

# NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

*Summer/Autumn 2018*



*A famous Cowbridge family: can you recognise them?*

## David Francis to be honoured by CHS

At the Annual General Meeting of Cowbridge History Society in May, Llanharry author David Francis was to have been honoured by the society in recognition of his outstanding contribution to local history.

David is of course the author of *Llanharry, Llansannor & District: a Memoir*, which became our fastest-selling title of all time when it was launched last summer, adding a healthy sum to CHS's income for the year. David has declined all offers of a reward, including his share of the profits, and even insisted on providing the refreshments at the launch party at his own expense. After much discussion, the society has decided to recognise his achievement by presenting him with a certificate of life membership.

Unfortunately, David and his wife were both unwell and were unable to attend the meeting on 4th May. We have therefore postponed the presentation until a suitable occasion in the autumn.

## Other AGM news

The committee has been re-elected without opposition to serve CHS for a further year. Officers and committee members are as follows:

Dick Buswell (Chair)

Dick Tonkin (Secretary)

Keith Jones & Beverly Tonkin (joint Treasurers)

Deb Fisher (Publications Officer)

Betty Alden

Don Gerrard

Chris Turner

Brian James attends committee meetings in his capacity as joint President but is not subject to re-election.

Our other joint President, Rev Norman Williams, was sadly unable to attend the AGM this year because of ill-health. So it was very good to see Norman out and about during the summer, looking much recovered.

Following the business of the AGM, members were treated to a fascinating illustrated talk by Chris Turner, on the subject of *The Welsh Religious Revival of 1904-05*. Although the age profile of Cowbridge History Society has been increasing in recent years, none of us are old enough to remember the revival at first hand, but many of us have heard about it from our parents and grandparents. What an experience it would have been to be present at one of the "conversions" that took place (28 of them in Cowbridge!), with the encouragement of the charismatic Rev Evan Roberts.

In the course of the talk, Chris mentioned the novel *Queen of the Rushes* by Allen Raine, which was written very soon after the events of the revival which it depicts. I borrowed Chris's copy and I must say that I found it extremely enjoyable; although somewhat dated, it far exceeded my expectations.

## Launch of *I, Iolo* - another howling success!

On Monday 1st May an impressive number of people turned out to the launch of Gareth Thomas's novel *I, Iolo*. This is the English version (and the original version) of the novel whose Welsh translation was launched last year at The Bear. We held this event in conjunction with the author himself and with Cowbridge Library. Thanks to Gareth's theatrical connections, he was able to bring along some acting friends, resulting in an entertaining and very memorable dramatisation of passages from the book.

Danny Grehan played the role of lolo with panache (and a fabulous outfit). Playing his long-suffering wife Peggy was Eiry Palfrey, also in period dress. The audience clearly felt great sympathy for her! Cowbridge History Society supplied refreshments, and the library staff worked tirelessly to find seats for the many people who arrived unexpectedly, perhaps not having noticed the RSVP instruction.

Gareth Thomas will be with us again, to talk about lolo, at our monthly meeting on 5th April 2019.

This account is followed by a review of the novel by Phil Carradice. At the time of the launch Phil had just returned from Israel, where he has been researching a new book about Masada, to be published by Pen & Sword.

## *I, lolo* - review by Phil Carradice

I always think that one of the signs of a good novel is when the subject matter is a person, a character, who you fundamentally do not like – and yet it holds you, gripped, right to the end. That is certainly the case with “I, lolo” by Gareth Thomas.

lolo Morganwg was hardly a likeable character – a liar, a forger, a self-serving pragmatist – yet Thomas manages to conjure huge empathy for this self-styled “Bard of Liberty” who ended up writing marching songs for the Glamorgan Volunteers. He was a man who disliked and saw no future for kings – but, as he was quick to point out, he was not thinking about the British king when he made that statement. Talk about playing all sides of the field!

What Gareth Thomas does is to draw a vibrant and compelling picture of the man and, equally as important, of the times when there was revolution in the air and the possibility of open revolt waiting around every corner. The story covers lolo’s life from adolescence up to the Glynogwr Gorsedd of 1798 – and what a glorious, rampaging life it was.

By writing in the present tense Thomas makes the man come alive on the page. You are almost there with lolo and his companions, waiting and walking in places like Cowbridge, Llandough and Flemingston. They are all vital settings for the story, as is the city of London where the world of books and booksellers is equally well drawn.

There are several wonderful insights in the book. Try this for lolo’s definition of poet and bard. It is, I think, hard to beat:-

*“A poet writes for whosoever he pleases in whatever style he wishes. A bard writes according to the ancient rules of British verification. He attends regularly at meetings with his fellows to review and revise such rules. A bard in our tradition is the guardian of all that is true and valuable.”*

If anything sums up the attitude and intention of lolo Morganwg it is that short paragraph.

In his own way, lolo Morganwg was a very skilled and able versifier. He could – and did – conjure verses at the drop of a hat; he understood and could write in forms such as cynghanedd. He saw himself – as Thomas points out – as a Welsh Robert Burns and that is a good way to view him. He might well have encountered anti-Welsh attitudes during his travels but his faith and belief in his own abilities helped him to survive.

One other thing that Thomas gets absolutely right is his sense of place. It is not just rural Wales but the filth and grime of eighteenth century London are evocatively caught.

If I have one complaint it has to be the footnotes whenever there is a Welsh phrase or even when Welsh social activities like the game of Bando or the village festivities and festivals are mentioned or described. If it is important, get it into the text – if not, let the reader find out for himself is the adage I would use. This is not a history book; do not treat it as if it was.

A good read, a compelling read, “I, lolo” is thoroughly recommended.

*Phil Carradice  
Dinas Powys*

## Things to come...

What have we been up to over the summer months? You may well ask. This autumn will (if all goes according to plan) see the publication of the second monograph in our "Rural Vale Remembered" series, following on from David Francis's memoir of Llanharry.

The second book - or booklet, if you like - will be *Colwinston: An Historical Journey*, written by Colwinston resident Chris Hawker (with much input from the local community); Chris's research stemmed from a desire to find out more about the history of the cottage in which he lives.

For several years now, a committee of villagers has been planning a book about the community, a kind of update of the millennium project which featured individual entries about most of the houses that were then in the village; there are considerably more now, since within the last two years, Redrow have built an estate of 64 houses on a greenfield site within the central loop of the village.

There have been a few hiccups in the planning of the "village book", as a result of which the idea was temporarily abandoned altogether. In the interim, Chris Hawker gave an interesting talk at the local pub, The Sycamore Tree, on the subject of the village's history. This proved extremely popular, and Chris had accumulated such copious amounts of historical material that the idea of the monograph came to the fore. Unlike the village project, this will be an examination of the historical background to the existence and development of the settlement of Colwinston - a village which in some ways is atypical of the Vale.

This will appear in the same format as the Llanharry book, and will again be available at a very affordable price to add to your collection - about the same price as a large cappuccino at Starbucks, but it will give you more enjoyment and last much longer! The cover design is based on an original sketch by the late Jeff Alden, showing one of the old farmhouses in the village as it was several decades ago.

Since Chris produced his manuscript, there have been further developments, and the "village book" that had looked like a non-starter has been revived. Although this will be a very different publication from Chris's village history, with colour photographs and a higher price-tag, we have tentatively agreed a joint launch, in Colwinston Village Hall, with a provisional date of 7th November - just in time to be purchased as a Christmas present. This will be accompanied by a revised repeat of Chris's original lecture, to which CHS members are naturally welcome. However, *Colwinston: An Historical Journey* will also be available at our December meeting, at the usual members' discount.

We do, of course, have other publications in the pipeline, but it all takes time, and extra events such as book launches have to be carefully planned. We on the committee like to think that we are continually offering "added value" to our members, and we hope to do so for many years to come.

However, not all our publications sell equally well, and we currently have a surplus of one or two titles, notably *How Well Do You Know Cowbridge?*, *Inns and Alehouses of Old Cowbridge*, and *The Great War: Memorials in Cowbridge and Llanbethian*. Rather than recycle the copies we do not expect to sell, we plan to offer free copies to members at future monthly meetings. We hope you will understand our reasons.

### Colwinston: An Historical Journey



By Chris Hawker

Deb Fisher

Publications Officer

## Local History Studies Room (Old Hall) and CHS archive

A Digitisation Working Party is now in place, continually reviewing plans and procedures for digitisation of our archive of local history materials stores at Old Hall. A desktop computer, and monitor, with Windows 10 software, have recently been purchased by the Society, and should be installed by the time you read this. The purpose is to ensure that visitors to the room have the opportunity to view items from the archive on screen, rather than getting all the hard copy documents out and having to sort through them.

In June, two representatives from 'Peoples Collection Wales' spent a morning at Cowbridge museum, receiving and scanning photographs relating to Old Hall grounds and the Physic Garden. Many of these are already online and can be accessed through this web link: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/discover/query/Cowbridge>

Peoples Collection Wales (PCW) is a community website funded by the Welsh Assembly Government via the National Library of Wales, and it is hoped to upload much of the Old Hall archive onto this website, to reduce the amount of work for our local volunteers in putting the information on the web and to make it available to the widest possible readership. The world is our oyster! It is hoped that improvements will be made to the PCW internal search engine to make it easier to 'drill down' to specific information.

The archive continues to grow, with donations from Alenka Edmondson, Colwyn and Pam Jones, Linda Evans, Johanna Miller, Mary Wallis, Alun Rawlins and others. Betty Alden recently interviewed Mrs Judy Davies (nee Watts) about the origins of Watts & Morgan. Visitors who have carried out research using the materials in the archive have included Peter Sain ley Berry, David Howell, Mike Collings, Jeff Bird and David Pierce, the Chairman of the Cowbridge Museum trustees.

Visitors from overseas have included Kevin Nolan from Chicago, a former pupil of Cowbridge Comprehensive School. Meanwhile, Andy Goss, the manager of the new Specsavers branch at 27 High Street, hopes to hang old photos of the building in the shop and to offer customers some Cowbridge Record Society/Cowbridge History Society publications as reading material. Mr Goss is among those who have made a financial donation to the work of the Society.

*Betty Alden & Dick Buswell*

### *Postscript*

On two occasions recently, members may have seen letters to the *Gem* being answered by Betty Alden. One of these concerned the origin of the name "Beggars Bush". Betty's response included the following information:

"David Jones of Wallington, who grew up in Great House, Llanblethian, in the mid 19th century, wrote that the name Beggars Bush 'was derived from the Begging Friars, probably at that spot they ... preached'. He thought there would have been thorn trees there to give them shelter.

"Other references in the archive are in 1683 (the Will of Cecilia Basset); 1778 to 1823 in the Llanblethian rentals, when the Richards family leased the land; 1824, when a cottage was to be built there for Mathias Jones and family, and on January 1, 1882, when FW Edmondson of Old Hall wrote in his diary: 'Took Non for a walk to top of Llanblethian Hill, passed the Cross, down the steps passed the Nicholls at Great House, through Windmill field to Beggars Bush, up the lane and across to Coxey Lane, Stumpies, Poplars and home'.

"The Cowbridge fire engine driven by Evan Tucker, landlord of the Railway Inn (later Basil's Brasserie), apparently 'went over the hedge at Beggars Bush'."

This response illustrates the eternal usefulness of our archive!

## Help for visitors

Some members may have noticed a letter in a recent edition of the *Cowbridge Gem*, suggesting that a Cowbridge History Tour booklet, similar to those produced by Amberley Publishing for Brecon and other towns, should be produced. Over the years, we have had many discussions with Cowbridge Town Council on this subject, and many small efforts have been made to make suitable material available to potential visitors, such as the town centre map provided by Cowbridge Museum.

We still believe that one of the best guides to Cowbridge history is the Cowbridge Record Society's book, *Cowbridge Buildings and People*, originally published in 1999 and no longer available (except through amazon.co.uk) We do have a definite intention to publish a new edition of the book, but it must be updated and this will take time. In the meantime, although we are always happy to help the local authority with their efforts, we feel that providing tourist information should not be a priority for Cowbridge History Society. We hope that our members agree.

## Emma Edmondson and her Diary

*Below and front cover:* Group photographs of the Edmondson family, dating from about 1894, when such informal photos were less common than they are nowadays.



Emma Edmondson (née Irving) was born in 1843 at Newmarket, Ontario, Canada. The family farm, Bonshaw, was named after the Irving estate in Dumfries in Scotland. Several of Emma's siblings died in infancy, leaving only five of the Irvings' eleven children. In 1860, aged 17, Emma was sent to Paris for "finishing", and then spent Christmas with her relations in Glamorgan - the Homfray family of Penllyn Castle. At the end of the year, she returned to France.

Far left in the photo is Edward Aemilius Jarvis, Emma's nephew; the other male is Charles Gresford Irving Edmondson, Emma's son. Standing in front of Charles is Constance Mary Hood, Emma's niece by marriage. Next comes another niece, Augusta Louisa Wilson ("Gussie"), and in front of her, Emma's two daughters, Mary Aemilia ("Minnie") and Harriet Diana ("Disey"). Emma herself is at the front of the line, far right.

## The Edmondes family and the Blue Bell Inn

This newsletter often draws extensively on the Society's archive, and such is the case with information about no 2 High Street, formerly the Blue Bell Inn. Like many other Cowbridge properties, it was at one time owned by the Edmondes family, to whom we have just referred. (Another local hostelry, the Edmondes Arms, was of course named after them.)

In 1738, the inn was owned by a William Davies, who had died by 1745. In 1759, Ann Evan was occupying the premises. Her goods were auctioned off in 1766, presumably because she had either retired or died. In 1772, the building was let to William Whitworth by its then owners, the Edmondes family. Within three years, it had passed into the hands of yet another tenant, Francis Thomas. Under the terms of the rental agreement, Francis and his wife Anne, were obliged to buy all their malt from Thomas Edmondes.

In 1779, Francis was fined "for laying rubbish in the highway opposite his dwelling house known by the sign of the Blue Bell". Nevertheless, he continued to occupy the inn until at least 1800. By 1822, it had passed to Edward Thomas (a relation of Francis?) and later to a Janet Thomas, who was in charge between 1827 and 1830, perhaps longer. Janet, sometimes called "Jennet", was still at the address in 1851, with one servant and two lodgers, although a David Thomas had been listed as the occupier in 1843 - presumably Janet's father, husband or son.

Some time in the next few years, Richard Howe of St Hilary took over the inn, and his wife, Elizabeth Howe, was still there at the 1871 census. The following year, her licence was transferred to Mr William Williams. In 1930, local people still remembered Mrs Williams as "seated in her armchair like a queen upon her throne, a stout, genial, motherly old lady, as sweet as a rose, and who ... much resembled Queen Victoria". Mary Williams, presumably the same woman, was still there in 1895, by which time William Hancock and Co. owned the inn.

Mary Williams' daughter, Mary Ann, married David Humphrey, and their children were Catherine, Elizabeth and William. This family emigrated to the USA, where a further daughter, Mary Ann, was born. (Mary Ann Humphrey married John Harris, and their child was the grandparent of Oliver Andes, who visited Cowbridge from the USA in 2013 and supplied this information.)

In the twentieth century, the tenancy belonged to the Harries family and later to the Fitzgeralds. At the rear of the building was a slaughterhouse. Just after the Second World War, it was in the hands of James and Sarah Jenkins, and it later fell derelict and was used as a storage facility by the Tilley family.

Before the Blue Bell Inn was demolished, Colwyn Jones, formerly of Watts & Morgan estate agents, remembers going down steps into the medieval building. When it was demolished, the Tudor stone entrance door was transported and built into Elder Cottage, Penylan (since renamed), the home of the Fernyhoughs at the time. The replacement building became a Spar shop in 1969, and the Filco supermarket in 1999.

To learn more about the Blue Bell, pick up a copy of *Old Inns and Alehouses of Cowbridge*, published by Cowbridge Record Society in 2003.

## Submissions

This newsletter is issued approximately three times a year. Local history news items can be sent to the Secretary at [dicktonkin@btinternet.com](mailto:dicktonkin@btinternet.com) for potential publication in the next newsletter, or may be brought along to the next monthly meeting.

# MONTHLY PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

**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 otherwise shown.**

As usual, our Programme Secretary, Dick Tonkin, has a very interesting set of speakers and talks lined up for the coming season. PLEASE NOTE that visitors and guests are always welcome to attend the monthly meeting on payment of a one-off fee of £1.50 per meeting.

Any member who has not yet paid for the 2018 - 19 season may do so at any time. The membership fees are unchanged at £7.50 per person, offering exceptionally good value. Any cheques should be made payable to "Cowbridge History Society" and can be sent to the Treasurer at Stallcourt Mews, Llanblethian, Cowbridge CF71 7JU.

## **Autumn 2018**

5th October *Victorian Grangetown - From Grange to Town*  
Ray Noyes

2nd November *"The 11th Hour of the 11th Day of the 11th Month" – Armistice Day 1918*  
Don Gerrard

7th December *From Cesspit to WC; from Well to Tap: Sewage and Water Supply in Cowbridge*  
Dick Buswell  
with wine and mince pies to follow

## **Winter/Spring 2019**

4th January *The Long Road to Women's Suffrage*  
Elin Jones

1st February *"Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know"*  
Patricia Price

1st March *Button Gwinnett and his links with Cottrell*  
Chris Young

13th March Charter Day Celebration, and lunch  
(Destination TBA)

5th April *Iolo Who?*  
Gareth Thomas

3rd May AGM at 7.00 followed at 7.30 by  
*The Lave Netsmen of Wales*  
Dylan Jones