

# ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



The Green Man of Llantilio Crossenny

NEWSLETTER No 16  
AUGUST 2000

## LLANTILIO CROSSENNY

In 550 A.D. the Saxons were plundering the area. Iddon, a local ruler, asked St Teilo, who was in Llanarth, to pray for help. St Teilo stood with a cross on the pre-Christian mound where the church now stands and put the Saxons to flight. Iddon gave the land to St Teilo in return for answering his prayers. Llantilio Crossenny is a corruption of the name 'Church of St Teilo at Iddon's Cross'. St Teilo became Bishop of Llandaff and is buried there.

The first church was probably a long low timber building usual in Wales. The oldest thing in the present church is the 12th century Norman font discovered in the churchyard early this century. The tower arches and the two lancet windows in the west wall are 13th century (early English) when the church was rebuilt in stone in the form of a cross.

St Teilo's is a relatively large church because the mediaeval bishops travelled with a large retinue between their manors and used it as a cathedral. In the 14th century the roof was raised and the north transept was enlarged to form a Lady Chapel. The head on the right of the altar is thought to represent Edward II (1307-27) having a hairstyle typical of that time. There have been several changes to the chancel wall which has a blocked doorway and a squint for the priest to see the high altar where gifts were laid and where there may have been relics of St Teilo. In the 17th Century the Lady Chapel came to be called the Cil-Llwch chapel after a local manor house The Green Man is Celtic pagan and was permitted in churches as a symbol of death and resurrection. Its date is unknown.

In 1708-9 the great timbers in the tower, each made from one tree 60ft. high, supported a ringing chamber with six bells- increased to eight in 1978. The door high up on the wall once led to a rood screen which held a cross and from which the gospel was read. This vanished in the reformation and the pulpit vanished only a few years ago. This unique church has a great many other things to interest the historian who may consult Bradney and the literature in the church.

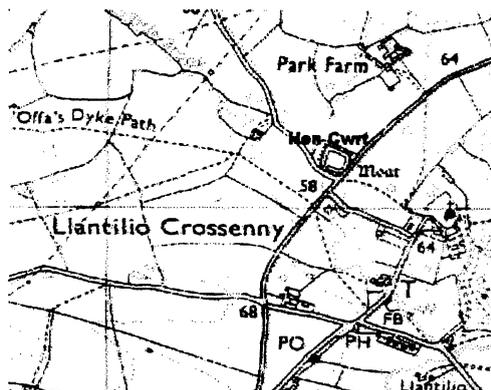
The Abergavenny - Monmouth Road once came to the church and turned left along the wall towards Hen Cwrt where it joined the present route at the original site of the Hostry Inn. A new road past the vicarage was made in 1459 but the present by-pass is relatively modern. There was a brewery on the old post office site. Llantilio Court or Great House was probably built from the remains of Hen Cwrt around 1459. In 1775 it was described as a fine Georgian house with terraced gardens and occupied the terrace to the north of the church. It was sold to a Mr Jackson in 1873 and demolished in 1930.

### **The Llantilio Crossenny Festival**

Thirty eight years ago Charles Farncombe the conductor, Mansel Thomas from the BBC and Dorothy Adams Jeremiah the County Music Organiser, living in the nearby village of Treadam, started a festival in St Teilo's church. It was a modest affair. Mansel played the organ and his wife Megan played the cello. Dorothy had a choir consisting mainly of reverend gentlemen and Jean Adams, Head of Music at Pontypool School for Girls had a choir consisting mainly of teachers, The Festival has become very professional as the years have passed and people from Norway Sweden, Germany and even the Bahamas come specially to this centre of excellence. Visitors from 'The Smoke' had no idea that things like this could go on in 'The Styx' and have returned impressed and brought their friends the next year. This May we engaged the Carnival Band, put on Handel's opera Julius Caesar, had a concert by Raglan schoolchildren and an orchestral concert ending up with Festival Evensong.

Our private sponsors are very generous and we get help from the Arts Council of Wales. We have about a hundred 'Friends' who for a small fee learn about the Festival before the others and also enjoy a special Friends' Evening which takes place in one of the larger country houses. The small band of dedicated volunteers which runs the Festival would welcome some young strong helpers, particularly from the village, since it is, after all, the **Llantilio** Festival. What about joining us?

Ken Key



## THE LAMB INN

### *A Short History of my family's involvement with The Lamb Inn, Merthyr Road*

I was born in 1909 at Gelligaer (Glam). There were three boys in the family, Trevor (the eldest) and then me and Bill.

The family moved to Cardiff, where my parents purchased the Gordon Hotel in the Docks area. (I believe that is no longer there). It was eventually sold to the Docks Company, which is now part of the Cardiff Bay Enterprise.



LAMB INN, MERTHYR ROAD. Large Park for Cows and "Barabones". W. Williams. Photograph.

My parents then returned to Llangattock Llingoed in 1917. Sometime in 1919 they purchased The Lamb and moved to Abergavenny.

Trevor and I went to Victoria Street School and Bill went to Park Street School. I left school when I was 14 and started work with Sargeant Bros. (the printers): with a break, when I was in the RAF until 1946, I served the company for fifty years.

While I was in India, my father decided to sell the Lamb; probably in 1944. It then became a private house and the courtyard is now Lamb Close

The two people in the photograph are my father and my brother Trevor.

Sometime in the early twenties contractors put up offices in the car park of the Lamb. They were working on the pipeline (probably at Llanfoist) for the Talybont Reservoir.

G.E. Williams

**PROGRAMME 2000-2001**

The Society meets at the Borough Theatre at 7.30 p.m.

2000

2001

Thurs. 21st Sept.	Mr Arthur Peplow. HISTORICAL SITES IN THE WELSH BORDER COUNTRY	Thurs. 18th Jan.	Mr Geoff Morgan THE MORGANS OF TREDEGAR HOUSE
Thurs. 26th Oct.	Mr David Rimmer URBAN & MUNICIPAL RECORDS (with special reference to Abergavenny)	Thurs. 8th Feb.	Mr Richard Keen COAL FACES
Thurs. 23rd Nov.	Mr Chris Barber A TRIBUTE TO ALEXANDER CORDELL	Thurs. 15th March	Mr Arthur Peplow CONSTANTINE HELENA AND THE LEGEND OF THE TRUE CROSS
Thurs. 14th Dec.	MEMBERS CHRISTMAS DINNER At the Lamb & Flag Hotel Abergavenny 7 for 7.30.p.m.	Thurs. 19th April	Dr Keith Strange THE CHOLERA EPIDEMIC OF 1849
		Thurs. 17th May	THE 24th Annual General Meeting followed by Mr Frank Olding THE CASTLES OF MONMOUTHSHIRE

Members subscriptions are due after the A.G.M.

**SUMMER VISITS 1999**

Our visits programme got off to an early start with our visit to Windsor Castle in March. We went early because some rooms are only open until the end of March. We all thought that a fabulous job had been made of the restoration after the dreadful fire.

Arthur Peplow guided us firstly round Muchelney Abbey where there are still well preserved remains of the cloisters and the abbot's lodging of this Benedictine abbey. Nearby we visited a late mediaeval house originally the residence of the priests who served the local church. On our way back to Taunton we stopped to look at the beautiful carved stonework on the tower of the 15th century church at Huish Episcopi. After lunch the owner of Cothelstone Manor gave us an excellent tour round their home and its gateway and afterwards laid on tea for us.

An evening visit was to Cyfartha Castle originally the home of the Ironmaster William Crawshay II with its interesting museum and displays.

In mid July we paid a half day visit to Fonmon Castle which has been occupied as a house since it was built in 1200. The present owner Sir Brooke Boothby helped to show us round.

Our last visit was to Waddesden Manor one of the most visited places run by the National Trust. It was designed in the style of a French Renaissance Chateau for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild and is considered one of England's great treasure houses

Alan Spink

### ST MARY'S CHURCH IN 1866

Anne Waller has provided me with some pages from John White's Abergavenny Guide-2nd edition-1866 which describe the churches of the town. We must all be very proud of what we have been able to achieve for St Mary's in the last few years. Such achievements were long overdue and many things have surely been lost over the years. Here are some extracts from John White's account:-

An alien priory for monks of the Benedictine Order was founded, a short time after the conquest, by Hameline De Balun, the Norman possessor of the castle. Camden says that De Balun's sons erected two lazarettos, or hospitals, for lepers, but no vestiges of them are traceable. An error might have arisen from an imperfect knowledge of the fact that De Balun had two sons who were lepers, whom he placed in the priory previous to his going on a pilgrimage to the holy land.

When St John's church was converted into a free-school, St Mary's, the priory chapel, was made the parish church. It was originally built cruciform, but the alterations it has undergone, and the additions made to it have been so great, that that the regularity of the structure, both in the interior and the exterior, has been entirely destroyed, and it would now be difficult to trace the form of the original structure. As it is, the church presents a striking appearance of incongruity. The colossean figure of Abraham (sic) lies in the Herbert chapel, and the other figures are ludicrously misplaced. The old monuments, once plastered with white lime, are disfigured by initials cut by mischievous boys with knives once upon a time when this chapel was used as a schoolroom. The chancel is at such a distance from that part of the church which is occupied by the congregation, that the communion service has to be read from the reading desk, which moreover is placed in the west end of the edifice. The eastern end of the building is in a pitiable plight; the carved woodwork, once so beautiful, is broken and neglected, and a great part of it has vanished. Alas, poor church! To attempt a description of it as it now exists were utter folly; so we must describe it as it was previous to the year 1820.

John White follows with descriptions of the various monuments. His comment on the Jesse tree is quite interesting:-

In the north end of the Herbert Chapel is a colossean figure carved out of a single piece of oak, with a long beard and dishevelled hair, apparently carrying a smaller figure on its shoulders. It was at one time supposed to represent St Christopher, carrying, according to legend, our saviour, when a child, across a river; but, on accurate examination, it appears to have been intended for the patriarch Abraham, represented in a recumbent posture, holding the genealogical tree of the tribes of Israel, with an angel supporting his head.

John White's accounts are rather long for this newsletter but in his description of the other churches he mentions two previous catholic chapels in Frogmore Street. One was used as a schoolroom and the other as a kitchen. We all know the one now occupied by Dovers the printers, set back, as was the law, from the main street. I wonder where the other one was!

## THE RAILWAY COMES TO ABERGAVENNY

Many of us are familiar from schooldays with the story of the opening of the Manchester to Liverpool Railway. Until recently, I was less familiar with the Abergavenny celebrations to mark the opening of the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway. While looking for something entirely different in Monmouth Museum - as is usually the way - I came across The Monmouthshire Beacon's account of this event in its December 10th 1853 edition.

On Tuesday December 6th, a fine morning in Abergavenny, a 'most hearty greeting was in store for the expected visitor.' From dawn onwards there had been the ringing of bells and firing of cannon and a holiday atmosphere, As it was Market Day, businesses stayed open but shop assistants were given a holiday on the following day. At 10.30 a procession was formed with a large number of the 'principal inhabitants', led by Cwmcelyn Band and a travelling one from Manchester. Flags were carried by 'navvies' and many carriages and other vehicles joined for the 'progress' to the station. 'The firing of cannon and the Church bells drowned every other sound.'

At the station there were four triumphal arches at 40-50 yard intervals with the first and last being double ones across both lines. On them were these mottos:-

"Success to the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway"

"May this eventful day prove auspicious to the town of Abergavenny"

"The Manufacturing, Agricultural & Commercial Interests united."

"May success attend Messrs Rennie, Logan & Co."

'The bands continued playing at intervals at the station until half past eleven o'clock, when the signal was given on the approach of the train, which came up and very gently stopped before the station amidst the most enthusiastic cheers of at least 3000 persons who were assembled within 200 yards on each side of the line.'

When the Directors and others got off the train, Mr Saunders Chairman of the Committee, made an address to the Directors. He congratulated them on the completion of their project and hoped that 'this undertaking may prove alike profitable to yourselves and beneficial to our town, inasmuch as it will open to this part of the country a more direct communication with the large mercantile towns of the North, and afford a more easy transit for our mineral productions; we can with confidence look forward to a commercial intercourse with parts of the United Kingdom from which we have hitherto been excluded.'

A Mr Richards then read an address to the contractors Messrs Rennie and Logan which left no one in any doubt that they were satisfied with their efforts. When Mr T. Brown of Ebbw Vale and Mr Rennie had replied the train went on to Hereford. Five minutes later another train arrived with 18 trams carrying nearly 100 tons of coal and got as good a reception as the first had had.

The procession then returned to the town and the navvies went for roast beef, plum pudding and a liberal amount of beer at a number of hostelrys - 'Miss Jones at the Butcher's Arms provided dinner for 30; Mr Davies, King's Arms for 20; Mr Pugh, Dragon's Head for 20; Mr Gordon, Cow Inn for 20; Mr Williams, of the New Duke for 20; Mr Rogers, of the Lion Street Tavern for 20; and Mr Morgan, of the Unicorn, for 20. Enjoyment was the order of the day; and we are happy to say the conduct of the men was most praiseworthy and respectable. Not a single case of drunken or disorderly conduct came before the Magistrates on the next day.'

On the Tuesday evening there was also a ball and supper at the Greyhound Hotel. Seventy to eighty attended and the dancing to the Monmouth Quadrille band began at 10 o'clock, the party not breaking up until 6 o'clock..presumably in the morning!

Wednesday was a 'general holiday, and again the bells and canon sounded from an early hour. Most shops were shut. School children had tea, plum cake etc in the afternoon and hundreds went to the cricket field for a big sports. Climbing a greasy pole attracted a lot of attention as must the four men who were blindfolded for a wheelbarrow race. A band played throughout and in the evening there was a 'grand pyrotechnic display'. Many people visited the railway station throughout the day to see the trains. There were other events too with the Cymreigyddion Hall staging a concert in the morning and a ball in the night. Sixty tradesmen also enjoyed an excellent dinner at the Golden Lion. The main dinner should have been at the Angel, but although a hundred were catered for and expected only thirty five turned up. The chairman Edmund Herbert of Llanarth could only think that many of those absent had joined the Hereford celebrations the previous day 'and had not recovered from the pleasurable excitement and fatigue attendant on their journey!' Many speeches and toasts followed. Certainly most shared the view of one speaker that without the railway Abergavenny would have become like Goldsmith's 'deserted village'. The telegraph lines had been laid and other railway links would follow and Abergavenny would no longer be a 'paltry village' but an important town.'

These days in December 1853 sound to have been very lively indeed. Next time you wait for a train at Abergavenny a journey back in time may be called for- especially if your train is late!

Richard Davies.