

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 27 May A.G.M. at 7 pm followed by a talk by **Sulwyn Thomas.**

Saturday 17th July Festival of British Archaeology, details to follow.

The Friends of the Archives for June: "Cromwell, A Swede and Pont Henri" Meet at Baltic Inn Ponthenri 7.00. Contact Noel King on 01994 427497.

Antiquarian Society Saturday June 19 Geological field day on the Black Mountain, meet at Llangadog Common Bridge to car share at 10.30.

Historical Association, Swansea & South West Wales

Thursday 20 May, 11am, Bishop's Palace, St David's, Pembrokeshire. Talk by Rhianydd Biebrach on 'Welsh Effigial Monuments'. This talk is organised by HA Swansea and is part of Cadw's Adult Learners' Week.

Friday 21 May, 11am, Laugharne Castle, Carmarthenshire. Talk by Professor R A Griffiths on 'Owain Glyndwr's Invasion of South Wales'. This talk is organised by HA Swansea and is part of Cadw's Adult Learners' Week.

Saturday 22 May, 10am-4pm, National Waterfront Museum, Family and Local History Research Fair. HA Swansea will have a stall at this event.

Lost Sketch Book: Did you lose a sketch book after The Friends' visit to Pontargothi Church? If it belongs to you then please contact the museum where it has been left for safe keeping.

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THE FRIEND

*The Newsletter
of
The Friends of
Carmarthenshire
County Museum*



May
2010

Thursday 27 May A.G.M. followed by a talk by **Sulwyn Thomas**

MESSAGE FROM JILL

This is my last edition of The Friend. However, it will certainly not be the last Friend, which will have a new editor in Tracy Dyson and we have produced this May edition together.

I know you will all join me in wishing her well and hope that you will support her. Producing five newsletters a year takes considerable effort. What she will need above all is material. She has many other commitments; it helps so much if she has a stock of articles of varying size which can slot in to fill the space available. What about an account of a museum or gallery you visited on holiday? Why not look at an object in our museum, take a photograph and write a few lines about why you like it? On a very rough count I produced about 40 newsletters so I know what a challenge faces Tracy. When you set up a blank with four A4 pages you sit and look at it and wonder how you are going to fill it. So please do help her. I look forward to a Friend which has new features and eventually may look quite different.

As I bow out I would like to thank Annabel Lewis and Christine Bound for their unfailing help in distributing The Friend. They have both agreed to continue helping Tracy.

URGENT CALL FOR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Do you have an opinion on how the Friends is run? Have you any ideas for events or fundraising? Have you any time or experience that you can give to the Friends and would you like to take a more active role by becoming a member of the committee? If so, we need your help. We have vacancies for new officers that urgently need to be filled. If you or someone you know is interested then please contact any member of the present committee or Gavin at the Museum. Ideally let us know before the AGM on May 27th.

The Friends visit to Pontargothi's 'Painted' Church

On a warm April evening the Friends met at Holy Trinity Church, Pontargothi, the painted church. The Revd Philip Johnes, newly retired from the parish, gave an excellent illustrated talk on the history of the building. He stressed that this very beautiful little church, with its unique wall paintings, is basically the work of one man, Henry Bath. The family made a fortune as Cornish tin producers and then, when the tin ran out, exported coal from Swansea and imported copper ore and guano. The coming of the railway to the Tywi Valley allowed Bath to buy land to build Alltyferin Mansion and commute to Swansea. The substantial Victorian house was completed in 1868.



Bath and his wife, having no children, were generous benefactors to the locality. A school was built so that the tenant's children did not have to walk to Llanegwad. An ardent churchman, he did not want to

enforce English services on the parish church in Llanegwad. Holy Trinity was built on land which had belonged to Talley Abbey, half a mile from the mansion and linked to it by a wooden bridge over the Cothi. The architect was B J Bucknall, a friend of the Baths, who had worked with them on Swansea docks. Sadly, Bath only saw the plans, as he died on a voyage home from Chile in 1875 at the age of 54. His nephew, Edward, inherited and continued the work.

Every inch of the interior is decorated. Biblical scenes form



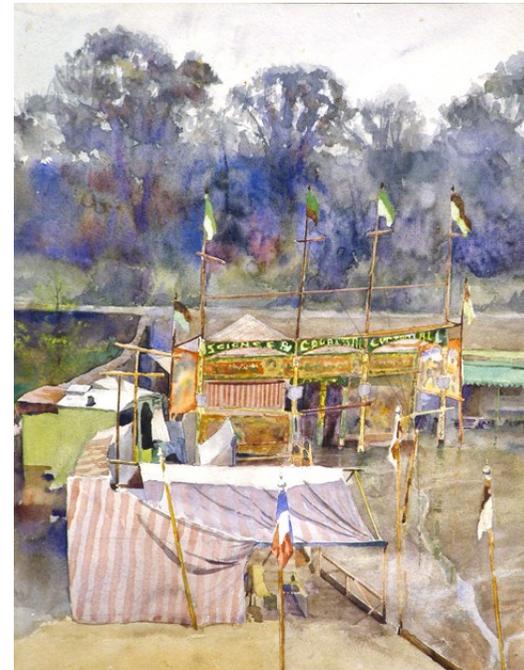
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B. A. Lewis
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2010**

**Home and Away
Paintings by
B.A. Lewis
April 24th – September 18th
2010**

Mystery of the Big Top

Can anyone identify the place in this painting by one of Carmarthenshire's best loved artists, B.A. Lewis? Painted in 1904, the picture shows a big top with the words "Courageous Events Hall" across it.



Buffalo Bill, or William Frederick Cody, toured Wales from 1903 to 1904. His show featured Indians attacking stagecoaches and wagon trains and being seen off by cowboys and soldiers. Are these the "courageous events"? He came to Carmarthen on May 13th 1904 and it must have been a striking event, particularly as the Indians or Native Americans, as they are now referred to, brought their families with them and set up camp.

The painting is on display in the Museum Gallery along with a collection of Benjamin Archibald Lewis' paintings from April 24th to September 18th 2010. If you know anything about the painting, the museum staff would love to hear from you.

Anne Dorset

Wales Stone Forum visit to Whitland Abbey

On Saturday 27th March I attended a field trip of the Fforwm Cerrig Cymru / Wales Stone Forum to Whitland Abbey and to Whitland itself. It was led by Dr. John Davies, formerly of the Countryside Commission for Wales and probably well-known to many of you.

The Forum was created to promote awareness and knowledge of the use of natural stone in Wales following the successful 'Stone in Wales' Conference in 2002. Bringing together as it does geologists, stonemasons, archaeologists, historians, architects and people working related subjects, it allows a very exciting multidisciplinary approach to understanding our past.

Whitland holds an iconic place in Welsh history. Firstly, of course, the famous assembly, convened by Hywel Dda in about AD 945, was held somewhere in the locality, and secondly, there is Whitland Abbey, founded in the 1140s, and which went on to become the mother house of seven other Cistercian abbeys in Wales and two in Ireland.

Although part of the Norman reformation of Christianity in Wales, the Cistercian monastic order rapidly went native and effectively became the diplomatic service for various Welsh princes. Whitland itself flourished under the patronage of the Lord Rhys. Look at the abbey's remains today and it can be difficult to realise that it once functioned as a royal mausoleum for Rhys and other members of his dynasty.

Little of the abbey can be seen above ground and there hasn't been much archaeological investigation either. Discover-



ies made in the 19th century are known while Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Sir Alfred Clapham surveyed the church ruins in 1921. The church was then excavated by the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society in 1926 and it was these trenches that were revisited as part of a training exercise, conducted in the 1990s by the former archaeology department at Trinity College, Carmarthen.

I was particularly keen to learn about the building stone used in the Abbey's construction. A little I'd learned about already from John and I hoped the visit of all these experts would help us understand the dressed pieces which the museum service had acquired from the 1990s work. Also, I suspect that we do have architectural material from the 1920s dig in the collection too, but which is now unidentified. Perhaps a study of the geological sources and the architectural styles might help identify any stray pieces.

The bulk of Whitland Abbey was constructed of local Ordovician sandstones, but the dressed pieces – used for fine architectural detail, such as doorways, windows and decorative mouldings – were carved from Jurassic Sutton and Dundry limestones.

Sutton Stone comes from near the mouth of the river Ogmere in Glamorgan and was used across southern Wales during Norman times, Newport Castle in Gwent, Llandaff Cathedral and Neath Abbey in Glamorgan and Manorbier Castle in Pembrokeshire being a few examples where it has been identified.



The Dundry quarry, by Bristol, was exploited a little later but was effectively worked out in the 15th century. This cut-off date makes it an excellent means of identifying medieval struc-

tures. At first glance Dundry is similar to the ubiquitous Bathstone which we see in so many of our civic and religious buildings of the late 18th century and after. However, Dundry is a much finer grained stone which makes it superior for carving and more resistant to weathering. It crops up as far afield as Dublin and other Irish towns, which shows how busy and important the merchants of medieval Bristol were to the regional and wider economy.

The use of these imports leads you to wonder about the true extent of the wealth and power commanded by native princes, such as the Lord Rhys and Llewellyn the Great of Gwynedd, who came to dominate native politics in our area after Rhys's death. Llewellyn built widely as part of his propaganda package against Anglo-Norman domination and John has tentatively suggested that he may have been responsible for early 13th century rebuilding at Whitland, rather than the English Crown or some other Anglo-Norman patron.

John also has a fascinating theory about the location of Hywel Dda's assembly at Whitland and you can read more about this and his ideas about the Abbey in the latest edition of the Stone Forum's newsletter. This, and much more, can be found at <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/welshstoneforum/>.

We finished the trip with a visit to the museum store in Kidwelly to view our Whitland material. There was much enthusiasm among the group and we agreed that the collection deserves further study, along with the stonework from Carmarthen Greyfriars. A quick look at some of this material identified carved stone, perhaps part of a font, originating from the Isle of Wight! For me it was an excellent reminder of how useful geology can be in understanding human history.

Gavin Evans

a frieze and the ceiling and walls are covered in gothic patterns. Over the years fumes from a coke heater blackened every surface until the paintings were hardly visible. Three years ago painstaking cleaning restored the original colours and made our visit memorable.

Carmarthenshire Wedding Rituals

As the weather is warming up, the wedding season starts in earnest. It is interesting therefore to look at some of the customs that used to be present at Carmarthenshire weddings in the past. Just as modern weddings enjoy the prestige of arriving at church in a gleaming wedding car, in the past the *Priodas Geffylau* (a Horse Wedding) was always desired if funds allowed, even if it meant the bridal party borrowing horses from neighbours. 'Playing hard to get' was also customary of the bride on her wedding day, and as can be seen in the extract below, she was well attended by many accomplices.

'...it was the custom for the wedding parties to ride to and from the church. On the way thither they resorted to racing, and chasing each other over the country. For this purpose the bride was mounted on a pillion behind the person acting as her guardian, who, escorted by her friends, together with those of the bridegroom, sets off from the house to the church; but when they arrived at a convenient spot, instead of proceeding to the church, the guardian would set spurs to his horse, and gallop off in a contrary direction, along some of the numerous cross lanes, apparently with every intention of carrying off the bride. Upon this, the bridegroom with his attendants, sets off in pursuit, while the other party are no less active in pressing forward to protect the fugitives and prevent their capture; and for the more effective carrying off of this mystery attack and defence, it is necessary that the whole country should be scoured in every direction, in order that the lanes and highways may be properly occupied by the pursuing party, to prevent the possibility of escape. It was a matter of principle with the guardian to be continually endeavouring to effect an escape with his ward. ...when the bridegroom caught the bride, the whole party would gallop away to the church'.

[F.S. Price, *History of Llansawel*, 1898, pp. 34-5]

If you missed the visit, the church is open Thursday afternoons 2 till 4.

Tracy Dyson