

Ceredigion Archives Newsletter

Michaelmas 1999

Office news

Welcome to the third issue of the Ceredigion Archives newsletter.

The summer has passed and the office is beginning to attract its autumn visitors, not least of whom are the students training to be archivists. We would be happy to see more visitors in the summer but many of our regular searchers are busy with gardens, holidays and families at that time, and the majority of the student population disappears throughout the summer months in search of employment or exotic holidays.

The last few months have contained exciting moments. Archives Assistant Glenys was interviewed for the S4C Digital programme "Wedi Cinio" on a wild and windy day at Aberystwyth Golf Club, and archivist Helen was asked to appear (with a very ancient map) at a public enquiry in New Quay. We had an exhibition at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Lampeter, and a small display at the Victorian Society's weekend in Aberystwyth. There have been lots of visits to local clubs and societies to speak about our work, and every one has been a very enjoyable occasion for the speakers ! The Archives and Museum ran a joint series of local history classes in Aberaeron, and an added bonus was the beautiful midsummer weather. Archives Assistant Gwyneth has acquired a reputation for making the work of the modern records department sound good fun, and now regularly forms part of new students' introductions to the subject.

We have had three voluntary workers in the office over the past few months who have helped in major record office projects : Gordon, who has worked his way through Sue Passmore's papers about New Quay, and has made a preliminary list for us (whilst acquiring huge amounts of knowledge about the history of New Quay and the surrounding area !) ; Matt, who is embarking on the Records Management course at the university this autumn, and who listed nearly 1500 modern records' files whilst he was with us ; and Eulonwy, who has produced a location guide for our 5,000 modern records boxes, and is now putting the data on computer for us.

Three maps have returned from our conservator, and are ready for use. There are two tithe maps (for Silian and Llandysul parishes) and a map of part of the Derry Ormond Estate in 1868. When we purchased the two tithe

maps, one was very fragile, and the other had a luxuriant growth of black mould, so it is splendid to see them clean, strengthened and ready for use.

We have purchased book-wrappers for the school log books and admission registers, which will help preserve the documents by providing support during storage. We also find that searchers tend to be even more careful with documents that are produced carefully packaged. If we make the effort, so do they.

We have also introduced those little “clicker” thingies to the searchroom to try to account more precisely for the number of times microfilm and microfiche are used. As we suspected, we used to under-estimate the numbers used quite significantly, and it is a detail we try to include in the monthly statistics we produce. If you hear a clicking noise as you pursue your research, be assured that it is not the secret camera, only one of us recording another microfilm emerging from its box.

The “Time Capsule”

A recent addition to our collections has been the so-called St. Paul’s Chapel “time capsule”. The Welsh Calvinist Methodist chapel, situated at the top of Great Darkgate in Aberystwyth has recently been converted into a wine bar and re-named “The Academy”. In the course of the repairs and alterations workmen uncovered the stoppered glass bottle placed behind one of the foundation stones in 1878.

The bottle was intact and its contents very well preserved. The men who found it removed the contents, and everything was handed over to the archives. There were two Methodist periodicals for the month that the foundation stone had been laid, a hand-written list of the trustees of the chapel, a poster announcing the stone-laying ceremony and a timetable of the local preaching circuit. None of these items are particularly precious, and it is quite possible that only the list of trustees is unique, but taken together they form a picture of an interesting moment in the history of the town, and in the history of local Calvinist Methodism. The poster, with its pronouncements of a march from the old chapel to the site of the new and fund-raising tea to follow, has a rallying tone both eloquent and rather poignant in a modern context.

In spare moments in the office (!) my colleagues and I are trying to undertake the very simple exercise of matching the list of trustees with details from the 1871 and 1881 censuses, so that we can form a slightly better picture of that moment in the chapel’s history.

At this pre-Millennial moment when many individuals and organisations are thinking about time capsules and what to put in them, it is perhaps interesting and relevant to reflect on this example only a little over a hundred years old. It is probably the specificity that makes the contents interesting ; the people who laid the foundation stone with the bottle behind it only included what they perceived as being relevant to them, in that context, at that time.

The article in this issue is by Gwyneth Roberts, who has been working in the Aberystwyth office since 1990. Gwyneth herself does not come originally from Ceredigion, but some of her ancestors were here, as you will discover if you read on...

Recent Accessions

There have been several notable additions to our collections :

- Acc. 1128 School log book for Llangeitho Primary School 1953 - 1988
- Acc. 1129 "Passmore Papers" : the working papers, notes, documents and ephemera created and collected by Mrs. S.C. Passmore (author of *Farmers and Figureheads* and other works) concerning the New Quay area.
- Acc.1131 Records of the Aberystwyth Civic Society 1977 - 1989
& 1132. (including minutes, campaign notes and photographs)
- Acc. 1143 "St. Paul's Chapel Time Capsule" 1878 (see notes elsewhere in the newsletter)
- Acc.1144 "Jesus College Papers" from the collections of Jesus College Oxford, including seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century title deeds and correspondence mostly relating to the Llanddewi Brefi area, and twentieth century title documents for Llandyssul.
- Acc.1145 Marine Maps of the Board of Trade (maps relating to the Crown foreshore and the safety of navigation in local waters) transferred from the Public Record Office. 1860 - 1970

New Welsh Wesleyan Chapel
Aberystwyth

List of the Trustees

October 31st 1878

Thomas Hugh Jones Painter &c
Thomas Collins, junr. Ironmonger
John Mathias, Printer
Richard Watkins, Retired Master Mariner
Daniel Morgans, Insurance Agent
John Thomas, Retired Master Mariner
James Holsely Jones, Bank Clerk
John Williams (Eggs) Picture House
Edward Edwards, (Ab. Myddelin)
James Fisher, Carrier
David Hopkins, late of Llanochter Coch
William Rowlands, Cabinet Maker
William Jones (Cannon), Master Mariner
Thomas Jones, Master Mariner
Richard Evans, Tailor
Owen Stephens, senior, Shoemaker
William Jenkins, Tailor
Thomas Hamilton Lewis, junr + Bridge Street
Edward Jones Lewis, junr
David Lloyd, Draper
Robert Fennick, Letter-Carrier
David Rees Jones, Shoemaker
Rev James Jones
Richard Hughes
Lucius Jones, Factory Llanbadarn
Evan Jones, Solicitor's Clerk (Secretary)
Rev James Pritchard - Superintendent of Circuit

List of trustees at St. Paul's Welsh Calvinist Methodist
Chapel (from the "Time Capsule") October 1878

Was Granny an Arsonist ?

When people first come into the Record Office to begin researching their family history we generally advise them to start with the census returns and parish registers. Many of our researchers are phenomenally successful with such a direct approach. If your family have remained in the same area for many generations and have worshipped at the same parish church then it is possible to skip through the centuries with the greatest of ease.

For some of us, however, things are not so simple and we are forced to take a longer but perhaps more scenic route to discover the same facts. This is especially the case if you belong, as I did, to a family of story-tellers; teasing out the truth from a tale that has been embroidered with each telling can be an exhaustive task.

*Advertisement for the
Waterloo Hotel from
The Gossiping Guide
to Wales c.1905*

Aberystwyth.

ABERYSTWYTH HYDRO HOTEL, "The Waterloo."

FACING THE SEA.

Finest Position on the Promenade.

This Popular Establishment has again been enlarged,
having now Accommodation for 200 Guests.

**Magnificent Public Rooms. Drawing Room.
Hall Lounge. Recreation and Smoking
Rooms, all facing the Sea.**

EXCELLENT COUISINE. BILLIARDS.

*The Hydro annexe just added is fitted up with
Dowsing's Electric Radiant Heat and Light, and
all the most Modern Electric Baths, as recom-
mended by the Medical Profession.*

HOT AND COLD SEA BATHS,

-Sea Water being pumped daily from the sea into the Hydro.

The Hotel is heated in Winter by patent Radiators.

Illustrated Tariff . . .

on Application to Manager.

Although I was born and brought up in Shropshire half of my family originate from Cardiganshire so when I came to work in the Record Office it seemed an ideal opportunity to look into their history. I knew that my maternal grandparents had met at The Waterloo Hotel where my grandmother was a waitress. At this time The Waterloo was one of the largest and most popular hotels in Aberystwyth. Sadly, it burned down in 1919, under rather mysterious circumstances. Family legend has it that my grandfather, then a young policeman, was so taken by my grandmother's charms that he kept ringing the bell for service, until she got fed up and ordered him out. When I was a child we still had a teaspoon stamped with the name of the hotel and my uncle told me that it was my grandmother who had burned down The Waterloo, snatching the spoon from the flames as she fled the scene of her crime. I was deeply impressed by this story; my grandmother was small but very fierce and a spot of arson did not seem to me to be entirely out of character! I must have been a particularly gullible child as this same uncle told me that in matters of religion he was a fervent 'Ironistic Galvinist' and it was years before I got the joke.

Even as an adult I was strangely disappointed to find out that by the time The Waterloo went up in flames my grandparents were safely married and living in Breconshire. Oddly enough, I have since met a delightful lady whose own grandmother almost certainly did burn it down - but that's another story.

I had no idea as to exactly when my grandparents had married. I knew that they had married somewhere in Aberystwyth, either in a chapel or in a civil ceremony. My grandfather's parents refused to attend the wedding but his only sister defied them and did go. My great-aunt had been a pupil teacher at Llangynfelyn school and there in the school logbook I found an entry for 3 October 1910 which confirms that she was absent that day to attend her

brother's wedding.

My grandfather's parents were employed at Plas Gwynfryn in Llangynfelyn, the family estate of William Basil Tickell Jones, then Bishop of St David's. My mother told me that my great grandfather, George Newell, was the estate manager and his wife Martha was the keeper of the Bishop's robes. I have their marriage certificate which shows that they were married in Bristol in 1886 and I thought they would be at Gwynfryn by the time of the 1891 census but there is no trace of them. The marriage certificate gives the name of George Newell's father which throws some doubt on my mother's belief that he had been left as a foundling on the doorstep of two maiden ladies in Great Malvern, who then brought him up as their own. Still, as this information came from my mother and not from my uncle there may be a grain of truth in it somewhere which I hope to find when the 1901 census is released.



*Martha Newell
(Gwyneth's great-aunt)
who was a mistress
at Llangynfelyn School
until 1915.*

Fortunately the school records for Llangyfelyn showed that my grandfather and his sister were both enrolled in 1896 having previously attended a private school. Although this was of no help in determining of their place of birth it did at least give me the dates of birth which I had not previously known. I can trace my great aunt's career through the logbooks of Llangynfelyn school ; from her appointment as a monitress on 17 June 1903 to her departure on 1 October 1915. In July 1914 she actually resigned on being asked to take charge of the sewing of Standards IV to VIII but was persuaded to return by the headmaster. The bare facts of her career are wonderfully fleshed out by the social detail contained in the logbooks. Successive headmasters give details of the appalling winter weather which kept the children from school, of the freezing classrooms and of the diseases of poverty which swept through the school at regular intervals. The children were frequently kept at home to help with agricultural work but there are also reports of days off for hiring fairs, singing festivals and even to celebrate the coming of age of William Basil Loxdale Jones, the heir to Gwynfryn. This event warranted two days holiday, one for the actual birthday and another for the attendant festivities.



William Basil Loxdale Jones

always known as "Basil"

The next time this young man, who was always known as 'Basil', appears in the logbook is on 30 January 1918 when the school is closed so that the pupils can attend his memorial service at Llangynfelyn church.

Basil Jones features in my family history in rather a sad way . In her later years my great aunt was convinced that she had had an 'understanding' with Basil and that they would have been married had he survived the Great War. She would often declare that she had experienced a vision in which she saw him dying upon the battlefield. As a child I thought this wonderfully romantic. I am now quite sure that it was all a fantasy for even though her parents were obviously highly respected employees they were still servants and class barriers were not so easily crossed but in view of his tragically early death and her rather lonely and difficult later life I do hope they managed a bit of a flirtation somewhere along the line.

Sadly my great aunt's vision does not bear up to close scrutiny.

When I found Basil Jones's obituary in *The Cambrian News* for 1918

I discovered that he was a Flight Observer with the Royal Navy and was drowned while on active service patrol, making, as the Llangynfelyn logbook states, 'the Supreme Sacrifice'.

The crucial combination of water and an aeroplane seems to have slipped through my aunt's psychic net.

I could, of course, have discovered much of this by other more conventional means but I would have lost out on many of the great pleasures of family history research



Flight Observer W. BASIL JONES, R.N., of Gwynfryn, Taliesin, Cardiganshire, who gave his life for his country on 7th January, 1918, was the son of the late Bishop of St. David's. He volunteered in September, 1914, and obtained a commission in the Royal Marines, and went immediately to France. In May, 1915, he became an observer in the Royal Naval Air Service and, the following August, he went to the Dardanelles. He was mentioned in despatches for his services there. He remained in the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron until the end of 1916. Early in March, 1917, he went to Italy. He was again mentioned in despatches.

such as reading the old newspapers and getting a sense of a community struggling to come to terms with the crushing tragedy of the First World War. Or immersing oneself in the day to day life of a small country school and gaining a sense of the wider community in its constant battles against poverty and ill-health. I always find it rather a pity when researchers doggedly pursue the bare facts of birth, marriage and death and do not take the time to explore the world in which their ancestors lived and worked. If we search for our forefathers and mothers in order to discover something about ourselves then we ought also to seek to understand something about the communities which shaped them, and ultimately, us.

Gwyneth Roberts