

Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No. 9

February 2008

To date we have escaped a severe winter, with only a hint of the 'white stuff'. Despite the winter break, there are a number of notable events to report, which take the Society forward, so we can reach the parts we want to reach – increased membership for a start! So, in good heart we look forward to spring and the rest of the 2008 programme.

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.com

We now have a web site – note the domain address above. The site is recognised by Google, so anyone anywhere in the world can find out about GHS at the touch of a few buttons. Remarkable! As this newsletter will also be published on the web site, I also welcome all those readers who have not known of our existence or activities. We hope you will enjoy it!

To create the web site we owe a great debt of gratitude to Communities@One and Helen Kell of the Wales Co-operative Centre, our mentor. Thanks to you all. Having acquired the necessary equipment a pilot website was created by Mary McCarthy, primarily to show intent to the grant providers. Our webmaster is Greg Buick, now in possession of the laptop etc., who will take the site forward. I am sure we all have ideas about the composition of our site and I am sure Greg will be open to suggestions/contributions. By the start of next season's programme the site should be fully functioning – NB. what exists now took the equivalent of four working days to complete.

I.C.T. Training

To secure full value from the hardware and software grant provided for us, training is essential and I hope members of GHS will take full advantage of this, so they too can 'have a go'. Two free training events are currently being negotiated:

- 1) Photoshop course – 1 day – learn how to 'process' digital photographs on a computer – we have Photoshop Elements 6 on the laptop.
- 2) Web site construction – using Microsoft FrontPage – also on the laptop.

They are open to a maximum of 12 people, between 10.30 – 16.00 at a location yet to be agreed, on dates to be decided between 14/04/08 and 31/05/08. If you wish to make a reservation contact Terry McCarthy, by 29/02/08, please.

Conference – Saturday 25 October 2008 – Llancaiach Fawr

Planning has started to make this event even better than that held last September. Two eminent speakers have already been booked, with others in the 'pipeline'. The format will be similar, but the cost for delegates will be rather more realistic. We look forward to seeing you there!

Meeting Reports:

Conservation – Karen Murdoch, C.C.B.C. – 28 November 2007 – Llancaiach Fawr.

Being heavily involved in the Winding house Project, it was inevitable that much of what Karen told us related to the development of the Borough's Museum – due to open in April. Helpfully, she began by defining the term 'conservation' – the preservation, protection, care and restoration of our cultural heritage – both large and small. Next she introduced us to the concepts of interventive and preventative conservation.

Interventive conservation - the process of stabilising an object from further damage or deterioration. It includes restoration, repair and treatment. All should be reversible, visible and follow ethical guidelines. It is time consuming and expensive and specialist skills are required. Illustrating this Karen took us through the stages involved in conserving a cheese press destined for the Winding house Museum.

Preventative processes - limiting the natural, continuous processes of deterioration, once an artefact has been subject to interventive treatment. Keeping agents of decay at bay is a complex task involving a range of processes appropriate to the job in hand, including: environmental controls, notably of temperature and humidity, radiation – mainly in the non visible ultra violet (sunlight) and infra red ends of the spectrum; guarding against contaminants such as pollutants, dust, and unwelcome solids, liquids and gases; protection from fire and flood; insulation from a range of physical forces ranging from earthquakes to simple bad handling. Achieving this involves a range of preventive measures which must be scrupulously followed, e.g. regular maintenance, good management of the environment, sympathetic lighting, archival quality storage, up to date inventories, purpose made display cases, sprinklers, etc.

Karen showed some of the conservation work carried out in St. David's house, the factory unit converted into the Borough's museum store. At present time and effort is being expended in getting exhibits and displays ready for the opening of the Winding house this spring.

Bravely, Karen invited questions from the floor. A number of issues were raised, including the Winding House, nature of the items to be displayed and the need for private individuals to take account of the conservation needs of their own historical artefacts.

Overall, a most interesting topic, one often overlooked, but essential in ensuring the survival of our historical heritage in all its forms.

Inca Way or Incapable Way – Terry McCarthy - 12 December 2007 – Llancaiach Fawr.

Not exactly local history, but an interpretation of Terry's Peruvian holiday photographs from 2006, focussing on the origins, history and impact of the Incas on the Andean physical and cultural landscape.

They emerged from the Andes close to Lake Titicaca around 1000 AD, led by their 'Inca' (leader) Manco Capac. They settled in a fertile basin where they founded their capital, Cuzco in about 1100 AD. By conquest, diplomacy and economic/political muscle they expanded their hegemony, encompassing neighbouring tribes. Acclamation of Inca Pachacutec in 1439 AD marked the beginning of a period of rapid expansion, resulting in an empire extending 2500 miles south from Ecuador into Chile, with a maximum width of 500 miles – the largest in pre-Columbian America. It was ruled from Cuzco, through a confederation of loyal tribal leaders. Quechua (Inca language) was imposed on its subjects, as was the state religion.

However, the Inca Empire was short-lived, as a consequence of three contemporaneous events:

- Inca Huayna Cupac died in 1527 failing to name a successor – two sons claimed the position so civil war broke out.
- Disease struck soon after (some think it was smallpox) decimating the population.
- The Conquistadors, led by Pizarro, arrived.

In 1531 the Incas were defeated and the Inca, Atahualpa, captured – executed in 1533. Defeat of the last remnants of the Incas occurred in 1572 and Spanish Imperial rule established. Spanish rule ended in 1826 when Simon Bolivar defeated forces loyal to Spain, to establish Peru, whose subsequent governance has been marked by dictatorships, military juntas and corrupt quasi-democracies.

The tour focussed on the Inca heartlands, starting from Lima on the Pacific coast. The terrain makes transport difficult; consequently to access the Inca homelands in the Andes the services of LAN was required. En route to Arequipa, a hint of the Nazca lines was seen, while on a later flight to Juliaca, an erupting volcano was observed. Following two days at Puno on Lake Titicaca, the Andean Explorer train (operated by the Orient Express group) was used to reach to Cuzco. The Sacred Valley was reached by people-carrier, to continue on to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu there was a choice – train or walk. The relatively environmentally friendly train took the strain!

Cuzco was and is the centre of Inca life and history. Indeed, in Santo Domingo, a former convent built provocatively on the site of the Golden Palace and Temple of the Sun, can be seen the 'navel of the World', around which Inca religious and political life revolved. While exploring the city the saying, which gave the title to the presentation, was communicated – when the first signs of an earthquake are felt the children run to shelter by the Inca walls, which by virtue of their non-vertical stone construction are fairly earthquake proof, in contrast to colonial buildings with their vertical brick walls which tend to fall down! Cuzco is a fascinating city and strong echoes of Inca culture exist, e.g. 17th century painting in the cathedral of the Last Supper, undertaken by the Indian school of artists – Our Lord is shown eating cuy (guinea pig – tastes like chicken!) and drinking chicha (maize beer), both very Inca!

Overlooking Cuzco, is Sacsayhuaman, site of a temple to the Sun, destroyed by Pizarro's troops in 1536. It is a prime and impressive example of Inca megalithic construction. Close by, at Puka Pukara, insights were provided into Inca civil engineering and administration. Remains of irrigation systems were observed, systems which enabled the empire to feed itself, thus keeping the people 'on-side, as were examples of the intricate road network. Incas never used the wheel; goods were transported by pack animals (llamas), and messages by runners, whose task was to carry oral information by relay across the empire – Incas seem to have not developed writing either (there is some evidence they used pictograms for record purposes). Surprising, too, was that despite their skills in gold and copper work, Inca technological development never extended to smelting or using iron – a major drawback when challenged by the Spanish invaders.

The Urumbamba or Sacred Valley contains a host of Inca remains: palaces at Pisac and Ollantaytambo and, close to Aguas Calientes, the World Heritage site of Machu Picchu, the latter being both spectacular and mysterious was not found by the Spanish invaders and not discovered until 1911 by Hiram Bingham. Neither its purpose, nor its occupiers are known for certain, while the site has given archaeologists some insight into Inca life, many of its treasures 'disappeared' soon after its discovery.

Peru shows many imprints of the brief Inca Empire. The intensive agriculture in the oases formed by the snowmelt rivers flowing off the Andes fed much of the empire is still vital to modern Peru. Even the abundant colonial architecture shows their influence, as Inca-style carving decorates many of them, notably churches. Then there was 'Juanita' in Arequipa – the mummified remains of an Inca girl sacrificed to the mountain (earthquake?) gods – a practice, one guide suggested, continues in some remote areas. Overall a fascinating place, with an interesting history, and a presentation to start off the Christmas celebrations in style.

Gelligaer – Journals - Volume XVI and Anthology

Volume XVI, published in 2007 – cost £5. Copies of an Anthology of Vol XI – XV inclusive, produced by Dr. Fred Holley for the Society are available for £6.99. Index for Vols. I-XVI, £1.

Helen Willson – Museums & Heritage Officer:

Just before Christmas Helen Willson, Chris Morgan's deputy was appointed the Borough's Museum & Heritage Officer. We wish her well and look forward to having a positive relationship with her and her office. Helen will be responsible for the opening of the Winding House Museum and developments to open-up the Roman Fort site. All the best, Helen.

Bargoed Library

After a period of uncertainty, plans for the redevelopment of Bargoed Library, notable centre for local history resources have been published. Later, in 2008, some, of the Family History resources will be temporarily relocated to the Winding House Museum. After a sojourn in St. Gwladys's Church Hall, Library and resources will be relocated to Hanbury Road, Baptist Chapel - in 2010?

Welsh Heartlands Autofest – 19-20 April 2008, (Civic Centre Pontllanfraith?)

Rhymney Valley Transport Preservation Society annual display of vintage transport – over 500 vehicles from all over the U.K. is expected to attend. GHS have been offered a stand there – can we man one and raise awareness of the Society on one or both days? Contact TM, by 10/04/08.

Gelligaer Historical Society

Important changes have been made to the roles being undertaken by the GHS committee, as shown below, as from the committee meeting on 05/12/07:

Society Officers 2007-08	President	Mr Islwyn Hughes
	Chairman	Mr Terry McCarthy
	Meetings Secretary	Mr David Mills
	Treasurer	Mrs Hazel Waters
	Publicity Officer	Mrs Jean Kember
	Webmaster	Mr Greg Buick
	Journal Sales Manager	Mr Gerald Kember

Very grateful thanks are due to Jean Kember for her tireless efforts to compile a quality lecture programme. The 'fixtures' for 2008-09 are completed, so David Mills has a short respite before his task begins in earnest – but I have every confidence that he will prove an able successor. One of the new roles; webmaster, is self-evident and we wish Greg Buick well in his work. Concerns had been expressed by many on the committee about distribution and sales of the Journal. Gerald offered to take-on this co-ordinating role. So if you need any copies see Gerald, but please do not be surprised if you are also presented with an invoice, a step felt necessary to ensure we have an identifiable accounting trail – important for future grant applications.

Membership - £6 per year – non members are welcome, but a contribution of £1 per lecture would be appreciated to defray expenses.

Meetings Scheduled for 2007-08.

2008	27 February	Bedwelly	David Mills
	26 March	Sir Francis Drake, Part III	Tudor Fisher
	30 April	The Silures	Ray Howells
	28 May	The Management of the Gelligaer Estates in the 1600s.	Annie Owen
	25 June	A.G.M.	

Local history groups - Publication launches

Since issue no. 8 the Chairman has been invited to and attended two publication launches:

- Caerphilly Local History Society – Harry Andrews formally launched the 8th Volume of their Journal during the celebration of the Society's 50th anniversary in Caerphilly Castle last December. Articles include; Recollections of Wartime Caerphilly, The Libraries that Never Were, Underhill Buildings Fire of 1922, Rudry Corn Mill, Corbetts of Pwllypant and the Bute connection, Public Houses of Caerphilly. It is good value at £5.50 – available from the Secretary, Mrs D. Williams.
- WEA class at Pontsticill, launched their copiously illustrated and informative book, 'Taf Fechan Valley: A Local History', in January. It is the culmination of five years work, by a class led by Mrs Annie Owen, from whom copies may be obtained. The book achieves its stated aims admirably to provide a detailed analysis of how and why the Taf Fechan Valley changed between 1850 and the present day.

Gwent Family History Society Research Trips 2008:

27 March	Thursday	Bristol City & Somerset Record Offices
10 May	Saturday	National Archives & Family Records Centre - both at Kew

GHS Members welcome – details 01495 223995 or trips@gwentfhs.info

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