

NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

Autumn 2019



Death of a market town?

Cover story

The front cover shows Cowbridge's busy sheep market in 1964. On the right, an auction is taking place at the same location in May 1969. Those were better days for the trade in livestock, lamb being a traditional Welsh product almost since time immemorial. Now the local authority plans to close the sheep market, which is all that remains of the once-thriving weekly market. Local farmers are protesting; their nearest outlet will be Raglan, and they are not willing to travel that far with the small numbers of sheep they need to sell. Will this result in yet more farmers leaving the profession?



As our Chair, Dick Buswell, reminded us in his impromptu talk in April, Cowbridge's livestock market, which has been in operation for at least two centuries, moved to the site alongside the town walls in 1888; a plaque in the low wall commemorates this event.

Paradoxically, the stated reason for closing the market is to enable the Vale of Glamorgan Council to pave over the area and charge local residents and visitors for parking on it. Some believe this will be counter-productive as the charges will discourage its use. In fact, the whole topic is full of contradictions. We are being told to eat less red meat, in order to act against climate change, but at the same time the local authority wants to increase the number of parking spaces, which, if it means more cars in Cowbridge, can only be damaging to the environment. The parking charges are said to be for the benefit of residents, but could take a big chunk out of the weekly salaries of those who work in Cowbridge and cannot get public transport to bring them there at suitable times. At the same time, local residents and business owners have expressed concern about the on-street parking problems that seem inevitable as a result of the introduction of parking charges.

In the meantime, the proposals to build a new market hall on the original cattle market site next to the former Market Place restaurant are not meeting with widespread approval among Cowbridge residents. If it is placed on the proposed site, not only will the new building obscure the view of the historic town wall (recently cleared by the removal of the disused sheds), but visitors will need to cross from the proposed large car park to the market hall on The Butts, which is already the route used by heavy traffic to avoid the narrow South Gate. With an increase in delivery vehicles also wanting to stop near the new market hall, this has the potential to become an accident blackspot.

Another troubling aspect of the plans is the proximity of the proposed new "Community Cafe" (to add to the existing 18 coffee outlets in Cowbridge) and adjoining buildings to the historic Market Place building - formerly the Masons Arms - which incorporates part of the town walls. At present we find it hard to understand how the proposed building can fail to have a damaging effect on the appearance, the future use and possibly the fabric of these medieval structures.

As a History Society, our only official concern is the effect of these proposed new developments on Cowbridge's heritage - which includes both material and intangible effects. With Cowbridge's historical identity resting very much on its status as a market town, it is important that we listen to and act on the concerns of our members in this respect. We have therefore submitted a written objection to the proposals as they currently stand, and will continue to keep a watching brief on the site and any further developments.

What will the archaeology tell us? See next page.

What will the archaeology tell us?

The Gem mentioned an archaeological excavation to be held on certain dates in July. By the time we went to view it, it had already finished, as it consisted only of two small test trenches. We were relieved to learn that the dig supervisor had been Jean-Yves Robic, who did such valuable work on the town walls excavation some years ago. We contacted Jean-Yves to ask how it was decided that such a limited excavation was adequate to assess what might have been present on the site before the cattle market first moved there. He replied that the scope was agreed with Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust in a Written Scheme of Investigation; the intention appears to have been to excavate in the area of the old town ditch.

The report on the findings of the excavation was duly completed, and reveals that work was hampered by the presence of early 20th-century concrete slabs under the tarmac. The finds from the trenches consisted mainly of china and pottery sherds from the 18th and 19th centuries. There were a few oyster shell fragments, which are often an indication of Roman settlement. The lower layers of the town ditch remain in situ, and the archaeologists recommended that the design of the proposed structure be revised in order to preserve the archaeological resource and to mitigate the impact of the proposed development; this would be achieved by replacing standard foundations with a “shallow raft” going no deeper than the limit of the excavations.



From the archive: The market as it looked in 1954; part of this area is earmarked for development.

CADW decline to list Girls' High School building

Another historic Cowbridge building remains under threat. Members will recall that Cowbridge History Society has been supporting the application by the consultant Robert Scourfield, on behalf of a local residents' group, to have the former Girls' High School building in Aberthin Road listed. Mr Scourfield had built an impressive case for the building's historical significance, and it was therefore disappointing to see that CADW had rejected the proposal.

Some of the grounds on which the application was rejected are difficult to understand. Mr Scourfield's report pointed out that this was the first girls' intermediate school to be built under the provisions of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. CADW were unmoved by this information, yet added that the school's construction "was very swiftly followed by what is now Harold Road Junior School, Abergavenny," built two years later as a girls' school. Yet the Abergavenny school *is* listed, on the grounds that it is "a building of greater architectural distinction".

The report from CADW concludes that "On the principal point of historic interest – that it was the first intermediate school for girls in Wales – I do not find this a compelling argument in favour of listing, since the principle of education for girls was enshrined in the 1889 Act, and other listed examples reflect the diversity of arrangements for providing education for both girls and boys according to the terms of the Act."

Curiously, CADW's response goes on to say that "the building has local importance. Therefore, the Vale of Glamorgan Council could consider taking the necessary steps so that this 'local importance' is taken into account when development is proposed. Further advice on this issue is available and I would recommend that you approach the Council about the possibility of the former school being included on its list of County Treasures." Sadly, such a status would have no legal standing, but it may influence decision-makers.

Listing of the building would not prevent its demolition but might help persuade the planning authority that the development needs to be more in keeping with the site and its environment. It is understood that the Vale AM, Jane Hutt, has agreed to escalate the matter with the Welsh government. Members may also have seen media reports to the effect that The Victorian Society has named the school as one of the Top 10 most endangered buildings in the UK.

Cowbridge History Society's objection to the proposed development remains in place. We have proposed that, whatever plans are put before the authority, the developer should at least ensure that part of the school frontage be conserved.

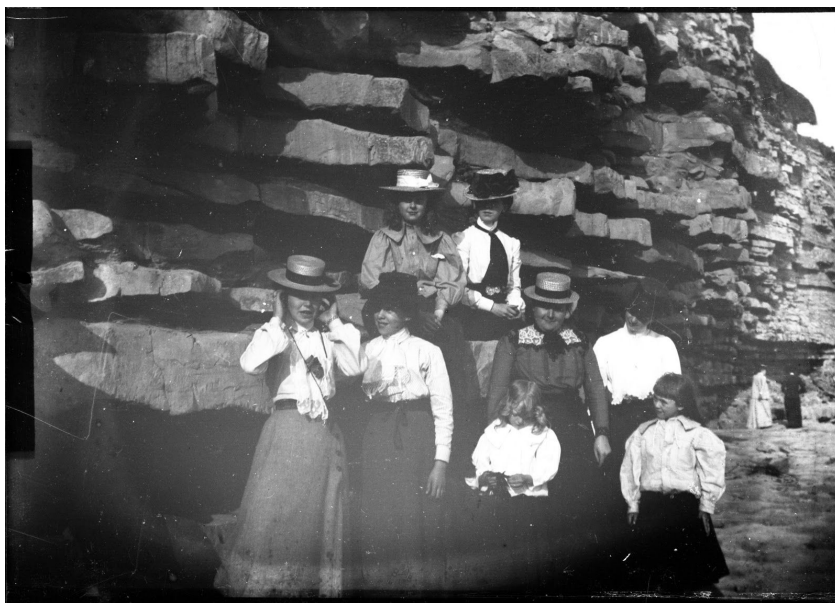
History Room move

Those of you who use the Local History Studies Room regularly will already have noticed that it has moved. We are sorry that we were not able to let you know in advance, but a notice was subsequently put in the *Gem*. The room is still in Old Hall, but its new location is **Room 1**, which is bigger than the room previously used. The room continues to be operated by volunteers, as usual, on a Wednesday morning from 10am until 12 noon. There remains a possibility of an additional opening, volunteer numbers permitting, on another day at another time. Perhaps members could let us know whether they would be interested in, for example, a "teatime" session.

The digitisation project is continuing and many of the old photographs and documents preserved by Cowbridge History Society can now be seen on the People's Collection Wales website (<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>). Search on "Cowbridge" and you will find over 5,000 items available for viewing, ranging from photographs and maps to advertisements and archaeological reports.

Recent accessions have included a box of glass negatives which had turned up in Gwyn & Gwyn's office in the 1970s. To date, there is no knowledge of its original owner. Frank Hartles and John Sherwood have scanned the negatives, and most seem to be of Cowbridge and district, both people and places, taken in the early 1900s. We would love your help in identifying some of these (see next page).

Here are some of the photos Betty referred to in her request for assistance. We apologise for the inevitably poor quality. It's not impossible that someone reading this has prints at home that correspond to the negatives.



1. (left) Who is this boy and where is he playing?
2. (top right) Perhaps a school trip to Southerndown?
3. (bottom right) Apparently a picnic tea - but where?

Important reminder!

The funding round for benefits to be obtained from Co-op members began on 28 October 2018, and will therefore end on 26 October 2019. So far the Society has earned about £320 from members' efforts - for which we thank you very much. Every little helps - oh no, that's a different supermarket!

Efforts to obtain benefits from Waitrose shoppers seem to have come to nothing. We applied to Waitrose to be included in their list of local charities way back in 2012, but so far nothing has happened. Several enquiries to Waitrose have received no response.

Talks of the season

The only blight on the 2018-19 season of talks was the serious accident suffered by Gareth Thomas on the day before he was due to give his talk on Iolo Morganwg to Cowbridge History Society. You will be glad to know that Gareth has made a complete recovery and is back on the speakers' circuit. After ringing around for substitutes, we settled for a talk by our Chair, Dick Buswell, about bollards - that's right, bollards - which turned out to be quite fascinating. The incident he described occurred in the 1890s, when the town council took one of its own members to court over a land ownership dispute. By pure chance, the information that Dick gleaned in the course of his research has turned out to be highly relevant to the current controversy over the proposals for a new building on the site of the former cattle market.

Some visitors expressed annoyance that we had not informed them in advance of Gareth's indisposition and the change of speaker (even though we didn't know they were coming). However, our policy is always to arrange an alternative speaker if we possibly can; we only cancel for reasons such as adverse weather, as we were forced to do in February. Fortunately, a rejuvenated Gareth will be appearing in our autumn session, whilst Patricia Price, whose talk in February had been postponed, ably filled in at the AGM when the scheduled speaker, Dylan Jones, was forced to back out at the last minute.

*Deb Fisher
Publications Officer*

AGM report

At May's Annual General Meeting, the committee was re-elected as follows:

Chair:	Dick Buswell
Secretary:	Dick Tonkin
Joint Treasurers:	Beverly Tonkin, Keith Jones
Publications Officer:	Deb Fisher
Committee:	Betty Alden, Don Gerrard, Chris Turner

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee's Officers, reported on the past year's activities, observing that with a membership of 105 the Society remains vibrant and very well supported, particularly in view of the small population it serves. The Chair thanked the members of the management committee for their work and support, including our two presidents: Reverend Norman Williams and Brian Ll. James. He thanked Betty Alden and her colleagues for their work in the Local History Studies Room and archive and Beverly Tonkin for organising the Charter Day trip to Fonmon Castle.

*Dick Tonkin
Secretary*

Biographies: James Reynolds (c.1790-1872)

Here is another episode in Chris Turner's occasional series about historical figures from the Cowbridge district.

An interesting and prominent individual in Cowbridge for much of the 19th century was James Reynolds. For most of his life he lived at Bute Cottage, Llanblethian, and ran a tailor's and drapery business from various locations in Cowbridge High Street. He inherited this business from his father (also James Reynolds) but Reynolds junior appears to have been responsible for expanding the operation. By the 1850s various trade directories also describe him as an auctioneer and a collector of income and property taxes. He was the census enumerator for the parish of Llanblethian in 1851 and has been praised by later historians for the accuracy and detail of the census returns for that Parish.

Reynolds' personal life was on the one hand tragic but also interesting. He had the distinction of being married five times. Mary, his first wife, died in 1831 and their three children died in infancy (there are memorials in Holy Cross churchyard). Further research is required to establish what happened to his other wives but his local prominence and good character suggests nothing sinister! Indeed, at his funeral in 1872, the *Cardiff Times* noted that the people of Cowbridge "...appreciated his sound sense and amiability of manner."

His religious affiliation, an important consideration in the Victorian era, was very much with the Wesleyan Methodists. He seems to have been prominent in establishing the Wesleyan cause in Cowbridge since he is named as one of the registrants seeking approval to use a rented room as a Methodist place of worship in 1815. He became both a member and later Treasurer of the Wesleyan chapel in the town and by the 1840s was also listed as a lay preacher. Local newspapers record him as chairing meetings of the Bible Society in Cowbridge. In 1851 at a Glamorganshire County meeting Reynolds spoke passionately about protecting Protestantism against the desire of Roman Catholicism to establish its own hierarchy (archbishops, etc). In his speech he said that "...although a Dissenter, he loved the Church of England from the bottom of his heart." Such dissenter support for the Church was common only amongst Methodists at this time.

Another of Reynolds's passions was the Welsh language. He was a member of the Cymreigyddion (a London based Welsh social, cultural and debating society) and addressed the society when it met in Cowbridge in 1837. He was one of the organisers of the Bridgend eisteddfod in 1851 and President of the Cardiff eisteddfod in 1857. In a debate held in Cowbridge Town Hall in 1851 on the subject of "Whether the Welsh language was worth nurturing" he was unequivocal in his support for the motion. We know from the local newspapers that he was also an active supporter of local self-help groups such as the Mechanics' Institute, to whom he gave numerous lectures, and the Oddfellows friendly society, which was strong in Cowbridge in the middle decades of the 19th century.

In many ways James Reynolds was a typical Victorian, successful in business, driven by his religious and cultural beliefs and an active promoter of self-help initiatives, but few who knew him could have doubted his commitment, his compassion and, judging by the scope of his many interests, his boundless energy and enthusiasm for the causes he believed in.

We would welcome involvement from Cowbridge History Society members in the biography project. If you are interested, please approach Chris Turner at one of our monthly meetings, or e-mail us.

COWBRIDGE HISTORY SOCIETY

PROGRAMME FOR 2019-20

Meetings in the Lesser Hall, Town Hall, Cowbridge.

Talks start at 7.30 and are on the first Friday of each month, except in February, when the talk will be on the 14th.

The May meeting will begin with the AGM at 7.00.

2019

- 4th October *Iolo Who?*; Gareth Thomas
- 1st November *On the Edge – the story of the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary from Chepstow to Nash Point*; Rosemary Scadden
- 6th December *Llantrisant – History of the Hilltop*: Dean Powell
with wine and mince pies to follow

2020

- 3rd January *Llanilltud Fawr - some insights into a Celtic Christian Community*;
Philip Morris
- 14th February** *Evan Thomas and his Lamps*; Brian Davies
- 6th March “*Are you being served?*”; Gwerfyl Gardner
- 13th March Charter Day Celebration: Insole Court - talk, tour and lunch
- 3rd April *The Rebecca Riots and rural protest in South Wales*; Chris Turner
- 1st May **AGM at 7.00** followed at 7.30 by *Early Medieval Landscapes in the Vale*; Andy Seaman

Submissions

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

There is now an archive of old Cowbridge History Society/Cowbridge Record Society/Cowbridge & District Local History Society newsletters available for reference in Cowbridge Library.