



CYMDEITHAS HANESYDDOL LLANELLI

LLANELLI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President: Sir David Mansel Lewis, KCVO, JP, FRCA, KStJ

Founder member: Caroline De Abreu

Established 1999

NEWSLETTER
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Naming the new woodland area

A new area of woodland, with a sculpture trail running through it, is something Llanelli residents can look forward to at the Millennium Coastal Park. Planting began at the beginning of February and the wildlife sculpture trail will soon follow.



At the end of last month members of the LHS were invited to submit a name for this new development. The committee spoke with some LHS members, and then met to discuss ideas. A number of alternatives were debated, each having sound historical merit, but finally the committee submitted three possibilities to the committee for leisure services. "Coed Cefn Padrig" was selected and members of the LHS committee felt this to be most appropriate because of the history of this land. In 1834 the river Lliedi was diverted so that it ran towards the Carmarthen Dock rather than emptying into the sea at the Sandy. This event, together with the building of an embankment along the shoreline to facilitate the railway line, turned the swampy, marshy land

between Llanelli and Pwll into the terrain we recognise today.

Before this time, the land to be used for the new woodland ran into the sea and the sandbanks we know as Cefn Padrig.

Before the construction of the railway embankments in 1847 tides would reach as far as the main road that runs from Llanelli to Pembrey, and so the name,

Coed Cefn Padrig will mark this change in Llanelli's landscape.

Once more the LHS has been responsible for naming a new

feature in the Llanelli area, basing the name on Llanelli's past.

LHS Chairwoman to step down

Our chairwoman, Caroline, will be stepping out of office at this A.G.M. and, although she will still be a member and attending meetings, she will not be filling the role of chair. Since the formation of the Society in 1999, Caroline, supported by a loyal and hard-working committee, has led the Society and seen it grow from a small band of enthusiasts to a well established society. It is going to be very difficult for all of us to imagine monthly meetings and



committee meetings without her at the helm.

In 1999, Caroline brought together a number of the town's historians to discuss the possibility of re-establishing a local history society in the town. At this first meeting of enthusiasts the idea of a Society was born and after a number of further meetings the Society was launched with Caroline as the chair. It has grown from strength to strength to become an active and respected organisation in the town.

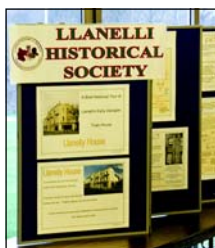
"After eight years as chair", Caroline said, "I feel that it is now time for me to step down for another to take on the role," and so we are looking to you, members of the Society, to start discussing this amongst yourselves and to approach one of the committee with suggestions of who might fill this role.

In addition to this we would like to have some "new blood" on the committee and would encourage members to seriously consider becoming involved. The task is in no way onerous and the rewards, in terms of satisfaction, companionship and the joy of sharing in the enthusiasm of others with regard to the history of your town, are great. So, hold back no longer, speak with a committee member and get yourself on board. (Needs sorting out before the A.G.M.)



In February, the monthly magazine, "Who Do You Think You Are?" featured the Llanelli Historical Society as their local history society of the month. For those members who have not been able to see a copy, the relevant page has been scanned and included in this newsletter. As a result of this article the secretary has received E-mails from all over the country from people who have connections with Llanelli.

Llanelly House Exhibition



In January the LHS took part in an exhibition designed to bring the Llanelly House project back into the

limelight. Three members of the committee (Peter Francis, Derek Newton-Goverd and Joyce Mollet) joined representatives of other Llanelli organisations in an event organised by Carmarthenshire Heritage Regeneration Trust. They set up a display of posters tracing the history of Llanelly House.

The event was held at the Selwyn Samuel Centre on Tuesday, 29th January. A similar event will take place at the LHS meeting on Monday, 3rd March.



Forthcoming meetings

In **April**, as usual, we have our AGM. In traditional form, we should get through this fairly quickly and after a break we will settle back for a selection of short films on old (and not so old) Llanelli.

In **May**, there will be an open evening on the theme of photography. This proved a popular theme at the last open evening when old cameras were displayed, together with memorabilia and posters covering the history of photography in general, and in Carmarthenshire, in particular. Consequently, the committee decided to expand the idea and include more items on this theme of photography. If any one has anything that would contribute to this evening, then please approach one of the committee members.

The **June** meeting will see one of our own members, Peter Francis, talk to us on the subject, "How old is Llanelli?" After Peter's much talked about, and extremely popular, illustrated talk on caving, given at the W.E.A. meeting in February, we look forward, very much, to this interesting topic.

Women's Roadshow

At the LHS meeting in January Sue Hamill talked to members about the Women's Archive of

Wales and the planned Wales Women's History Roadshows. The Llanelli Roadshow

LHS Web Site

<http://www.llanellihistorical.co.uk/>

The work of Jason Gill at

<http://www.anabolic-budgie.co.uk/>

took place at the Town hall on Friday, 22 February and was a tremendous success. There was a large attendance (including a number of LHS members) and, for most of the day, the room was buzzing with activity.

In the format of the "Antiques Roadshow", various experts and organizations set themselves up around the room, with computers, scanners and expert advice close at hand, and were kept extremely busy examining wonderful treasures from the past, brought in by members of the public.

LHS Secretary, Joyce Mollet, gave a talk on Mary Jane Hughes, a Llanelli World War 1 nurse, and a number of organizations displayed photographs and stories of women from Llanelli's past, around the room.

The collection of old photographs featuring Llanelli women, women's organization and events, presented by the staff of the Llanelli Library was a particular success and drew a crowd throughout the day.

Please send any contributions for future newsletters to the editor, Joyce Mollet.
News, views, short articles, letters, photographs - all welcome!



Robin Craig - Commemoration Service

Extracts from the final speech given at Robin Craig's
Commemoration, University College London, 29 November
2007 by Canon Dr. Edmund Newell, Canon Chancellor of St.
Paul's Cathedral, London.

In the last newsletter you will have read the obituary for Robin Craig who sadly died last June. Robin was a loyal and supportive friend of the LHS and one who was extremely generous, passing on to us his Carmarthenshire collection of books, papers and research material. In November there was a Commemoration held at University College London and a number of distinguished people spoke of his life and work. The final speaker was Canon Dr. Edmund Newell, Canon Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral, London who had at one time been one of Robin's PhD. Students. The editor has included in this newsletter selections from this speech.



Robin, at his home in Dover, calling members of the LHS to load their cars with the collection of Carmarthenshire materials bound for Llanelli.

“Bird shit. Tons of the bloody stuff!”

These are the first words I remember hearing Robin say. It was, I think, in the Gustave Tuck Theatre here in University College London in the autumn of 1981. I was a second year undergraduate, and Robin went on to give an erudite lecture on the South American guano trade, a subject on which – of course – he knew more than probably anyone else in the world.

As one of Robin's former students, I have an abiding memory of a wonderfully gifted teacher. A tutorial with Robin was quite an experience. He'd normally begin with a risqué or politically incorrect joke – perhaps one he'd heard the night before at Ronnie Scott's. We'd all blush; laugh nervously. We might then get an anecdote – such as how he'd caused a strike of dockworkers or we might get some culture – a review of an outrageous opera by Ligeti, or an organ concert by Messiaen. Then we'd get down to work and he would lead us in a fascinating discussion by displaying his remarkable breadth of knowledge.

Robin's “shock and awe” tactics worked. We loved the shocking jokes and stories, and we learnt a vast amount from this generous-hearted teacher we were in awe of, but whom we also held in great affection.

Robin was a legend. Students talked excitedly about him: “You *must* sign up for his course.” He made maritime history sexy – sometimes quite literally with his more outrageous stories. It was the course that even the most committed landlubber wanted to take, because Robin was so inspiring and such fun.

But it wasn't only his charisma as a teacher that endeared him to students. He was a “young person's person” who enjoyed the company of youth – and we enjoyed his. He had, as well, a caring, fatherly presence, and took an interest in our lives outside the university, and after graduation. And he was, quite simply, fascinating. He'd led a remarkable life, and he wanted to share both his wisdom and his love of life with others.

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LHS Committee

Chairwoman:

Caroline DeAbreu: 756141

Secretary:

Joyce Mollet: 755388

Treasurer:

John Williams: 810677

Committee Members:

Peter Francis: 759920

Derek Newton-Goverd: 775943

Pamela Raikes

Benita Afan Rees: 775320

William Rees 775320



Bringing history to the people

Llanelli Historical Society brings the town's past to life for the whole community to enjoy. **Daniel Cossins** talks to Joyce Mollet

How did the society begin life?

It started in 1999, and the founder was our present chairwoman, Caroline De Abreu. She was researching her family tree and little things kept cropping up that she wanted to research further, but there was nowhere in Llanelli where she could get help. The town had once had a couple of history societies, but they had taken a rather elitist approach. There was clearly a need for something to

We gain fascinating insights into the town's social history

bring together history enthusiasts in Llanelli, so Caroline decided to start a local history society for the town. She felt it should be a group for the people, rather than simply academics, and this has always been her aim. To be honest, it's probably why the society has been so active.

What does the society do?

We meet monthly and these days most of our lectures are given by members because we have such a diverse range of research interests. We organise talks about everything from the local mining industry, to prisons, to the Llanelli men who fought in the Boer War. We also

screen films of old Llanelli, run regular day trips to sites of historic interest and display our research at the very popular annual open day.

A small lottery grant has enabled us to buy the equipment to produce a newsletter, which helps us co-ordinate activities and keep everyone informed.

We also have an Oral History Group that visits residential homes to record the reminiscences of the town's older generation. Those

interviewed seem to have enjoyed sharing their memories and we gain fascinating insights into Llanelli's industrial and social history.

What projects is the society currently working on?

We have recently inherited a massive collection of maps, papers and books about the town from Robin Craig, a respected maritime historian. Cataloguing such a huge amount of material is proving quite a task, but I'm sure it will provide a real boost to ongoing research.

One group is working with the donated maps. By combining an 1840 plan of the town with family history research, they can highlight buildings and the people who lived

Llanelli (rather than Llanelli) House waits to be restored to its former glory



Powers of restoration

In 2003, Llanelli House was one of many historic buildings vying to win the £3.3 million grant on offer in BBC 2's *Restoration* series. Completed in 1714, the Georgian town house was once a symbol of wealth and status. However, years of neglect left the structure in a dilapidated state and its richly decorative interior boarded up.

The Llanelli Historical Society (LHS) felt passionate about the project. Members prepared an exhibition and organised two lectures about the history of the building, which captured the local imagination and generated invaluable publicity. Such grass-

roots support helped Llanelli House proceed to the final with over 39 per cent of the Welsh vote. Manchester's Victoria Baths eventually scooped the prize, but a further submission was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund in June 2007 and a decision is imminent.

The LHS was also involved in the latest series of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Griff Rhys Jones' grandfather died in a brawl in Llanelli and members were able to provide research assistance. It turns out that when Griff presented *Restoration* at Llanelli House, he stood just 100 yards from the site where his grandfather was killed.

in them. This should give us a real sense of the town at the time – it's a good piece of social history.

Most of the writing on Llanelli concerns its industrial past, to the detriment of social and women's history. We are consciously trying to redress that balance. Personally, I'm very interested in the women of Llanelli. I wrote and published

With a Camera in my Pocket, an illustrated biography of Mary Jane Hughes, a World War One nurse from the town, and I'm currently researching another book about the female members of a local aristocratic family, the Stepneys.

What's your favourite local pub?

The Island House Pub is 200 years old. Once a Quaker school, it is so named because of its distance from the few other buildings in the town at the time. Sadly, its patrons are fighting to save the building from demolition to make way for another shopping complex. Far too much of our history is being bulldozed in the name of progress. If we don't work to save it, future generations will have nothing. ■

FACTFILE

- **Formed** 1999
- **No of members** approx 120
- **Membership fee** £10 p/a
- **Meetings** Every first Monday at the Samuel Selwyn Centre
- **Website** www.llanellihistorical.co.uk
- **Next event** 3 March – an evening to promote Llanelli House
- **Contact** Joyce Mollet
☎ 01554 755388



NEXT MONTH → Meet Tavistock and District LHS