4) The local planning authority could carry out such work, and then attempt to recover the cost from the owner. Again, it was mentioned that only work within the Public Health Act could be undertaken.
- (5) The ultimate sanction was the compulsory purchase order. It was explained that this was used only under exceptional circumstances, when no agreement could be reached between the owner and the Welsh Office, and there was imminent danger that the building would collapse. At this stage, the present owner, Mr Boland, entered. He apologised for being late, and then subjected the meeting to a 15-minute talk on scaffolding and his preparations for starting a scheme of restoration. The mood of the representatives was one of scepticism and utter cynicism. The Welsh Office were insistent that time was running out for the castle, and that action was very very necessary. They discussed with Mr Boland the possibility of taking over the site under a guardianship agreement, which would seem to be the easiest and obvious way out. However, they were met with prevarication and problems at every step of the way. It became obvious as the meeting progressed that Mr Boland had very little intention of co-operating with the Welsh Office, and that he was merely stalling for time.

The meeting concluded with the Welsh Office agreeing to a dialogue with Mr Boland on the possibilities of guardianship, and setting their proposals out in writing. The other members were concerned that this would drag on and, in two years' time, the matter would still be unresolved. We were assured by the Welsh Office that we were talking about a matter of months not years.



## LLANBLETHIAN (ST. QUENTIN'S) CASTLE

Few who walk up the hill from Cowbridge past the gatehouse of the Castle or who take the footpath up through the three fields past its north eastern corner, realise that turbulent, colourful characters have been connected with its history.

We know that the splendid Gatehouse, now sadly crumbling away through neglect, was built by Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan at the beginning of the 14th Century. There it stands three floors high with two half-hexagonal towers set well forward from the curtain wall. Its passage was defended by two portcullises covering loopholes from the flanking guard-room. Underneath are dungeons, which the older inhabitants of Cowbridge remember crawling into.

It might well be called Gilbert's Monument, since he had not finished it when he was killed at the age of 23 at the Battle of Bannockburn, in 1314. Probably when Gilbert inherited the property from his father in 1295, there was an older tower or keep in existence, as there are substantial mounds in the centre of the walled area which is about 210' x 180'. These may provide a link with the St. Quentin family who owned the manor after the Norman invasion.

Gilbert de Clare was a great friend and supporter of Edward 11. In fact in 1311, when Edward was in Scotland, he was Keeper of the Realm for the King, for a short time. He distinguished himself in the Scottish wars against Robert Bruce. There must have been men from his manor in Llanblethian, who fought with him. It was his impetuous charge at the Battle of Bannockburn that led to his early death.

The Castle, together with his other estates in Glamorgan, was eventually inherited by his sister, Eleanor. Her grandfather had paid £2000 so that she might marry Hugh Despenser. He was later executed on the fall of Edward 11.

Although the castle was not finished by Gilbert de Clare, it must have been in good condition and able to provide accomodation in the 1370's. We know this, as a descendant of Eleanor and Hugh, Edward Lord Despenser, spent his last days there. Edward was a very great magnate who had fought in France under the Black Prince and had later been Constable of the Duke of Lancaster's army in France. In September, 1375 Edward was visiting Cardiff Castle and he died a few weeks later sometime between 10th and 12th November at Llanblethian Castle. His death was thought to have been the result of hardships in the 1373 campaign.

In later years the Gatehouse was used as a prison, mention being made of this in 1477 and about 1540.

The impressive Gatehouse and castle badly need attention and expert care.