

# NEWSLETTER

of Cowbridge History Society

*Easter 2020*



***“The Chair holds forth”: Dick Buswell addresses U3A members at Holy Cross in February, just one of CHS’s community activities***

## A message from the Chair

There seems no need to reiterate what you already know - that, following government warnings and in view of the increasing risk to us all posed by COVID-19, the Society's management committee has been obliged to put on hold the remainder of the 2019/20 programme. It is our current intention that the two talks will be given and the 2020 AGM held in the autumn once the course of the pandemic and the UK's reaction to it are better understood.

The Constitution requires an AGM by 4th July but it is too early to see if that will be feasible. A decision by the committee on when it can be held will need to wait on the development and decay of the COVID-19 pandemic and government guidelines. Our current plan is to look at the situation in mid April and each subsequent month. We aim to ensure that the cancelled talks for April and May will take place later in the year or in 2021.

Because of the closure of Old Hall and to ensure the safety of volunteers, the Local History Studies Room has also been obliged to close its doors. It will reopen only when it is safe to do so. However, the archive is available on the People's Collection Wales's website at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/users/5375>

The Office of National Statistics shows that the core area of Cowbridge (not including Llanblethian) has 501 people aged 70 or over (30.9% of the population), of which 112, or 6.9% of the total, are over 85. In Wales as a whole, 18% of the population is over 65. Quite a concentration.

NOTE: This newsletter will continue to be issued as usual, circumstances permitting. 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.

## Reading matter

Bored? The archive of past Cowbridge History Society/Cowbridge Record Society/Cowbridge & District Local History Society newsletters normally available for reference in Cowbridge Library is obviously inaccessible at present. However, electronic copies of newsletters going back to 2014 are available and can be obtained from the Publications Officer by e-mailing [secretary@sassoonfellowship.org](mailto:secretary@sassoonfellowship.org). Most of our past book titles are also available. Please inform the Secretary [dicktonkin@btinternet.com](mailto:dicktonkin@btinternet.com) if you are interested and we will find a way to get them to you.

## Talks of the season

Philip Morris, retired archdeacon of Margam, kicked off our 2020 season in January with a fascinating talk on the history of Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major), including information about the ancient monastery and the Iron Age fort on the coast nearby. There is much more to be discovered about the area, but the archaeological investigations have barely begun and perhaps at some future date the known facts will be very different.

On a dark and stormy night in February, there was (as always) a capacity audience for Brian Davies, formerly of Pontypridd Museum, who talked about Evan Thomas, the manufacturer of miners' safety lamps based in Aberdare. Brian brought with him part of his collection of lamps, which were viewed and handled with great interest by his avid listeners. I apologise for the poor quality of the photograph I took.

In March the ever-knowledgeable Gwerfyl Gardner spoke to us on the subject of "Are You Being Served?"



providing some insight into the history of the department store, nowadays a dying breed. Gwerfyl had diligently tracked down the history of James Howell's and David Morgan's, not to mention other gone-but-not-forgotten Cardiff stores such as Mackross and Marment's. She then moved on to the rest of the UK, researching the ancestry of Peter Jones (who was Welsh) and John Lewis (who wasn't).

Gwerfyl's talk made me think also about mail-order firms such as that founded in the 1870s by Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones, the man who supplied Queen Victoria with Welsh flannel underwear. From there I was led to consider Gamage's and to wonder whether there was any connection with the Gamage family of Coity, collateral branches of which persisted long after the last heiress, Barbara Gamage, had been married off to Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester, in 1616. As yet I have discovered nothing new about the mail-order firm, but Barbara Gamage was, until his death, the ward of a man who figures in a biography written by Don Gerrard which appears later in this newsletter - Sir Edward Stradling.

In April committee member Chris Turner was due to address our meeting, on the subject of the Rebecca Riots. Fortunately, the annual Charter Day celebration on 13th March, ably organised as usual by Beverly Tonkin, was able to go ahead. See the report elsewhere in this edition.

*Deb Fisher  
Publications Officer*

## Obituary: George Haynes

George Haynes (left in the photo, out fishing with the late Jeff Alden in 1989), a former member of Cowbridge & District Local History Society, died recently. George, a resident of Llanblethian, was well-known locally for his forthright views. He was prominent in the Glamorgan History Society and made a major contribution to the research that led to the publication of *Cowbridge Buildings and People*, the first Cowbridge Record Society publication, in 2000. He was also very involved with the Glamorgan History Society. He and his late wife Nino were regulars at History Society meetings until 2009.



## Waitrose comes good

Eight years after we applied to Waitrose for some financial assistance from its charity fund, Cowbridge History was finally featured as one of the three local charities during February. At present we do not know how much was raised, and naturally there is also no update on the replacement of the Town Wall markers, which we have been pursuing for quite some time.

## **PROGRAMME FOR 2020**

**ALL MEETINGS HAVE BEEN CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**

**A REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME WILL BE ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS  
IN DUE COURSE**



## Charter Day Trip to Insole Court

Friday 13th March was a wonderful and fine day, in complete contrast with the severe rainstorms and gales that had preceded it. Our destination, Insole Court, lies in the western part of the City of Llandaff (which enjoys the rare distinction of being a city within a city) and its grounds slope gently towards the south. The Society was given the use of the former drawing room; a light and sunny space suitably prepared for our visit with floral arrangements complementing the marble and Penarth alabaster window arch and it was there that our excellent speaker, in character as "Fred" Insole, forsook his cloud home to take us, with much humour and a firm grip on the mores of his times, through the history of the Insole family's rise and decline.

It all began with James Harvey Insole, a man with entrepreneurial skills and perfect timing who saw and exploited the very considerable benefits and value of clean burning Rhondda steam coal as well as the lesser but nonetheless commercial potential of house coal. He it was who bought the land on which two very fine properties were built having started his career buying coal in small quantities from the owner of a drift mine finishing as a mine owner himself and a prominent figure in Cardiff's rise and in its social establishment. He liked what he saw of the Marquess of Bute's Cardiff Castle tower and romantic gothic interior decoration and decided he'd have some of each too!

The family flourished through the latter part of the 1800s and into the 20th century when, as was the case for so many of the local trail-blazers of those times, it all came to a halt with World War I, two lots of death duties, the shipping crisis and the development of the diesel engine which overtook steam technology. In 1932 the estate was sold to Cardiff Corporation and by 1938 the family had left. The ground floor became a community centre with municipal library. In 1988, when the site was earmarked for sale, a local residents group formed and in one shape or another it has, with HLF and Big Lottery grants, not only renewed and restored the property but in 2016, as Insole Court Trust, taken over its management from Cardiff City Council; a marvellous tale of community commitment, drive and vision.



After the talk, which had taken about an hour, we were free to stroll through the grounds laid to lawns, rockery and community gardens and sit in the sunshine before gathering again to enjoy a delicious lunch. Prof Dick Buswell, on behalf of the Society, presented Beverly Tonkin with a fine bouquet and thanked her for her work in making the commemoration of the award of Cowbridge's 1254 charter a most informative and enjoyable event.

*Dick Tonkin*  
*Secretary*

## Biographies Project

*This month's additions to our collection have been provided by **Don Gerrard**.*

### Sir Edward Carne (1500/1501-1561)

Sir Edward Carne was born at Nash in 1500/1501, to Howell Carne of Cowbridge and his wife Cecily. He claimed descent from Thomas Le Carne, supposedly the second son of the "King of Gwent". Educated at home, he went to Oxford University c.1516, graduation with a BCL in 1519 and a DCL in 1524. He was Principal of Greek Hall, Oxford, in 1521.

As a rising civil lawyer and Renaissance Scholar at Oxford, he was brought to the attention of Henry VIII, perhaps by Cardinal Wolsey, and by 1529 he was one of those engaged in the advocacy of the King's divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

In 1530 he was sent to Rome by Henry VIII, as a Royal Proctor, together with Thomas Cranmer, to argue Henry's case. He stayed there until 1534. On his return to England, he became a Member of the King's Council, on close terms with Thomas Cromwell, who used him as a Monastic Commissioner between 1536 and 1539. In 1538-39 he was Ambassador to the Netherlands, where he was engaged in the preparations for the Cleves marriage, and Ambassador again in 1541 and 1544-50, when he was involved in some tortuous treaty negotiations with France.

As a Monastic Commissioner, he was not slow to take advantage of his opportunities - in 1539 he obtained Gaunt's Hospital/Abbey in Bristol for his wife's use; he acquired Wenlock Priory in Shropshire (1541), the Augustine Priory in Newport (1543), plus his most important acquisition, Ewenny Priory.

The Priory was dissolved in 1536. It had been founded as a Benedictine monastery in 1141, but by 1536 it had only three monks. Carne leased it in 1536 and bought it in 1545 for £727 6s 4d. At the same time he acquired the rich Manor of Ewenny, with its water mill (now a public house), Ogmore Castle (one of a trio of defensive castles on the western edge of Bridgend, the others being Newcastle and Coity), and the important ford over the River Ogmore. On her accession in 1553, Mary Tudor hoped, indeed expected, the return of monastic lands from the Catholic nobles who had acquired them. She was disappointed. Carne, in common with many others, refused.

Carne was knighted in 1540 and spent the years 1544-50 once more in the Netherlands. As a Catholic, he found Edward VI's religious policy after 1547 repugnant. Despite this, he became a member of the Council of Wales and the Marches in 1551. He welcomed the accession of Mary in 1553, and he became a JP for the counties of Cheshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire, all Marcher counties and therefore linked to his position on the Council of Wales and the Marches.

He is known to have sat in only one Parliament, in 1554, as MP for the County of Glamorgan, as very soon after he became Sheriff of Glamorgan 1554-1555 (he had previously been Sheriff in 1542-43).

From 1555 to 1559 he was Resident Ambassador to the Holy See. On Mary's death in 1558 he asked to be recalled, but when Elizabeth I did so in 1559, he surprisingly refused - he could possibly have been under the threat of losing his property in England and Wales. This did not happen. He was instead put in charge of the English Hospital (Abbey) of St Thomas in Rome, where he died in January 1561. He left one legitimate son and four daughters.

A tablet was put up in the Church of St Gregory in his memory. In his Will he had instructed his executors to erect a tomb or tablet near the grave of his father in Holy Cross Church, Cowbridge.

## Sir Edward Stradling (1529-1609)

Sir Edward Stradling was born at St Donat's Castle in 1529. He was educated by a private tutor until 1543, when he went to Brasenose College, Oxford. He left without graduating, and then spent some time in Rome. He returned to St Donat's when, in 1573, his father, Sir Thomas Stradling, died, and Edward became head of one of the most important families in Tudor Glamorgan, until his death in 1609.

The St Donat's estate comprised hundreds of acres, consisting of eleven manors - one, the manor of Monknaish, had 1800 acres. Most of the land was rented out to tenants, the main crop being corn (wheat and oats). Records tell us that any surplus was sold in the market at Cowbridge, together with vegetables, butter and cheese. The Vale of Glamorgan was well known for its butter, a good deal being sent as far afield as Bristol. Some timber was sent to Cardiff for shipbuilding. We know too that fine wines, fruit and confectionery from the Mediterranean came to St Donat's imported into Cardiff. In common with other rural estates, St Donat's faced problems in Tudor times, from the "Price Revolution", when prices rose some five fold.

In 1554, Stradling had become an MP (for Steyning and Arundel in Sussex). Parliament in Tudor times met infrequently, but Stradling kept a house in London. He became Sheriff of Glamorgan three times - in 1573-4, 1582-3 and 1595-6, and he was JP (an office introduced in Tudor times). He was influential in 1578 by intervening to stop local merchants raising the price of Glamorgan butter, only one of a number of cases where the local JPs were asked by the government to help.

We know that Sir Edward lived well at St Donat's. He dined on venison from his deer parks and drank fine wines from France and Spain. He even had a vineyard on his estate. He also kept falcons. There was an excellent library at St Donat's, containing books and documents, some of which had been acquired at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Sir Edward concocted a fantasy pedigree, claiming that he was descended directly from Sir William de Esterling, who had come from Normandy with William I in 1066. This was not true. His background is shrouded in mystery. It is more likely that his ancestors came from Thun in Switzerland, arriving in England maybe around 1250. A John de Stratlinges accompanied Edward I to Wales in 1284 and St Donat's was acquired in approximately 1316. The name was anglicised by Sir Thomas, who died in 1327.

Sir Edward died in 1609. He had no children and the estate passed to his adopted son, Sir John, who had married his wife's niece. He left behind a legacy of sorts: a sea wall at Aberthaw, an aqueduct at Merthyr Mawr, and the beginnings of a harbour at the mouth of the River Ogmore!!



### Sources:

*Dictionary of Welsh Biography*

G E Jones - *Tudor Wales*

A H Dodd - *Early Modern Wales*