Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)
Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog
Newsletter 89 - Autumn 2020

MYNYDD ILLTYD and Jottings by Charles Wells

This month on our website

Members' Interests

These have been updated for 2020 and can be seen in the Member's area of our website.

My father's appointment as Clerk of Breconshire County Council in 1946 was a shock to many, not least my mother, as he was a non-Welsh speaking Englishman and, except for a distant relative who had once lived in Llanfaes, had no previous connection with Breconshire at all, or Wales for that matter. Nevertheless, once in post, he diligently attended Welsh lessons in the Guildhall, in the company of newly arrived nuns from Ireland and others, and became quite proficient in the language, as I did myself but now cannot remember a word. Nevertheless, we were still regarded as simply '***saes***', which was often hissed at my mother as she passed along the street.

Although not a Roman Catholic, I was enrolled at St. David's Convent just before the Daughters of the Holy Spirit handed over to the Ursulines of Thurles. The White Sisters were gentle souls who did little to curb the natural enthusiasm of a six-year-old, but the Ursuline's were a far more formidable lot and it was not too long before I was in regular trouble. Quick to use the ruler for the slightest misdemeanour, across hand or leg, I thought it all most unfair, although undoubtedly justified. It was after one such altercation that I rushed howling from the school and sought refuge in the museum opposite. Fusty and dusty, this haven of tranquillity and wonderment was to become a regular haunt for many years to come. It was also the start of my lifelong interest in natural history.

Prominently displayed for sale at the front of the curator's cubbyhole was a copy of Edward Cambridge Phillips's *The Birds of Breconshire*, with a splendid photograph of a nesting buzzard on the front cover. How I coveted that book and the following year, after a debilitating bout of measles, I persuaded an overindulgent grandfather to send me the money to buy it. I was over the moon.

As one of the very few Welsh county avifaunas of the 19th century, it is an invaluable work despite Phillips' preparedness to accept all records communicated to him with little further investigation. Many is the time that I thought he had sent me on a wild goose chase!

He was born in Wiltshire in 1840, made his home in Breconshire and was, for over 60 years, the Justices' Clerk of the Defynnog and Talgarth petty sessional divisions. He and his wife, a squire's daughter from Carmarthenshire, lived near Brecon for 40 years but then, finally, moved to Hay where he died in 1931.

Initially, our garden in Camden Road, and the fields behind, provided sufficient birdwatching interest to keep me occupied. Finches and tits of all varieties chattered merrily in the fruit trees, and blackcap, redstart, butcher-bird and jay were regular visitors. Occasionally, a buzzard from nearby Slwch Tump would alight on a rotting tree in the garden to rest from its endless wheeling overhead and in the autumn flocks of fieldfares and redwings from northern climes would fly in to spend the winter in neighbouring fields, feasting on the berries in surrounding hedges.

A highlight of the summer was the arrival of the bird catcher who would skilfully lay his nets in the field immediately behind our house, where once there had been a tennis court, to capture the unwary charms of

goldfinches that swooped in to feed upon the thistles. It was quite idyllic, but where were curlew, kite and plover?

Eventually, after much badgering, my father took me to Mynydd Illtyd. What a revelation! This was more the habitat that the eminent Mr. Phillips described. The wild, brooding upland was home to herds of curlew, deserts of lapwings, exaltations of larks, and wisps of snipe: all collective nouns drummed into me by the Ursulines. The haunting, melancholy call of the curlew, echoing across that windswept landscape remains with me to this day. After that, I was to spend many happy hours logging the bird species of Mynydd Illtyd.

Curlew, lapwing, wheatear and raven were quite common, but water rail and spotted crake eluded me for years, although I could hear from time to time the crake's 'hwitt hwitt hwitt', a single note repeated at short intervals which sounds like a small whip being cracked.

My main mission, however, was to spot a merlin, a very shy and rare bird of prey. Then, one day, I stumbled across a nest: the next five minutes were one of the most exciting moments of my life as the male merlin berated me, circling wildly above my head shrieking 'quik-ik-ik'. Nirvana!

Illtyd Pools were another source of fascination, as dragonflies and damselflies skimmed the rippling waters. It was here that I would regularly bump into Dr. David Kyle, who lived in a large house at the Cerrigcochion end of Alexandra Road, next to that of the solicitor John de Winton, I think, who taught me much about submarine warfare whilst I was recuperating from measles: it still amazes me that he had the time and patience to indulge the mind of an enquiring child.

With his large collecting net sweeping this way and that way, I was rather in awe of Dr. Kyle, who I later learned was a noted authority on *Anisoptera*, but he too was prepared to answer my endless questions: I learnt much, and the study of dragonflies was added to my list of interests.

By the time I was able to make my own way by bicycle to Mynydd Illtyd, I was quite familiar with several of the 'Commoners' who had sheep roaming the ground. As one sheep looked much like another to me, I was curious to learn how they knew whose sheep was whose: "Simple. Ear Notches. Your dad wrote the Identification Guide." That I didn't know!

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The National Archives

On July 21st the reading rooms at Kew will reopen after being closed due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

The Archives will be offering limited access to parts of the building and services will operate differently for the time being.

All visits must be pre-booked and all documents to be ordered in advance

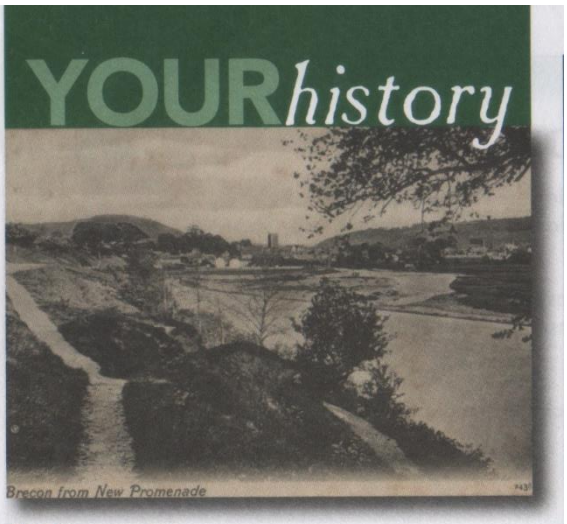
There will be a new document delivery system in place to protect staff and to ensure correct handling of all documents

A one way system will be in place around the building with signage to remind users of the social distancing requirements

Free downloads of digital collection on their website will continue to be available for the moment. For more information go to www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/coronavirus-update

The Beacon

This free A5 monthly glossy magazine distributed in Brecon and its surrounding villages contains a "Your History" column, contributed by the BLFHS, which often offers an interesting article about the area. There is a pause in articles at present so here is a throwback to 2014



The Promendade

This postcard has a 1909 postmark.

The weir across the River Usk from the Boat House to Newton Farm was created when the Canal was built in 1800. Water for the Canal goes under the town through a pipe which can be seen alongside the Honddu bridge at Watergate.

The Castle of Brecon Hotel advertised one of the attractions of the town being the walk 'on the green sward along the banks of the Newton Pool, to watch the Salmon jump'.

There was a proposal in July 1866 to install two new seats overlooking the Pool. The local newspaper reports that ladies would not be able to enjoy the walk to the new seats because of the bathing 'at all hours'. The pond, Newton Pool, created behind the weir was perfect for swimming (probably by men and not always wearing swimming costumes).

In 1894 an eisteddfod was held in Brecon to raise funds to improve the boating facilities and to create the Promenade walk along the river. However it seems to have taken some years to complete the work as in 1919 the Council discussed 'the disgraceful condition of the Promenade'. The work had been started before the war but not completed.

Fortunately the work was finished and, over 100 years since it was first proposed, The Promenade continues to be a popular walk along the River Usk.

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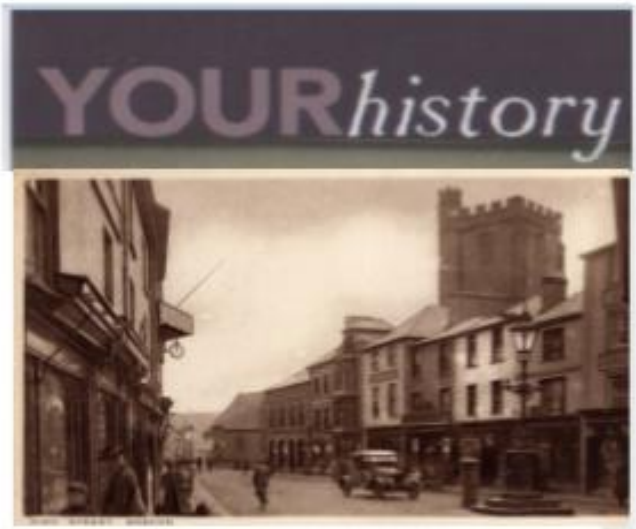

The Games Fountain

On 28th March 1878 a new drinking fountain was officially opened in Brecon. It was located in front of The Old Bank in the High Street and was erected by Mr William Games a former mayor of the town.

A newspaper report of the occasion states that 1,400 school children were given tea in the Market Hall. All the shops closed at noon and bunting was displayed in the streets. In the evening Mr Games provided a banquet at The Castle Hotel for 180 inhabitants including Mr Gwynne Holford M.P.

The fountain was made of bronze to a design by George Hay, sculptor of The Watton. It was cast by Mr J E Nott who had a foundry in Bell Lane behind the shop now occupied by St David's Foundation. The description was given as "the fountain is an ornamental one, surmounted with hieroglyphics and three globe lamps, stands about 17 feet high from base to the top. The base is of Forest of Dean stone. There are drinking cups on two sides, and also drinking troughs for dogs."

We have been told that the Fountain was moved to the Promenade sometime in the 1930's and then it disappeared. No-one seems to know what happened to it – any ideas?

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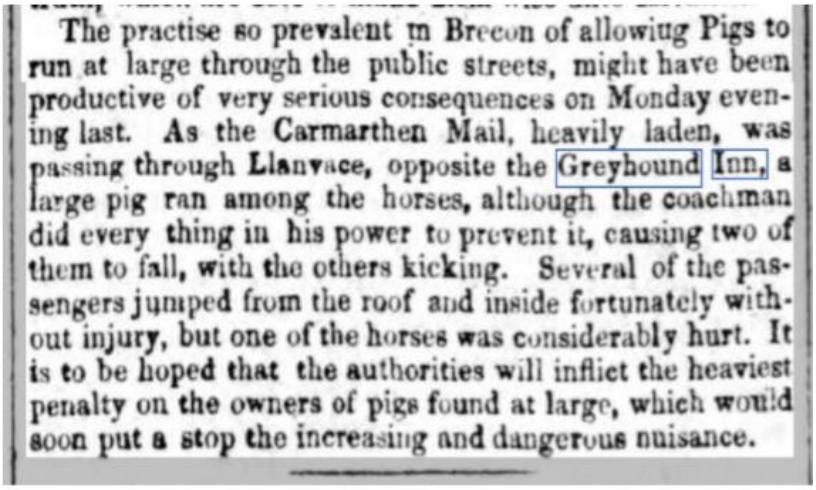
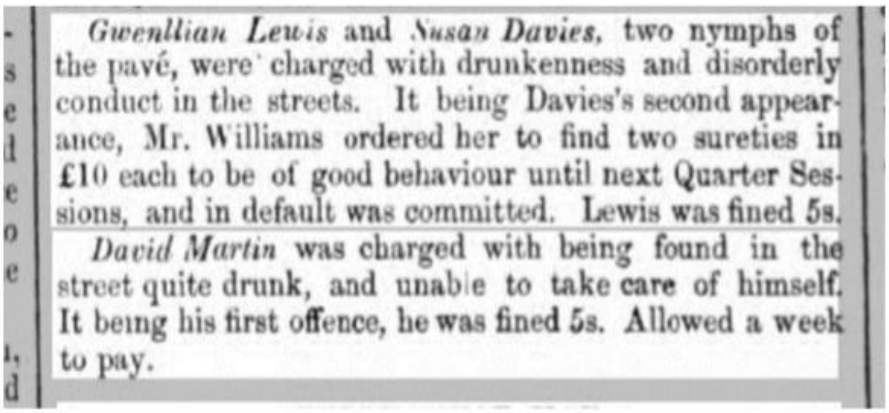
A few interesting newspaper reports and an unusual view of the Struet.



The practise so prevalent in Brecon of allowing Pigs to run at large through the public streets, might have been productive of very serious consequences on Monday evening last. As the Carmarthen Mail, heavily laden, was passing through Llanvace, opposite the Greyhound Inn, a large pig ran among the horses, although the coachman did every thing in his power to prevent it, causing two of them to fall, with the others kicking. Several of the passengers jumped from the roof and inside fortunately without injury, but one of the horses was considerably hurt. It is to be hoped that the authorities will inflict the heaviest penalty on the owners of pigs found at large, which would soon put a stop the increasing and dangerous nuisance.

Silurian, Cardiff, Merthyr, and Brecon Mercury, and South Wales General Advertiser 27 September 1845 page 3



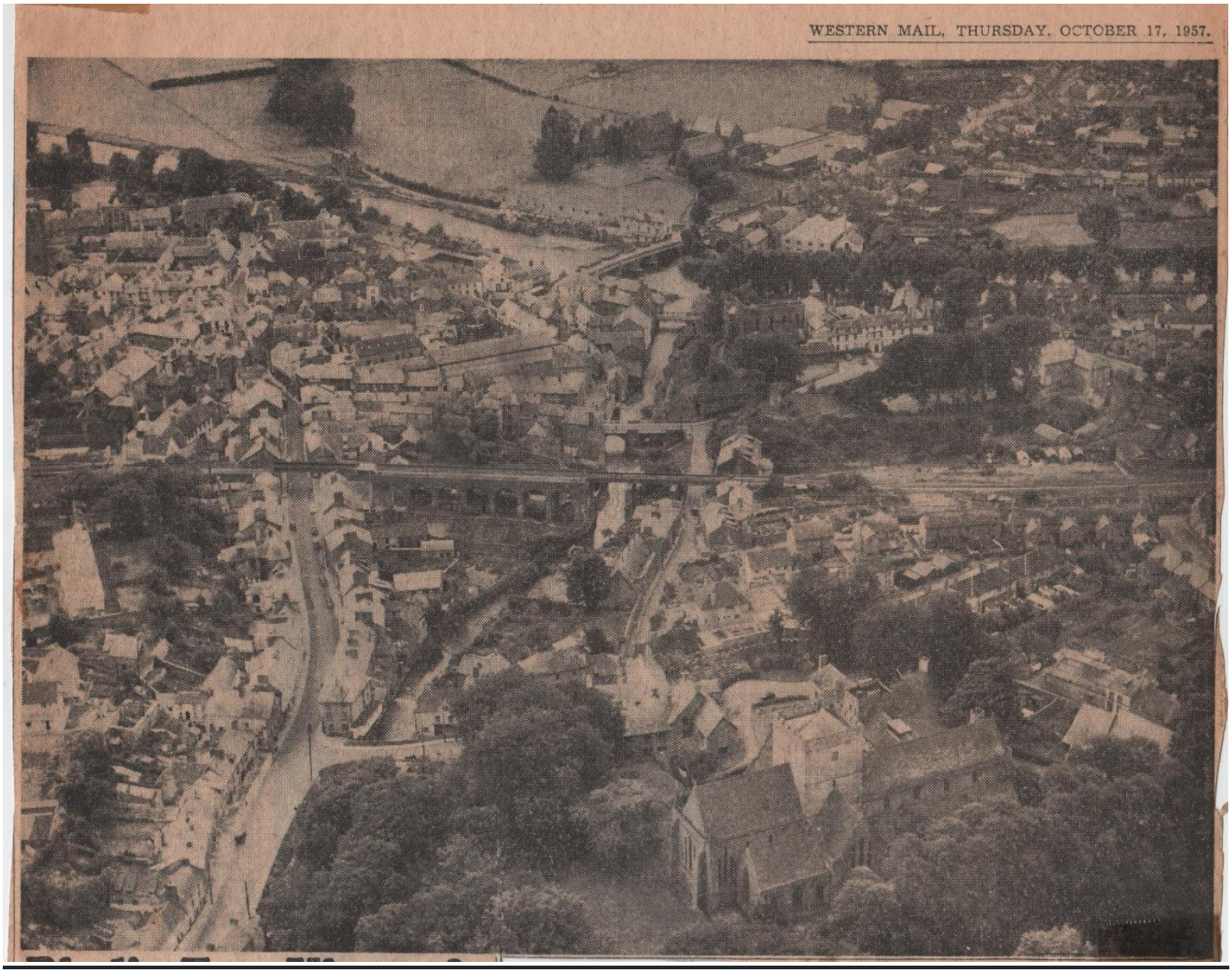
Gwenllian Lewis and *Susan Davies*, two nymphs of the pavé, were charged with drunkenness and disorderly conduct in the streets. It being Davies's second appearance, Mr. Williams ordered her to find two sureties in £10 each to be of good behaviour until next Quarter Sessions, and in default was committed. Lewis was fined 5s.

David Martin was charged with being found in the street quite drunk, and unable to take care of himself. It being his first offence, he was fined 5s. Allowed a week to pay.

Silurian, Cardiff, Merthyr, and Brecon Mercury, and South Wales General Advertiser 26 March 1853 page 3

Newspapers for Wales can be searched and viewed on the following Websites:

1. *National Library of Wales https://newspapers.library.wales/*
2. *If you subscribe to Find My Past, Brecknock newspapers can be found on the newspaper section of the Site. These cover dates outside those available on the NLW website.*
3. *The British Newspaper Archive site https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/ also has newspapers for Wales and remember that the Hereford Times also covered local news in Wales. It is a subscription site but can be searched for free.*



The Struet from the air – 1950s

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Wilkins Bank. Brecon

Wilkins Bank was one of the early banks in Wales, being started in Brecon in 1778 by a John Wilkins whose family had made their money while in India with the East India Company. It progressed steadily and opened branches in Merthyr Tydfil, then in Cardigan, Carmarthen and Haverfordwest.

In 1830 the bank changed its name to The Old Bank, and the building it used is nowadays Lloyds Bank in the High St. I remember when a boy the signs above the door used to read both "The Old Bank" and "Lloyds Bank."

The bank did well, and in 1890 it was sold to Lloyds Bank. However in 1866 there had been a concerted run on the bank's funds as a result of a massive financial collapse in London; that of Overend, Gurney & Co. Apparently about 100 Brecon depositors rushed to the Old Bank, claiming they needed their funds for building projects, like water mills, or new houses and suchlike. However, the bank had sufficient funds to meet the demands, and after about a week the panic was over and the depositors were invited to reinvest with the bank: just about everyone of them did so, presumably with their confidence in the bank reinforced.

My real reason for putting pen to paper on this is a story that has come down through our family about that run on the bank.

Recalling where the bank is, some of you will also remember that just across the High St, very narrow at the point, was Fryer's Ironmongery (now Gibb Outdoors). I remember it being owned by Mr. & Mrs. Doug Fryer, and the top of Ship St used to be adorned with all the bits and pieces of a country ironmonger: buckets, ladders, spades, wheelbarrows, scythes, you name it. Now possibly in 1866 it was owned by his father or grandfather, who had a very good trade with the local farmers and businesses which involved his giving them revolving credit: they bought as needed, and paid when they could, so a lot of trust was involved, both ways.

The other key factor to all this is that under the narrow High St at that point both the ironmonger's and the bank had(have?) vaults. When the run started, a lot of the customers having taken their money out of the bank wondered what they should do with their crocks of gold, for that is what they had in those days. To put it for safe keeping, yes, but in a place where they had confidence, rather than under the floorboards or mattress: why not with the ironmonger whom they knew and trusted implicitly?

Brecon is a small town and people quickly realised what was going on, which probably exacerbated the panic. It says much for the astuteness of both the Bank owners and the ironmonger that they came quickly to an arrangement when they realised what was happening. An opening was made in the separating wall between the two sets of vaults, and as money was handed in at the shop, it was passed under the street back into the bank's vaults: the bank had its money back, and Mr Fryer could sleep soundly having put the money safely into a proper bank vault! (It was vice versa when the money was reinvested in the bank, of course, and afterwards the opening was discretely blocked up again.) So it's not surprising that there was enough cash to meet the demands on the bank, and the day was saved.

Now I pass this on as an amusing apocryphal story. As I said, it has come down through my family and I have no real reason for doubting it, given that my great-grandfather Ben Jenkins of the Watton Saw Mills had been the biggest employer in the town in his day (He died in 1906), and so would have been friendly with the movers and shakers of the town and privy to their confidences.

But true or not, it's a lovely story, don't you think?

David Jenkins

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Some stray items from the Glamorgan Archives

CHURCH RECORDS

Bethania Congregational Church. Records 1967-72. Ref: D/782/16

REMOVAL ORDERS

Examination of Sarah Davies. Order of Removal from Merthyr Tydfil to Merthyr Cynog (co. Brecon).
Notice of appeal. Spring 1842. Ref: DXEO/4

WILLS

Probate of the will of Elizabeth Maund of the Struet, Brecon. Spr. 21 September 1869. Proved 7th July 1879. Ref: DXGE47/4

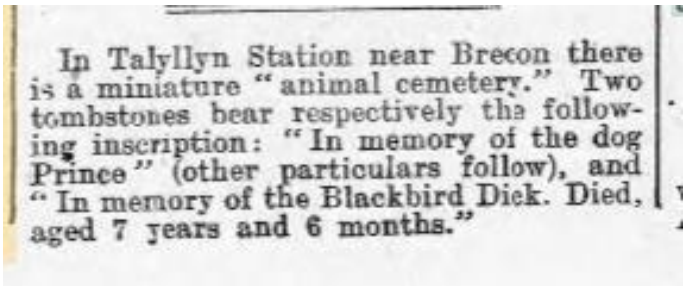
Probate of the will of Ann Maund of the Struet, Brecon. Spr. 5th May 1879. Proved 10th September 1883.

ROADS

Account Book of the Breconshire Turnpike Trust 1827-1830. Ref: CL/MS/4/443

Animal Gravestones

There are many instances of pets being given proper burials with proper gravestones. Most are found in the grounds of the great estates but some can be found in more unusual places. Talyllyn Railway Station near Brecon has two poignant gravestones to the memory of "Dick" the blackbird and a dog called Prince who died in 1888 aged 7 years. The graves were presumably tended until the station was closed during the Beeching cuts and have now become overgrown and forgotten. One wonders who Prince belonged to and what the story of "Dick" the blackbird was. One might also wonder what the significance of the slate stone marked "Reserved for Staff" was – I am not sure it was intended to suggest a human burial plot but who knows!



In Talyllyn Station near Brecon there is a miniature "animal cemetery." Two tombstones bear respectively the following inscription: "In memory of the dog Prince" (other particulars follow), and "In memory of the Blackbird Dick. Died, aged 7 years and 6 months."

This random mention of the cemetery can be found in the Aberdare Leader 28th May 1910 but there is no further information about either Prince or Dick the blackbird which is a shame.

Annual General Meeting and Chairperson's Report

The AGM of the Breconshire Local & Family History Society took place through a postal and email vote this year.

The minutes of the AGM held in June 2019 were approved and can be seen on the BLFHS website

The Financial Report for the period 1st June 2019 – 31st May 2020 was agreed.

The following members were voted to serve on the Committee for the coming year:

Chair	Glen Harris	Treasurer	Eirwen Jones
Secretary	Alison Noble	Membership Secretary	Hilary Williams
Newsletter Editor	Sue Ashton	Web Master	Jennie Williams
Programme Secretary	Margaret Sommers	Photograph Editor	Rob Eckley

The members did not raise any queries or questions about the business of the Society in the past year.

The Committee thanked all the members for taking part in this AGM and look forward to working for the Society in the coming year.

Chairperson's Report

This Report covers the period from June 2019 to May 2020 and records a number of changes for our Society.

Following a stressful period, we were able to move to our new home for meetings at "y Gaer", the new Museum/Library complex in Glamorgan Street.

June: At the 2019 AGM the future looked bright. Our programme of speakers and site visits had been arranged. The move to "y Gaer" was eagerly looked forward to.

July: A very successful visit was made to the Llanwrtyd & District Heritage Centre, a history of the building and the setting up of the centre was given. Refreshments and a guided tour of the town followed.

August: Unfortunately, our Speaker, Ieuan Evans was taken seriously ill and so our eagerly awaited talk on Swansea Pottery had to be cancelled. Sadly, Ieuan has recently passed away and we pass on our sympathy to Gwyneth, his widow.

September: We visited the new and much bigger and better facility at Powys Archives at Llandrindod Wells. Our members were impressed by the facilities there and the helpful and informed staff.

October: Arthur Gwyn gave an interesting Talk on the Great War, in which he compared the history with the fictional accounts of that War. This led to much audience discussion.

November: Monsignor Clyde Hughes Johnson spoke about the importance of Brecon town and the Brecon area in the preservation of the Catholic faith during the four centuries of anti-Catholic legislation.

Following a welcome Christmas break, and a delay in the opening of "y Gaer", meetings got briefly back to normal with the February and March meetings:

February: The great day finally arrived and we were given a guided tour of "y Gaer" by the Curator Nigel Blackmore. Our members were much impressed by what was there and Nigel's knowledge and enthusiasm. We also saw our new home where our meetings in the future would take place.

March: Our first talk in "y Gaer", given to a full house by Rowena Akinyemi on Giraldus Cambrensis.

April: The Lock Down and no more talks or site visits. That did not mean that the Society was idle. • Jennie our Webmaster continued up loading the website onto its new platform • Hilary fielded many research queries from members. • Hilary and Member Steve Morris began a project of recording and developing a history of each public house, inn etc. which has existed in the three parishes of Brecon i.e. St David's Within [Llanfaes], St John's and St Mary's. It is hoped that a combined publications and website section will be the outcome of the research. • Alison is cooperating with a neighbour to research the history of the communities on Mynydd Illtyd, which spans the Parishes of Defynnog, Llanspyddid and St David's Without.

The Future.

As the Covid 19 pandemic declines, we hope to move to a more normal way of life and ensure that BLFHS can resume its important role in discovering our family histories and Breconshire's past.

Glen Harris

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Meeting Reports

Meetings have been suspended for the time being due to the Covid-19 virus.
Website

Website

Our website address is www.blfhs.co.uk

Facebook

The society now has a Facebook page. Check it out at www.facebook.com/breconblfhs

Future Meetings

Meetings for the foreseeable future have been cancelled in the light of developments around the "Covid-19" virus.

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