

This is the second edition of the Ceredigion Archives Newsletter. We would very much like to thank everyone who has subscribed, and hope that you enjoy the contents of this edition.

New searchers

The first three months of 1999 have shown an increase in searcher numbers at the office, especially amongst students. It is interesting to note that in addition to the history students we might expect, students of geography, anthropology, law and theatre studies use the office for source material. One group of students had to find ways of presenting aspects of the social history Aberystwyth through drama, and spent happy hours looking at records of the town in the nineteenth century.

Conservation issues

In mid-January a conservation company came to make an estimate of the cost of conserving our collection of education records which include log books, admission registers and administrative records of most primary and several secondary schools in the county. Many of the books are not in bad shape; with others the binding has suffered with years of use in school. The estimates ranged between £40 and £450 per volume, which in a collection of about a thousand volumes represents a great deal of money. Once in the archives repository documents like these are used on average less than once a year. In one way this is a great pity as wonderful information can be found in log books, but less use helps the volumes last longer. However, most nineteenth and twentieth century documents contain levels of acid in the paper that eventually cause the pages to become brown and brittle. Even if the documents are stored carefully and never touched this causes their decay over time. The question of appropriate conservation must be addressed. Sometimes we are asked why we have not microfilmed such collections. The answer is that microfilming helps the problem in only one way, and we are still left with the difficulties (mostly financial!) of preserving the original document.

We have bought further quantities of see-through polyester "pockets" in which to store fragile items. These are particular good for single sheet documents, which can be read and handled without further damage

Talks and lectures and exhibitions.

The archivist, Helen Palmer, has been allowed out on several occasions recently, to speak to local organisations including Llanilar, Eglwys Fach and Trefeurig Womens' Institutes, the Llanychaearn Friendship Club, the Penrhyncoch Retirement Group, the University Womens' Group and the Waun Fawr Retirement Club. These occasions are always fun for the archivist and (we hope!)

the audience. Events with tea and biscuits afterwards are the best kind, although I have fond memories of cake *beforehand* on at least one recent occasion. For the archives staff these talks, and the exhibitions we try to produce on a regular basis, provide an excellent excuse to look at our records and read through them. With the demanding administrative side of the archives profession ever increasing, it's good to make time for studying the documents themselves.

We are now on to our second exhibition of the year. These are small displays placed in cases on the mezzanine floor of the County Offices where the Archives are situated. The first display was of items and news from 1899 (see Glenys' article below!) and the current exhibition is about the Lifeboat Service and the R.N.L.I. which is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year.

The article in this newsletter is by Glenys McBurnie. It reflects two of her consuming passions - walks in the countryside and local history research !

Selected recent accessions

- Acc. 1117 A documented history of Hafod
prepared and deposited by Jenny McVe of the Hafod Trust
- Acc.1118 Tithe map and apportionment for Silian parish (1845)*, tithe apportionment for Lampeter (1839 & 1873) and altered tithe apportionment for Llanwenog (1852)
*currently unavailable whilst the subject of conservation
- Acc. 1121 Sale catalogues for selected household contents at Hafod (1939) and Nanteos (1957).
- Acc. 1124 School log book for Borth county primary school 1993 - 1996.

I must also mention the **Museum Collection** of items transferred from Ceredigion Museum. These include many very splendid documents and are being listed as time allows. So far, 74 items have been listed, and *that* took most of a weekend ! There are some particularly jolly ledgers and day books, including that of "John Edwards and son, Penygroes, Llanfihangel " which gives the measurements of customers of his tailoring business (1893 - 1910). So what was the average chest measurement of the late nineteenth century Cardiganshire male ? Come and check for yourself!

FAMILIAR FOOTPATHS

Little did we know that we were buying a small piece of local history when we bought a property in Blaenplwyf in 1993 ; not until a few people mentioned that we had bought "y capel bach". Since the property consisted of two small cottages with gardens to the front, a pig sty, a few sheds , and a field of about an acre to the side, it did not resemble a chapel at all.

Once the property was ours I decided to do some research at Ceredigion Archives. I attempted at first to find the property in the census returns for Llanychaeam parish for 1841, but to no avail. So my next task was to find its location on a map. This proved to be the key, as the property was shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (*circa* 1832) as "Blaenplwyf" : the name had changed over the years. This was made clearer when I received a photocopy of an article on early Methodism in Cardiganshire written in 1859 by William Rowlands, "Cwrt-y-Cwm". The congregation had been holding services in a small cottage called "Corn" from 1803 up to 1818. At this time they approached the steward of "Nanteos", a Mr. Armstrong, with a view to leasing a piece of land so that they could build a chapel. According to William Rowlands, Colonel Powell, the owner of "Nanteos" obliged them by offering an acre of land for the sum of rent of one guinea a year. In 1819 the building of the chapel, by local craftsmen, commenced, with donations from the community making the work possible. The chapel was called "Blaenplwyf" as it was the first property on the main road to Aberystwyth in the village of Llanychaeam , the next parish being Llanddeiniol. Eventually the village of "Pont Llanio" adopted the name after a larger chapel was built there around 1880 ; this became necessary when the congregation increased during the religious revival.

Knowing it had been a chapel, I was able to look at the microfilm of non-conformist baptismal records for "Blaenplwyf". Original records are held at the National Library of Wales and the Public Record Office at Kew, but Ceredigion Archives holds copies of these up to 1837. The first baptism recorded was on March 8th 1808 :

Joel Rowlands, son of William (farmer) and Margaret Rowlands
of "Cwrt y- Cwm".

Other places mentioned were Trefedlyn, Tanffordd, Lletyoen, Rhwylas, Ffoslas, Pencwnddu (Llanddeiniol), Ffynoncapel (Llanilar), Llainwen, Rhydygwin, Glanrhos and Chancery.

Towards the end of the film I found the following entry :

25th March 1835
William son of Joel Rowlands (farmer) and Mary his wife
of Aberbrwinen.

Here was the record of a whole generation of a family with very strong connections with "y capel bach". An account of the first William Rowlands' life can be found in a publication called *Enwogion Sir Aberteifi*. He was born in Blaenplwyf in 1778, and was an important figure in the religious life of the area.

I was then able to proceed with searching the census again, to see who lived at "Blaenplwyf" in the years 1841 - 1891. I was delighted to find the property already converted into a house by 1881, after its use as chapel had been abandoned, and the Stephens family living there ; the property stayed in the possession of this family up until 1993, when we became the new owners. I was also able to consult some Electoral Registers, one for 1918, some in the 1950s, with most in the 1960s and up to the present. Another useful source was the Land Valuation Act of 1910, which gives you information as to who owned each property and who the householder was.

Many footpaths leading from the house take you down to the coast. One passes a small farm called "Mynachty'r Graig" and then on to "Monk's cave". These place names are the last indication that this parcel of land was once owned by the monastery at "Ystrad Fflur".

I often visit "Abaty Ystrad Fflur" (Strata Florida Abbey) in Pontrhydfendigaid as it is one of the most peaceful places imaginable, and fortunately I was invited to stay in the village for a few days last Christmas. As usual we went on our pilgrimage to the churchyard and the abbey, but this time decided to take a walk towards "Pantfyfedwen", once the home of Sir David James the philanthropist and Lady James, whose memorial stands in the nearby churchyard. As we passed by one particular tree my friend's husband stopped and said "They call that the hanging tree, but no-one seems to know the story". As is human nature, we were all a little interested, but thought no more as we continued with our walk. That is, until I opened the Cambrian News for 1899, when I returned to work after the Christmas holidays. I was looking for information for a New Years' exhibition, and decided to find articles from the first few months of the year from the 1899 newspapers. This is the entry I found for May 5th 1899.

Pontrhydfendigaid

Sad occurrence -

On Sunday morning, April 30th, the body of William Roberts, eldest son of Mr. Richard Roberts, "Towy-fechan", was found suspended on a frail tree on the road leading from the Abbey to "Pantfyfedwen". The poor fellow had been away on Saturday looking for lost sheep, Tregaron way. The sheep had been found and after visiting Tregaron he made for home. This appears to have been at a late hour, and

on his way home, through some derangement or otherwise, he committed suicide by strangling himself. True till death and after, his two faithful dogs kept guard over their master's body and it was with great difficulty that they were kept away to allow the police officer to cut down the body. The sad news cast a gloom over the village as he was well known. He was of a quiet unoffending demeanor and always figured well at sheep-dog trials. An inquest was held on the Monday, where it was stated that Roberts was quite sober at eleven on Saturday night and there was nothing strange in his manner... The verdict was that the deceased strangled himself whilst temporarily insane.
(Cambrian News 5th May 1899)

In the parish records for Strata Florida I found the following burial entry :

3rd May 1899
William Roberts - Towy - aged 30 years

His parents are also buried there.

From the census for 1881 for the civil parish of Caron Uwch Clawdd, I found that William was one of at least seven children, the youngest being then two and the oldest 19 years old.

One hundred years later, by chance, the story of the "hanging tree" has been rediscovered.

Footpaths in the vicinity of my home interconnect cottage and farms with what used to be the chapel. The origins of many footpaths can be found with a little detective work. One such footpath, a few miles down the coast, is found in "Cwm Mabws", Llanrhystud, near Mabws Hall.

The log book for Brynherbert school gave me the clue as to one reason for its existence. Many log books and admission registers for Ceredigion schools are held at the Archives, as well as Education Committee minutes and some school plans.

Like all school log books, 'Brynherbert' school log contains daily entries by the headmaster regarding the day to day running of the school. In some of these entries I noticed farm names I knew to be quite a distance from the school:

13 November 1891
"Catherine Jane Jones, New Mabws has diptheria."

8 February 1909

"Mary Jones commenced as Supplementary tacher, transferred from 'Gofadail' school. Admitted 2 girls from 'Tynbeulu' farm, one is 7 yrs and the other 6 yrs, this is their first appearance in school and to mix with children."

These children may have used the path from 'Cwm Mabws' to get to school as the distances by the main road were much greater. And a short cut would have been very welcome in inclement weather. Some parents may have chosen to send their children to 'Brynherbert' even though 'Llanrhystud' school may have been closer. In one entry the headmaster made it quite clear that 'Brynherbert' school was superior to 'Llanrhystud school when it came to arithmetic."

21 April 1902

"Admitted 2 children from Llanrhystud, James and Hannah Mary Williams. They are a little more backward than our children in arithmetic."

I was quite surprised to see these names, as Hannah Mary was my grandmother and James my great uncle. They lived on 'Rhiwbwys', again quite a distance from the school. My father had heard the story that his grandmother had moved the children from 'Llanrhystud' school to 'Brynherbert'; now we had written proof. However, family legend has it that it was clashes with the head teacher that necessitated the move.

The school seems to have had an unsettled time between 1890 and 1900. During this period the school had no less than eight different headteachers, and they all had problems with persuading the children to attend the school. Illness was often the cause for low attendance, diphtheria, scarlet fever, inflammation of the lungs, and measles were but a few of the illnesses mentioned. Some of the reasons given for the children not attending school were, washing day, pig killing, harrowing the oatfields, gathering potatoes, hiring fairs, Eisteddfodau and various religious services, not to mention the inclement weather which would often hinder their long journey. The head teacher was obviously not amused in the following entry:

"Attendance is poorer than yesterday and very much so this afternoon owing to the saie at 'Rhosolchfa' up on the hill. The hill tribesmen are away today in this sale."

(Brynherbert log book, 22 October 1907)

Even the presence of 'Aletheon' the strong man could not entice the children away from their pre-Christmas chores:

"Attendance not so good, 30 present, 5 boys at home helping to kill and pluck the Christmas geese. The Champion Strong man is making the rounds of all schools, called this afternoon, he will perform some clever tricks and feats in the morning."

(Brynherbert log book, 22 December 1908)

I wonder what the "hill tribesmen" made of that spectacle!

Attendance improved two days later due to a local wedding:

"Attendance is good as a wedding takes place at the farm near the school, the children were allowed half extra play to see the wedding party returning. All the children were presented with an orange and some of them invited to the breakfast. With my permission the wedding party was allowed to come to school to present the oranges while the children in turn entertained them with a song."

(Brynherbert log book, 23 December 1909)

I'm sure that the headmistress wished she had an endless supply of oranges, to keep the attendance figures up.

Would today's school children be so easily satisfied?

A promising evening school was set up in 1896 at 'Brynherbert'. In the dark winter nights students over the qualifying age of fourteen came along the roads and pathways which converged upon the school :

"I James Davies, trained Certificated teacher (King's College London) started the Evening school here on 4th December 1896 at 7.30p.m. Fifteen students put in an appearance at the opening. The first lesson given was Welsh translation, according to the time table."

(Brynherbert Evening Continuation school log book)

(4 December 1896)

In 1897 the school had a glowing report by the H.M.I :

"This evening school was exceedingly well attended considering the remoteness of the district, was conducted with industry and very creditable work was accomplished during the sessions. The comparatively large numbers in attendance shows the high value set by the pupils upon this evening school".

(Ibid.)

(30 July 1897)

But due to illness, and commitments elsewhere, the numbers dwindled, and the evening school was closed, after three years, in 1899.

Nevertheless in 1913 there was another attempt at running the evening school, not without some initial trepidation:

“As no such school has been held since 1899 many declare that they are ashamed to come to show their ignorance in the subjects.”

This problem, amongst others, persisted until the closure of the evening school in 1914. The following entries paint a vivid picture of those few difficult months:

“A few young men of the district had been on Friday last causing trouble and giving constant worry during the evening. Last night they came again but caused no worry as they had been warned of the consequences.”
(10 December 1913)

“..... Only 3 ladies put in an appearance.....Three young men came to the premises but felt too shy to come in with the number so small.”
(7 January 1914)

“A very stormy wet night and only 4 ladies came together though one of the boys was outside but had no courage to come in.”
(12 February 1914)

“.....2 of the boys came as far as the school but would not come in.”
(16 February 1914)

“.....It is impossible to get the boys to come in when only one or two are together, they seem too bashful to venture in.”
(20 February 1914)

“No boys are present tonight again.”
(23 February 1914)

“Two boys are present tonight, none has been since 18th February in school but have gathered together outside, some one or two feeling bold enough to appear in school.”
(2 March 1914)

The logbook evokes a wonderful image of the girls sitting tidily indoors, waiting for the lessons to begin, with the bashful boys lurking just outside the door!

The stimuli to research all the extracts above came from walks I have enjoyed, with friends and family, in the country near my home. There is always something of interest to be seen on a walk ; and when the walk ends the enjoyment of it remains, as do the questions raised by the experience. Why was this particular path created ? Whose home was that ? paths used to link the places that were most important in people's lives - their home, their school, their chapel or church. I

hope I have been able to give you an insight into some of the ways I have explored the history of the paths I have walked in Ceredigion.

I'm afraid you won't find a stock of oranges in Ceredigion Archives, but you will find a wealth of interesting documents relating to the county. *

* And some (inedible) bananas on the banana plant of course ! Ed.