

Ceredigion Archives Newsletter

Christmas 1999
New Year 2000

Since the last newsletter some good things have happened at Ceredigion Archives ; we have received some interesting and important new records, we have managed to put up some shelves on which to store those records (thank you Ray, the man who loves shelves !) and we have had a very generous Millenium gift from the Dyfed Family History Society, which we are hoping to spend on installing a public access internet point in the office, for the use of all those interested in local and family history. These very positive developments have been set against the fact that we have had a few problems with staff sickness during the autumn. We are all eating our vitamins now and trying to stay well !

Our last newsletter attracted two particular types of comment. The first were many very positive remarks about Gwyneth's article ; several people remembered her aunt well, and others told us interesting new details about poor Basil Jones, the Bishop's son, and his family. The other remarks concerned the fact that St.Paul's Chapel, Aberystwyth was a Wesleyan and not a Calvinist Methodist chapel. The curious thing about this is that it was a fact which everyone in the office knew perfectly well, and the error (repeated, with apparent enthusiasm, several times in the notes !) is totally inexplicable except as a moment of madness. We have tried to pass it off as the deliberate mistake which we try to include in every issue (gremlins seem to ensure there always *is* such a mistake !) but really I can do nothing but apologise for any distress or confusion caused.

Some items which have arrived so recently that they have not yet been included on the accessions list have been transferred from the National Library of Wales. The National Library collects archives which are of national significance, but over the years they have acquired many records which have more local significance. Where possible, many of these records may be transferred to the appropriate repository, the county record office. Records which have arrived recently include those for Llanerchaeron, the house near Ciliau Aeron built by John Nash, and other records of St. Paul's Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Aberystwyth..

Another nice object which arrived by post at the office is a copy of a sale catalogue from Hafod, the house near Devil's Bridge and Cwmystwyth where Thomas Johnes once lived. The original document is in the possession of Houghton Tower Ltd. – Henry Houghton lived at Hafod between 1846 and 1854, having purchased it from the Duke of Newcastle. What makes the document particularly interesting is the fact that someone has written notes to show who purchased many of the auctioned items. The name Downie features prominently. Joseph Downie was an Aberystwyth banker and later wine merchant, originally from Scotland, and in 1852 he was living in Pier Street with Jane Downie. The name is still visible in Aberystwyth at “Downie’s vaults” in Eastgate. The Downies purchased items like “a massive inkstand of Derbyshire Spar”, but Joseph’s interest in wine had evidently not yet developed for he left the contents of “Col. Johnes’s Cellar” to be purchased by others, including the Revd. Lloyd, vicar of Hafod. I must also mention the arrival of the records of Ardwyn Grammar School, Aberystwyth. We were extremely pleased to receive the records of the school from Mr. Huw Spencer Lloyd, in whose care they have been whilst he has been producing two very interesting books about the school’s history. Friends and colleagues in their younger days have been identified (with much glee !) amongst the pages of his recently published *Ardwyn School : a collection of pictures*.

We had a very pleasant visit in October from some children from Beulah school, who were finding out about the history of their area. It is always really encouraging to see how enthusiastic and interested children can be, when the history is theirs – *their* homes, *their* school, *their* community. We have also been out to speak to several local groups and organisations, and hope we have dispelled a few myths about archives and those who care for them !

Helen Palmer is responsible for this edition’s article. As we are now at the millenium (as we are constantly reminded at present !) it is a piece which explores themes of continuity, and looks, as we must do, with hope towards the future.

We wish you all a very good Christmas, and a very happy new year.

Selected Recent Accessions

- Acc. 1147 Papers of John Morgan, printer of Aberystwyth,
and others (1850 – 1923)
- Acc. 1149 Lady Visitors' Book for the Joseph and Jane Downie's
Bequest (1889 – 1957)
- Acc. 1151 Minute Books of the Women's Institute Executive
Committee (1921 – 1953)
- Acc. 1153 Cambria Archaeology *Archaeological Audit on Hafod
Mansion* (2 volumes)
- Acc.1156 Records of Ardwyn Grammar School, Aberystwyth
- Acc. 1159 "The History (in Welsh) of Trewen Congregational
Church Cwm Cou near Newcastle Emlyn by D. Alltwn
Jones".

A story without an ending...

Whenever new documents come to the archives they must be examined, read, and described, as part of the process of making them ready for public inspection. It can be very exciting, reading something written fifty, or a hundred, or two hundred years ago. Some documents are inevitably more rewarding than others in the information they yield. Sometimes something will arrive which is wonderful - in its contents, and in the way it fires the imagination.

Amongst the archival items transferred from the Ceredigion Museum in the last few years were two sets of letters exchanged by two sons, their uncle and their parents in the early nineteenth century. The letters - and these are real letters, sent from places in England and France, and folded and worn from their travels - have been bound with thread into two books, each chronicling the life of one of the sons. The letters are full of local, national and

international news, and they are wonderfully exciting to read, because they are so immediate and fresh.

To publish their contents in an article which takes account of the context in which they were written will take months of research (possibly years at this rate!). I am looking forward to all the intricate research into the Napoleonic wars, and the social histories of the early nineteenth century. But increasingly these documents have come to represent something else, which needs no context. The letters symbolise the continuity of families and of communities. In Shakespearean terms a tragedy ends in a death and a comedy ends - not in hilarity, for the jokes don't always seem that funny - but in a wedding, and the promise of continuity.

The letters show how very difficult and uncertain life could be at that time; disasters and misfortune seemed to lurk everywhere. But ultimately what they demonstrate is the way life goes on, and the way in which the minutiae which fills our every day is in its own way as relevant and as important as the national and international affairs which happen all around us - and sometimes, to our perplexity, include us in their midst.

The family who sent and received the letters lived in Llantood, just inside Pembrokeshire. Cardigan was their nearest big town, and it was mostly with Cardiganshire that they identified. There was a mother and father, Esther and John Williams, and five sons, Thomas, Morris, Daniel, Caleb and William. The letters were written by Morris, who was in the militia, and then found himself in the 23rd Regiment amidst the Napoleonic wars, and Daniel who was sent to Hounslow to earn a living with his uncle Owen Williams and his English aunt. Thomas was also in the Militia, and was later discharged from the 23rd Regiment in November 1814. Caleb was apprenticed as a mariner, and William stayed at home.

The letters are written in English, although there are indications that the family always spoke Welsh when in Wales. The letters below are some of those between Daniel Williams and Uncle Owen in Hounslow, and John Williams, Daniel's father, in Llantood. I have kept the spelling in its original state so that you too can have the fun of working out what is being said!

From Daniel Williams to his parents

Daniel's 1st Letter

R[ecieved] 27th [June] 40 minits past 10 at night

Hounslow June 24th at 10 oclock

Dear Father, Mother and Brother

This is to let you know I have my journey so well as I wish and have a fair wether in all my Journey.

Dear Mother don't you trouble your mind about me I am well and hearty and I hope you the same.

tell when William my Brother come home on Thursday he come before night or not tell me in the letter, dont you wright a letter to me before I write you.

Please to excuse this time so no more from your most humble son and servant,

Daniel Williams

You have account of my journey in the next Tell to my Frinds I well and hearty.

John Williams to his son Daniel

Answer to this 24th & the 27th of June 1813 the 1st and the 2nd letters after his Departure which was on the 22nd of June and arrived at Hounslow about 10 oclock Thursday Morning the 24th and saw .s unkle After Noon July 5th 1813

Yours dated 24th of June at Hounslow after your Arrival comes to hand the 27th and we then was Tranquil in our mind for you, but your hand wrighting proves that you are not in your usual Temper when you write them both But as for your query in that concerning your Brother Will^m He was at home at Sun Set he and the Horses was well when he return from Carmarthen when he sent you there on Thursday 22nd June I and your Mother was in our usual mode. Yours dated 27th came to hand the 3rd of July in which we hear of your Reception with your Unkle and your aunt. Take you Care to follow their Advice in all things, take care to avoid bad companies be allways sober keep your time be meek and humble and do unto all men as you would they should do unto you, and be Serviceable to your Relations if something Calls, Remember to look in your Book and in your Mensuration Copy and a Religious Books, ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you.

In the next letter tell was any Enquiry of your Education Transacted and what Branch in Carpentry Do you follow and what salary at Pr. Day or week what is the Market prise of Corn Beef Chhes & Butter and what do you

pay the week for your Victuals, and where you put yourself up in hounslow, or go when you arrive there to your uncle .s house straitway or how Did you found him, They are at Glanpoolafon Cardigan Penrallthowel Passes thier usual health.

The Bull of Wm. Davies Treleddin gore his servant 28th of June and there is very little hope life in him . Williams the shopkeeper opposite the Angel Inn Cardigan died the 1st of Instant 2nd of Instant the cart of D^ad. Phillip s hendre upside on is servant and killed him. Morgans Priest of Cardigan Bridel and Eglwysirow Died the 2nd of Instant. It will be a woe to the Horses many of them was drive hard before he was Dead. Candidats for Bridel are the young Bridestock of Blaenpant, Mr. Owens Cilvowyr Mr Jones Kilgerran, G. Griffiths, Kilgerran Mr. Jones St. Dogmeals, Mr. Harries Pantudery, Mr. Thomas Nantgwyn and William Thomas for is son Griffith.

John William

N.B. This Letter Posted 5th of July 1813 for Hounslow

From Uncle Owen Williams to John Williams, his brother

R[ecieved] 12th Instant

No. 4 Chapel Row Hounslow Agest 9 1813

Dear Brother I am sorry that I could not write sooner for want of Time to furnice me with materials to write. Daniel arivde at Hounslow on the Thursday about 10 in the morning but so great was his Timerity and so shey of his ant that he remaind at the Bel only 4 Door from my house untill I came home from work. Daniel work along with one at millriting from 5 in the morning until 7 at night 7 days per week at the wages of 5s 3d per day. he Boards and Beds along with me ... We have had no time to go to London yet we mene to go the latter end of nex week to bey some tools and Daniel a New Bever Hatt.

He is ready and willing and Doeth what lays in his power to mack himself servisable and I will tak care that he shall not be insulted by any body Daniel is to have 5s 3d per Day until nex spring and to have 6s that is my agreement with the gentleman the Proprietor.

Daniel or any other yong unexperience hand are not suford to go into any place wher ther is any Danger Whatever and I can tell you that he can handle his Tools better than some we had hear before ..

From Daniel Williams to his parents, included with the above letter

Dear Father and Mother

I take opportunity to write this few line to you and hope to find you in your good state of helth as it leves me at present.

And to inform you I recived your letter dated 1st of August on 5th of the same and glad to hear of your health. I am sory if my Mother trouble her mind about me I have plenty of every thing I want I work at powder mills now and we go before long to make a thrashin machine to the same Gentleman for 2 horses and to thrash 20 sake of weat in 12 hours I not like you to say to any of your Nibours what I do here.

barrack is near this Town and good many of Light Horsemen in thim. No Solders quartred here only go on march I call my uncle and my Aunt same as other men do Mr. Wms and Mrs Williams

Your letters cost here 1s1d½

Give my kind love to my Mother and to my Brothers. Your most dutiful obedient Son and Servant

Dl. Williams.

In a letter from Daniel Williams to his parents 17th October 1813

...“my uncle is follow millwrighting and my Aunt is Bonetmaker and very strict England Church.”

Owen Williams to Mr. & Mrs John Williams : 7th November 1813

...Daniel goes on Very well and I think more reconsile to Inglish neibors than he was at first...The Duck of York pass through this Toun last Night on his way to Windsor and he tould the innkeeper where he Chang horses that Boneparte is taken prisoner in comon souldir close by a rigament of russion cosacks...

Daniel Williams to his parents : 7th November 1813

Astonish thing happen here on October 4th a man came by the powder mills and stole about six pounds of powder in little bag under his great coat and went to a publick house in Hounslow and drink some beer and was a man smoke a pipe close by him and the powder catch the fire and blow the room window and the frame clean out to the middle of the street and every

window as on the House was broak and every glass and china broak all into pices and the front wall was broak very bad and they oblige to build a new wall there...

A letter in reply to Daniel's letter enquiring about the "mournfull accident" which left his mother unwell : early 1814

John Williams : "the Accident of the 11th No^{br}. is a s followeth, David, son of John Thomas Rhostowarch came to our house on the 1st of the month for to go to Penrallthowel for a Medicine the next Day and grow ill in is health everyday and died in our house on the 11th of the said month and buried in Meline, his Mother and 's wife was at our house when he Died and in that time Esther was with the men and the women in watching the Sick hath cold herself and went on horseback to the Burying place and came home that evening and went to bed and be there near three weeks, she is up now as she is use to be.

From a letter of John Williams to his son : 26th March 1814

...Caleb return from France after been a Burden of Horned cattle there from Cork and have been very like to have been taken by an American Privateer, when they return they lost thier convoy Day before in a gale of wind, he write to me from Cardiff...

From a letter of Daniel Williams, Hounslow to his parents : 5th June 1814

"we are in good health and hear some good news from abroad expect the Foriners Kings to England tomorrow they are goin to make sham of the battle has fought at Leipsic in Germany when the French blowed up the bridge before their own Army cross the river. they are goin to fight it in St. James' Park next Wednesday they make a wooden bridge in the Park. Grand illumination in London the same night.

John Williams, Llantood, to his son Daniel : 28th August 1814

Eliza [the name of the ship?] Capt. Davies of Cardigan was taken on 25th July by the Whig armed sloop one of the American privateers 50 miles off Baskets on its voyage from Limerick to London. She destroyed her cargo and stole everything that was of worth Bread Beef Water New sails New Ropes and all papers the Brigg's Register and Charts and then let her go. She arrived at Milford by night 29th of the same.

Daniel Williams to his parents 22nd January 1815

...I have nothing in particular to inform you but wish you write as soon as opportunity will permit and remember me to my friends. I am very sorry because I have no news to inform you I hope you will get something for I am fond of news.

Owen Williams to Mr. & Mrs. John Williams : 9th November 1817

My good Brother & Sister :

I take this early opportunity to inform you that your son Daniel is going to be married to a charming young woman of one & twenty : now you are going to ask me whom she is : and I will tell you that she is a Niece of your sister in Law at Hounslow : a Native of Warwickshire. Daniel & Shee hath kept company this 2 year.

I send you this account for your approbation. The banns are published this day. So let me have your opinion on the matter as soon as you please. Your Father in Law is going to give you a pair of Stockings & send them down some time in the Spring. Your intended daughter is very slender But I suppose that Daniel will make her thicker. You may call her your Father Hannah.

Owen Williams, Hounslow to his brother John Williams : 8th November 1818

Dear Brother

this is to let you know that we are in a middling state of health although mine is impaired very much. I am to inform you that on 4th November about 7 in the morning you had a grandson come into this troublesome world. It gives me pleasure to inform you that Daniel is become one of the soberest men in Hounslow and is very proud of his Liddle son.

Daniel Williams, Hounslow, to his parents : 17th January 1819

...My Wife sends her love to you and I am glad to inform you that she is pretty comfortable and the little boy is pretty well and grow very fast he was christen 29th November and Uncle gave him the name John Owen William..