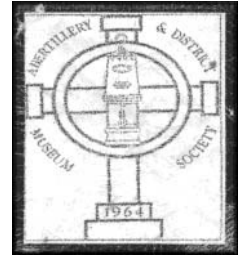


ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



October 2009

News Round up

The **Coffee Morning** in mid-September was a big success; plenty of people turned up and there was a lovely display of wedding photos to look at – some of us have changed more than others and it was fascinating to look back over the years at both faces and fashions. Thanks to everyone who took part.

The **Autumn Trip** to Wells was another success and Roy even managed to lay on wall to wall sunshine. Wells is a lovely town – lots to see but within a compact area and so a visit is very manageable. The cathedral with its magnificent West Front was our first stop; the inside is as impressive as the outside and it is certainly a place to linger with its cloisters, scissor arches, astronomical clock, embroideries, icons.....and much more. If you can drag yourself away from the cathedral there's also the Bishop's Palace, Vicars Close, Saturday market, shops and plenty of places to eat and drink. The time went all too quickly but Roy had more planned for us – a stop at a large garden centre (more shopping!). Thank you Roy for a really lovely day; we know the trips take a lot of organising and the time and effort you put in is much appreciated.

Christmas Fair 5th December

This will come around all too quickly and so please start collecting items for a bumper event. We will have the usual range of stalls – Christmas/crafts, toiletries, books, toys, crackers, handbags, tins, lucky dip – so please start to knit, sew, crochet etc and rummage! Unwanted gifts would be much appreciated for the bran tub. We will also need donations for the Christmas hamper. **Craft Fair 28th November** – this will be upstairs in The Metropole; the Museum Society will have a stall so please help with handicrafts to sell.

Vice Presidents (Annual Subscription £25)

Mr Keith Dykes
Mrs Esme Heal
Mrs Kathleen Davies
Mrs Margaret Herbert
Mrs Carole Brooks
Mr Arthur Lewis OBE

Mr Carl Jones
Mr Glyn Saunders
Rev. R Watson
Prof. Gerwyn Griffiths
Mrs Jeanette Fulton
Mrs Thelma Griffiths

Books etc for sale in the Museum

The Museum shop has some attractive gifts for both adults and children so if you are stuck for ideas for presents, how about?

- **Museum mug** – made of bone china with the Museum logo on the front and the Welsh Dragon on the back **£4.00**
- **The Romans in Abergavenny**
by Frank Olding **£6.50**
- **1984 The Great Coal Strike**
by Hedley McCarthy **£8.99**
- **Industrial Archaeology in Blaenau Gwent** by John Van Laun **£6.50**

Diary Dates

Wednesday 7th October 2009 – *An Hour with Roy Noble*

Wednesday 7th November 2009 – *Finding Thomas Milne* by David Woodliffe

Saturday 28th November – *Craft Fair, Metropole*

Saturday 5th December 2009 – *Christmas Fair*

Lectures start at 7.00pm in the Metropole Theatre, with teas and a chat downstairs in the Museum afterwards. Entry is £2 and the public are most welcome.

Please call at the Museum for more information or watch the Newsletter for coffee mornings and other events.

Museum opening times

The Museum is open to the public, **free of charge**:

Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 1pm 2pm - 4pm

Friday & Saturday 10am - 1pm

Museum phone number **01495 211140**.

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome so please call in as often as you can.

Email address: abertillerymuseum@tiscali.co.uk

Web: www.abertilleryanddistrictmuseum.org.uk

Details of coffee mornings etc are posted on the notice board at the Museum or at the following websites where you can also read the Newsletters:

www.cwmillery.com www.abertillery.net

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Fund raising September - £126

100 Club

June – Gwyneth Hillier, Melanie Dean, Marge Selway

July – Nora Rowlands, Kath Carter, Wendy West

August – Neil Winmill, Roy Pickford, Sian Price

Contact Names

Mrs Peggy Bearcroft, Chairperson	01495 213806
Mr Don Bearcroft, Curator	01495 213806
Mr Ron Selway, Vice Chairman	01495 215775
Mr Trevor Cook Secretary- c/o Museum	01495 211140
Mrs Margaret Cook Assistant Secretary	
Mr Bernard Jones, Treasurer	01495 213185
Mrs Enid Dean, Fund raising Secretary	01495 212880
Mrs M Gilson, Schools Liaison	01495 212413
Mrs M Selway, Programme Sec	01495 211960
Mr Roy Pickford, Social Events Sec	01495 213377
Mr Bernard Hill, Asst Curator	01495 212864
Mrs Jen Price (Newsletter)	01633 482851

Poet's Corner

View From The Rhiw (2006)

Atop a grassy bank stands Christchurch, entirely comfortable in its setting.

Grey wall and tower blending into the climbing mountain.

I remember myself standing at the altar, waiting for my bride, for I was married there.

But that was long ago.

Close by, the cottage hospital, now home to a few lost souls.

I remember my young wife, pale, lying in a ward bed,

weeping softly for the children she could no longer bear.

But that was long ago.

The Ebbw Fach and the Ebbw Fawr, rush, leaping hurrying to meet.

Like lovers, they combine at the junction, then hand in hand, they hurry,

clean, alive, to meet the mother sea.

But I remember the rivers black with dust of coal from the washeries,

leaving pools of slurry at their bends.

Or when the acid picklers discharged

brown with sinister mist hanging above the river's surface.

They made their sluggish way to the sea. Dead.

No children played on its banks.

But that was long ago.

The tree-lined valley that leads to Cwm. The village clean painted,
Its long rows shining in the sun. No traffic now.
No dust.

But I remember the huge black carbuncle that hung over the school
where innocent children played,
fed by the buckets that tipped slag and waste from the bowels of the earth.

But that was long ago.

I lift my eyes to the mountain ridge, tree topped, squaring the heads of the valleys, ever changing with sun and rain.

The Festival Park, with clean lakes and pagodas.

The smart shopping mall.

But I remember the ridge light up like false sunsets as the ladies tipped their molten slag.

The stumpy, blackened trees, for nothing grew in the fiery breath of Bessemer pots.

I hear the clang, bang of men making steel, feeding the needs of a nation.

But that was long ago.

From my vantage point atop the Rhiw, I survey the horizon

that encloses all my memories.

I take lungfuls of God's clean air and look down along the valley.

I remember myself running, jumping, onto the huffing, puffing, panting,

coal-chewing locomotives that scuttled, beetle-like across the valley floor.

I lift my eyes to the Church of Christ.

I see my young, lovely bride standing in the church door.

I am sad, for I am old.

And that, was a long, long time ago.

By Jack Wanklyn, Brynithel (aged 82)

We send warm congratulation to Jack Wanklyn, a member of the Museum Society, who obtained a Certificate of Higher Education in Literature from the Open University earlier this year. Jack has studied locally for this for four years and the ceremony recently took place at the University in Caerleon. Well done, Jack. It proves that age is no barrier to educating oneself to a high level.

There is a great deal of talent in our Museum Society membership. Don't hide your talents away – let's hear about them.

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The Round Towers at Nantyglo

Have you ever been INSIDE the towers at Nantyglo? A short while ago, together with two companions we visited the site. On reaching the tower an iron gate confronted us behind which was a large barking dog. We duly admired the stonework etc and shortly afterwards a gentleman came out of the house near the gate. We explained we were just looking at the tower. He then asked us if we would like to go INSIDE this relic. He tethered the dog, opened the gate and we then entered the tower itself, through an iron door. The structure is now supported by scaffolding, but the iron window frames and rafters and fireplaces are still in place. It was originally a three-storey building with cantilevered stone stairs still clearly visible, as were two musket holes in the iron door. Immediately outside was a square iron plate, perforated with many holes, which Mr. Jones told us was the only ventilation to the cellar.

Mr. Jones, the gentleman who is the owner of this extensive site, then took us to see the very well built stables, which must have been quite lavish in their time. Iron was the commodity used extensively throughout. The windows, door frames and rafters were all iron. The coach house had wonderful wrought iron doors. Mr. Jones told us that part of the stable block was used in his mother's time as a dairy where she made butter and cheese. Two very small cottages are on the site too, and again the use of iron in door and window frames and rafters reflect the former local iron making industry. Were these cottages for the groomsman or ostler I wonder?

In the course of our tour Mr. Jones put forward a theory contrary to popular belief. Was Crawshay Bailey the terrible ironmaster depicted in history or was he just a stern business man? In 1820, the two brothers, Crawshay Bailey and Joseph Bailey purchased Nantyglo Ironworks. Crawshay built Ty Mawr mansion (now demolished) and the extensive farm and stables in front of us. Was this, together with the towers, a statement of prestige – “Look at me, how great I am to be able to build such lavish farm buildings and stables”. Certainly there are other examples of wealthy landowners and business men who built decorative rather than utilitarian farm buildings as a symbol of their prestige and wealth.

It was pointed out to us that Crawshay donated land at Abergavenny which became Bailey Park. The houses he built for the iron workers at Nantyglo were, by the standard of the time, quite good. Assuming he had the towers built as a defence against rioting workers we are told that they rioted because Crawshay Bailey forced lower wages on his workers, the rioting

leading to the military being brought in. Compare this with the situation in the 1920s /1930s when the coal masters forced lower wages on their miners and the militia was engaged at the Rhondda to quell the rioting. Was this so different from the ironmasters at Nantyglo a century earlier?

Both brothers became MPs and Joseph entered the House of Lords. Joseph Bailey bought the Glan Usk estate just outside Crickhowell; the original house on the estate was blown up many years ago in order to avoid death duties and a more modern house built to replace it. Joseph's title is still perpetuated and his descendents are the Legge Bourkes; the daughter of the present title holder is “Tiggy” who was at one time a nanny to Princes William and Harry.

Mr Jones thinks that perhaps the Baileys were not the terrible evil ironmasters local history depicts but stern businessmen. What do you think?

Enid Dean

Continuing Success – Alf Stone's grandson, Christopher Evans, is a fourth year student at Cardiff College of Music and Drama and is studying for his Bachelor of Music degree. He plays bass trombone in the college band and in the college orchestra. A few weeks ago he was invited to play for the famous Cory Band on their recent tour for the Holland Brass Band Festival. We all know what a prestigious band the Cory is and it was a big honour for Christopher. The Cory Band recently entertained Abertillery with a wonderful concert in the Metropole. Unfortunately, Christopher did not play with them that night. Continue studying hard Chris and our best wishes for your graduation.

Gerald of Wales Exhibition

In 1188 Gerald de Barri – Gerald of Wales – set out with Archbishop Canterbury Baldwin from Hereford on his tour of Wales to recruit troops. The party travelled over 500 miles in a clockwise direction stopping first at New Radnor, in Powys, and ending in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, before returning to Hereford. The account of his travels can still entertain, for example, he records that at one church in mid Wales a holy relic had miraculous properties to cure tumours if you offered a penny. One poor soul only had a halfpenny – his tumour went down by just half. The book has returned to Wales on loan from the British Library as part of an exhibition at the National Museum in Cardiff. The exhibition, entitled *Medieval Wales: Some Crusade Stories*, runs until early January 2010.

Museum Matters October 09.

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The exhibition "Celebration of Marriage" held in our museum proved a huge success. Members of the society brought their wedding photographs in to be copied and put on display. All the brides looked beautiful as is to be expected, the grooms, all young men and as in my case carrying less weight and having more hair caused some mirth. Photographs of families were included with the Grandparents, Parents and their children's photographs on display. Among the photos were two Diamond Weddings with a card from the Queen and also a Wedding Vow Renewal Ceremony.

The exhibition was Jennifer's idea and it complimented something that I was arranging with the Outreach Group who regularly visits the museum. The group have great fun dressing in period costume and I had asked their carers Beverly and Caroline if they would like to do a wedding re-enactment, the answer was a resounding yes from everyone.

Our volunteers set too with enthusiasm getting the wedding clothes, the bridesmaids' dresses, top hats, flowers and bouquets. The bride's dress was loaned by one of the carers. The next step was choosing who would play the various roles; a lot depended on who fitted what clothes! I acted as the minister, Denis Roles agreed to be best man and the group took on the other parts.

I wrote a script for certain people although adlibbing was required for what was essentially a fun event.

The groom waited with the Best Man and congregation when the Bride arrived we all stood and sang Hear Comes the Bride as we could not get an organist.



I then welcomed them and then asked, "Is there anyone here present who knows just cause why they should not be joined etc. etc". The Best Man shouted "I Do! He's married already"

I'm not! Replied the Groom.

I told them it was ok as he was a Mormon.

The ceremony proceeded with the marriage vows slightly altered for the occasion for example.

Do you take this beautiful girl etc, etc to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health until death you do part or until she runs off with the milkman!

At the end of the ceremony I asked everyone to remain seated and told the Bride and Groom that now they were married it was about time they christened the baby. Peggy brought the baby and handed it to the Bride. The Groom looked absolutely amazed; I asked him if he was ashamed? No he replied. The baby was christened Laura, Edward Greaves. After which the Wedding party and guests adjourned to the office for refreshments.



Peggy and I sat observing the group as they sat eating their cake; we were struck by the love, tenderness and affection that they showed to each other and to all of our volunteers. The Groom Andrew presented a bouquet to Beverly thanking her for being a bridesmaid, he then went into the museum and solemnly shook hands with Denis, thanking him for being his Best Man. (Dennis had put on his best suit and it was the first time the Groom had met him). He then returned to the office asking the Bride Lisa to hold the baby so that he could take a photograph. None of this was rehearsed.

They all thanked me afterwards for arranging the Re-enactment but as I have always told them they do far more for me than ever I could do for them!

We are justly proud of our museum but at these events I am prouder of the museum volunteers who go the extra mile to make things work.

*We are unpaid volunteers but occasions such as these are **Pure Gold!***

Don Bearcroft curator.

