



Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)

Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog

Newsletter 93 - Autumn 2021

Dinas Orphanage Brecon

Before 1834 orphaned, poor or destitute children were cared for in a variety of settings largely instituted by religious or charitable organisations. With the coming of the 1834 Poor Law the State also became an additional provider for these children although care could be scattered and families could be separated. The coming of the Poor Law Unions saw the creation of workhouses to help the poor but there was no real consideration of the needs of children and the workhouse was for many a last resort and one in which they did not want their children to be raised.

By the 1840's recognition of this saw a move away from placing children

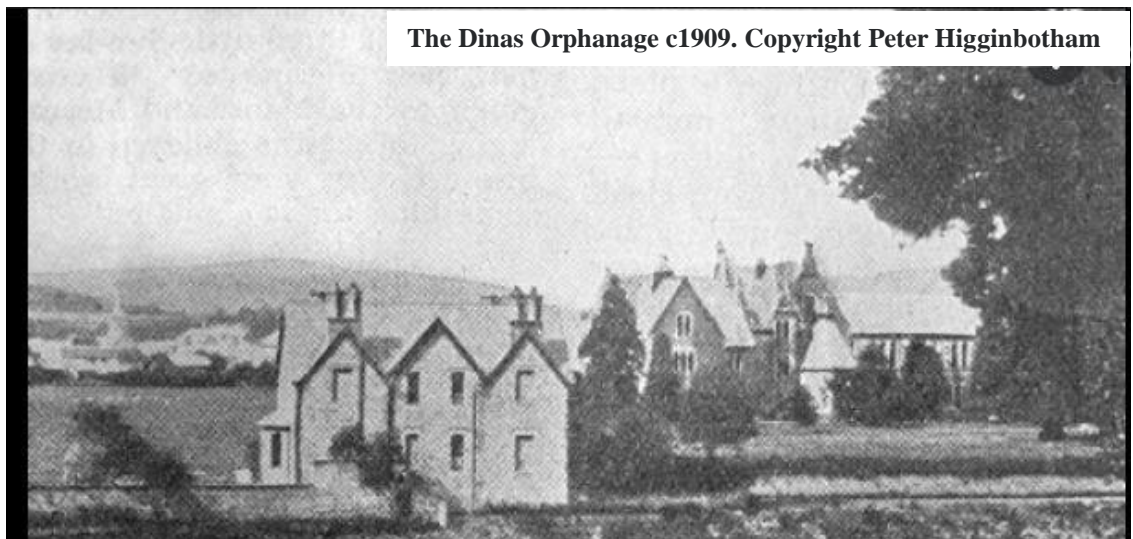
in a workhouse to one which placed a child in a more appropriate setting where they could receive support and training to enable them to find work. These institutions ranged from those housing large numbers of children to those caring for small groups in a community setting. If there was no suitable home a child could be 'fostered out' with the Poor Law Union paying for their upkeep. Not all children who attended these homes were orphans. Many came from families who had struck hard times such as losing employment or losing one parent. Often the children left behind were young and could not be cared for properly. Placing them in a home offered them the best hope of growing up and achieving something.

The Dinas Orphanage in Brecon was one of the many "scattered" homes which were provided locally although the children housed in them were often from much further afield. It was set up in 1882 but an article in Brycheiniog¹ suggests that there was an earlier home in Dinas Row set up by John Lloyd, an East India Company Captain, and his wife Elizabeth. I have found no records of this and there is no Dinas Row in any Census. However, Elizabeth Lloyd certainly was aware of the need to support orphaned and destitute girls as her Account book contains an entry in 1807 for a subscription to the Chari[ty] [for] girls of 10s 6d. Katherine Conway Lloyd, her grandson's wife, may have been influenced by this as she was instrumental in establishing the Orphanage 1882. It is certainly possible that she knew of the earlier home. An orphanage may well have existed in Dinas Row but the area was well known for flooding and at some point the whole area was demolished so, perhaps was the orphanage.

With the help of the Girls Friendly Society Katherine Eliza Lloyd worked tirelessly to establish Dinas and in 1881 the South Wales News² reported that the new orphanage was being constructed in "a corner of the estate set aside for the purpose. A report in the Brecon County Times³ suggests that the home was quite palatial in some senses. It was

This month on our website

Details of the new booklet containing the MI's for St Illtyd's Church, Myndd Illtyd. Members can also access the MI's on our website.



The Dinas Orphanage c1909. Copyright Peter Higginbotham

designed by the Brecon County Surveyor, William Williams and built by the Llanfaes firm William & Sons in the Elizabethan style at a cost of £500. The mullions were of chiseled stone whilst the walls were of hammered dressed stone. Inside there was a double aspect day room, a large kitchen with a cooking range and wood fired stove, a pantry, scullery, porch and an entrance lobby completed the downstairs. Upstairs was a dormitory, sickroom, matron's room and a toilet. The rooms were reported as airy and light with good ventilation and head height. Entrance to the home was through large iron gates flanked by two large stone pillars. Outside there were kitchen and flower gardens. For the children who boarded it must have seemed like heaven on earth.

In May 1882 the new orphanage opened, its purpose being "the reception and maintenance of children bereft of both or one of their parents" and with a goal of training the children until they were "fit for service". Set up in 1875 by the Anglican Society to support girls and young women in England and Wales the Girls Friendly Society was one of the oldest charities of its kind and is still in existence today. Orphanages were set up within the parish framework and with the agreement of the parish priest, the church playing a central role and all children being versed in the teachings of the church.

Because Mrs Conway Lloyd died before the Orphanage opened there was no formal ceremony until later in the year. The Brecon County Times reports on this ceremony which took place on the 1st August of 1882.⁴ Initially four girls were admitted and the first Matron was a Mrs Knowles.

DINAS ORPHAN HOME.—We understand that the object of this Home, established in connection with the Girls' Friendly Society, to be as follows:—The Dinas Orphan Home was founded by the late Mrs Lloyd, of Dinas. It is intended for the reception and maintenance of children bereft of both, or of one of their parents. Preference will be given to the former. The Home is established for the education of the children, and training them for domestic service, under the management of a careful resident matron. Every care is bestowed upon the religious as well as moral training of the children. The children are received between the ages of six and ten years, and remain in the home until fit for service, when suitable situations are provided for them. A G.F.S. member can always be received at the Home in case of her changing her place, provided there is accommodation at the Orphanage at the time. She will be required to make some weekly payment for her board. The Home was opened May 26th, 1882. The officers are—Treasurer, Col. T. C. Lloyd, Dinas, near Brecon; superintendent, Miss De Winton, Buckingham Place, Brecon; secretary, Mrs John Jones, 13, Street, Brecon; matron, Mrs Knowles, Dinas Orphan Home, Brecon. The Home will be open for visitors every alternate Wednesday from 3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Books from the G.F.S. Library will be given out every Thursday from

Brecon County Times. 3rd June 1882. p.8

For its first twenty years the orphanage would remain the responsibility of the GFS but in 1909 it became the responsibility of the Waifs and Strays Society. This had been founded in 1881 by Edward de Montjoie Rudolf. He was a civil servant who with his brother ran a Sunday school in St Anne's South Lambeth. After noticing two children who regularly attended were missing he sought them out only to find them in a terrible state and starving. After seeking a church home in which to place the two children he discovered that there were few around so with his brother decided to set up his own. In 1881 the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed to be the President of his Society which became known as the Church of England Central Home for Waifs and Strays. The first children were received into the care of the home in 1882. After this the Society grew very quickly and by 1890 had 35 homes rising to 93 by 1905.

In 1893 the charity changed its name to the Church of England incorporated Society for providing homes for waifs and strays then in 1982 it became The Children's Society.

Dinas Orphanage was able to care for up to eight young girls and to prepare them for a life in service. During this period employment opportunities for girls were limited and most either went into service or became teachers. The orphanage offered a supported route into these and for the children fortunate enough to be boarded it was a life-line. In early 1882 the orphanage became Certified which meant that it could take children boarded out by the Guardians of the Poor who administered the poor relief and workhouse system. Each child taken in by the home was charged at 5 shillings which was either paid by the Charity on behalf of the child or by the local Poor Law Union if the family were unable to pay.

By all accounts the children were treated well. The daily routines were strictly adhered to but there seems to have been time for both work and play. The eldest girls carried out most of the daily housework and laundry whilst the younger

children attended the local school. During the winter evenings the girls would work on their embroidery making special items which could be sold to raise money. Weekly singing lessons were also organized and all the girls attended the weekly church service on Sundays. Many of the homes were allowed to have animals and Dinas was no exception welcoming a cat in 1918⁵ ostensibly to keep the mice down but nevertheless perhaps a comfort for children who had little in the way of family.

Little is documented about the first ten years of the Orphanage as its opening was just after the 1881 Census. But the Census returns of 1891, 1901 and 1911 do give a snapshot of the girls taken in by the orphanage most of whom came not from the local area but from quite far afield. In 1891 six girls are boarding ranging in age from 14yrs to 3yrs, two of whom are sisters. The Matron was one Harriet Fennell who was born in Lacock, Wiltshire to parents John, a wood merchant, and Rebecca Fennell. She seems to have started out in service working as an under housemaid for the Audry family in Lacock. By 1881 she had moved on and was working as a general servant in Bristol in the house of Elizabeth Garnett. At some point she applied for the job of Matron and was approved as suitable. It is likely that she took over from Jane Watkins who in March 1891 was recorded as having died in her bed at the Orphanage, discovered by one of her girls⁶. She had been Matron for barely eight months. By 1901 Harriet had left the Orphanage and taken up residence with her brother becoming his housekeeper. The 1911 Census records that she remained with him.

Of the six girls boarding in 1891 two were siblings; Edith Sage, 14yrs, and her sister Eliza Mary Sage who was 11 yrs old. They came from Sutton in Surrey and were the children of Henry Sage, a labourer, and his wife Mary. The family seems to have been a small one for the times with only the two girls appearing in the 1881 Census. The parents do not appear in any Census going forward so it's possible that the girls were sent to the Orphanage as orphans. This was not the case for all of the children who found themselves at Dinas. Many came from families where there were just too many children to care for and others because one or other parent died. In the latter cases it was often the youngest who were sent to the orphanage or boarded out as foster children.

Edith left the orphanage and did indeed go into service. In the 1901 Census she is a housemaid in for Alfred Schwabe, a stockbroker, living in Northamptonshire. She does not appear in the Censuses after this date and a marriage or death hasn't been found.

Fanny Fisher was another girl who was boarded at Dinas with her sister Adelaide Maud. Both were born in Swindon to parents Richard, a millwright, and Susannah. Susannah was his second wife who he married only a year after his first wife died. One wonders if this was necessity as he had three children to care for. By 1871 the children by his first wife have been separated out, some to live with his parents and some to live with his wife Susannah's parents. The 1881 Census show Richard now had a new family; Fanny, 3yrs old and her five brothers. Adelaide her only sister wasn't born until 1884. In 1885 their mother Susannah died followed by their father Richard in 1889. This perhaps is what precipitated sending Adelaide and Fanny to Dinas Orphanage. Both girls presumably stayed at Dinas until they were of an age to take up employment in Service as by 1901 Fanny is a housemaid in Stradey Castle, Llanelly and Adelaide is a kitchenmaid at Treberfydd Mansion in Llangasty-tal-y-llyn. In 1907 Fanny married James Henry Ravenhill at Maindee, Monmouthshire and in 1905 Adelaide married Reubon John Banks at St Marks in Swindon.

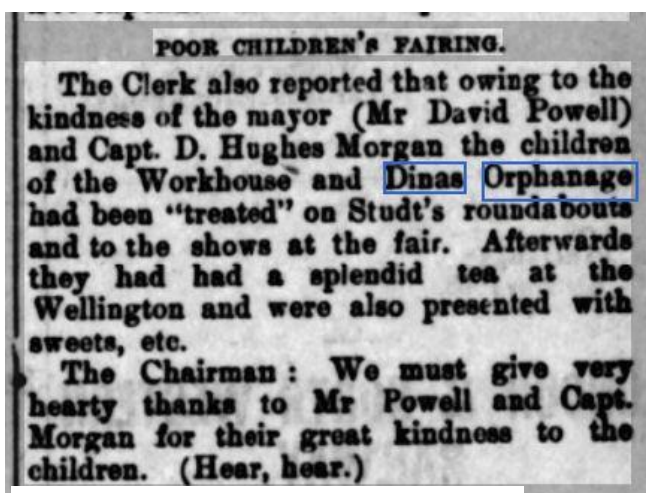
Charity Ellen Sabine seems to have been the only child who spent her whole life in care. She was born in London in 1878 and in 1881 she is found in the Census as an "inmate" of the North Bank Infant Nursery in St Marylebone, London. No birth record has been found for her and when she married in 1917 to George William Atkinson, a widower, no father is noted on her marriage register entry. Perhaps she was a child given up at birth.

By 1901 the orphanage had a new Matron, Ruth Hedley, who came from Todmorden in Yorkshire. She was older than the previous Matron and had been living with her parents until at least 1891 where she lists her occupation as Dressmaker. Although it seem that in general none of the Matrons had any formal education in running an Orphanage a report in the Radnor Express for 1904⁷ announces that Ruth was awarded a certificate from the Brecon Ladies Ambulance and Nursery Association suggesting she was well aware of the need to keep her charges healthy and safe. However, tragedy seems to have struck the Orphanage Matron again, as in 1911 she is recorded as a patient in the Robinson Kay Home for Incurables in Bury cited as having "paralysis". There is no available information as to how she ended up here or in this situation but it is a sad end to her life of service.

As with previous Census entries the 1901 lists eight girls born in various places around England and Wales. Mabel Morgan and her elder sister Marion were born in Hay, Breconshire, whilst Ethel Patrick was a British Subject born in India.

In 1909 the Orphanage was taken over by the Church of England incorporated Society for providing homes for waifs and strays who would be responsible for it until 1918 when it closed.

By 1911 Gertrude Alice Smith is in charge. She was from Rotherhithe in London having been previously a general servant in the House of Mercy in Clewer, Windsor. At this time the Orphanage had seven girls boarding; two children were described as "trained for service" and the remainder were at school. Minnie Holton one of the oldest children at 15 yrs old had probably entered the orphanage after the death of her mother in 1908. She was one of nine children the youngest being Eliza born in 1908, suggesting that perhaps the mother died in or as a result of childbirth. Tom their father doubtless found it hard to look after the family, particularly the very youngest, so it's not surprising to find that whilst Minnie entered the Dinas Orphanage her sisters Catherine, Violet and Eliza were sent to St Saviour's House in Leeds. This was run by the Sisters of the Poor. One wonders if siblings ever came together again after being separated for so long. As was common a widowed father often remarried but then began a second family often leaving little to support those of his first wife. Tom Holton, Minnie's father did remarry to a Spanish citizen, Leila Carrpacquary, but in 1911 the Census shows that most of the children born to his first marriage were still living with him. Perhaps he sent the youngest girls away in the knowledge that they would receive schooling and the chance of employment.



Brecon County Times. 14th Nov.1902.

Although the girls led a life of strict routine there were times when they enjoyed trips out taking part in local festivals which were connected with the local Church of England Temperance Society. In 1903 a number of the girls listed as being boarders at Dinas in 1901; Mary Dobyne, Mabel and Marion Morgan, Clara Murray and Ethel Patrick, are reported to have taken part in the maypole dancing⁸.

In 1902⁹ it was reported that a number of the children from the workhouse and from Dinas Orphanage had been treated to a trip to the fair where they were able to the fairground and were allowed to have a go on the steam roundabout.

What fun it must have been for them. Tea was sometimes taken with supporters of the Orphanage and on one occasion they were given a Christmas treat and given gifts and small presents.



Brecon County Times 30th July 1886 p.5

The local community was an obvious supporter of the Orphanage and there were many instances of individuals organizing concerts and bric-à-brac fairs to raise money for its upkeep. In 1881 just prior to the opening of Dinas a local artist donated a copy of his painting to be auctioned to raise funds. The painting was apparently displayed in the local chemist's shop to bring it to its widest audience before being sold, for what one hopes was a decent amount of money.¹⁰

In general it seems that most of the girls did leave the Orphanage and gain good employment usually in Service. Some of the children have not been traced either before or after their time at Dinas. The Orphanage closed in 1918 and an advertisement offering the house for rent appeared in the Brecon County Times of 26.12.1918 p1

The Dinas Orphanage Christmas Treat.

On Thursday, Dec. 28th, (St. Innocents Day) the lady officers of the above "Home" provided a treat for the children to which the mother of each child was invited to be present, and asked to bring one child with them. The centre of attraction was a beautiful Christmas Tree gaily decorated with flags, &c., its branches being laden with innumerable articles, giving to the whole when lighted a fairy like appearance. After every one had received suitable gifts the company sat down to a sumptuous tea at which ample justice was done to the cake, buns &c, which had been abundantly provided. The merry laughter, which was kept up by the young folks proved the games were fully appreciated. At 7-30 p.m. the visitors, those who had got up the treat, took leave carrying with them the grateful thanks of the bright faced little orphans who through them had spent all evening long to be remembered with delight.

Brecon County Times. 6th Jan. 1883. p.5

References and Sources

1. Captain John Lloyd & Breconshire 1796-1818. Brycheiniog vol 39. 2007. p73
2. South Wales News. 6th Dec. 1881. p.3
3. Brecon County Times. 27th May 1881.p.5
4. Brecon County Times. 5th Aug. 1882. p.5
5. A-Z of Brecon. Places, people, history. Mal Morrison. Amberley Publishing Ltd. 2020.
6. Brecon Times. 27th March 1891.p.4
7. Radnor Express. 7th April 1904. p.8
8. Brecon County Times. 5th June 1903. p.5
9. Brecon County Times. 14th Nov. 1902. p.8
10. South Wales Daily News. 6th Dec. 1881. p.3

Websites

Children's Home. The institutions that became home for Britain's children and young people.

www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BreconWS/

Hidden lives revealed. A virtual archive – children in care 1881-1981

www.hiddenlives.org.uk

A brief look at children in the care of the Children's Society in Victorian Britain.

www.girlsfriendlysociety.org.uk

Sue Ashton. Editor



Don't forget – I am always looking for interesting article subjects so let me know if you have anything you would like to share!!!!

I am looking for interesting subjects on which to base the lead article. If you are passionate about a subject which you think would be interesting to our members please let me know by sending me an email at the usual address editorblfhs@outlook.com

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. Latest look at first gas lighting in Brecon and the advent of electricity

Brecon's First Gas Lighting and when Electricity arrived

In 1822 Benjamin Broadmeadow, a civil engineer from Gloucester, provided a plan to light the streets of Brecon with gas.

There would be 57 separate gas lamps, affixed to properties. Each Ward of the town had its share of lamps. Each lamp, had to be lit, maintained and put out by hand.

Light up would be from Sunset to Sunrise. Each lamp fitting cost about £160 and there was a £2 fee for each lamp per annum.

A later circular advertised the lighting charges per annum for the gas lamp, which had burners with 3 holes:

- sunset until 8pm
£1.1s.0d
- sunset until 10pm
£1.19.0d
- sunset until 11pm
£2.8s.0d
- sunset until sunrise
£4.4s.0d



Gas Lamp. Brecon High Street

Customers had to take out a yearly contract with half a year's rent paid in advance.

Coal gas was stored in the Gasometers situated where Elliot Place is now, next to the canal. Gas was piped into the town to feed the lamps.

In 1856 the Brecon Gas Company was formed. Gas meters were introduced and all the pipe work and lamps renewed. The canal area of the Watton still has names such as Gas Works Lane and Gas Works House.



Gasometer, Brecon

Bringing Electricity to Brecon

Harold Elston set up his "Modern Garage" in the Struet, on the site of the Struet Mill, in January 1916.

In the early 1920s, he constructed a generator driven by the old mill leat, to produce electricity for the garage. He ran cables from the garage to his home on Pendre, the Priory Church [Brecon Cathedral] and some other houses.

During the early 1930s Brecon Town Council built

a generator at the side of the canal near the Slaughter House to provide electricity to the town.

The Shropshire Worcester & Stafford Electric Company ran high voltage cables/pylons from Abergavenny to Brecon and took over the Brecon Town Council Company in the late 1930s.

The old company electricity supply was DC [Direct Current] and the new supply was AC [Alternative Current] so electric motors and other equipment had to be converted.

All electricity companies were nationalised in 1947 and it became more cost effective to supply rural areas with electricity from the National Grid. These areas had relied on their own generators and an accumulator [rechargeable

battery], to power radios, which were recharged at garages.

Connecting to the National Grid was a huge undertaking and the final connection in the Ystradfellte area was made in 2005.

© Breconshire Local & Family History Society



FamilySearch Lookup Service

Family Search are now providing a “look up” service if you cannot get to a local Family History Library. This will enable records which are not online to be checked. The service is not a research service so users will need to give specific details about the record they are interested in. To request an image of a particular record you must fill in a request form. Details of the service can be found at the following web address

<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/library-lookup-service-fhl/>



Annual General Meeting and Chairperson’s Report. 22nd June 2021

The AGM this year was carried out over Zoom as we are still not able to meet in person. The officers were voted in again.

Chairperson’s Report 2021

I am sure that I do not need to remind you of the trying and stressful year we have just been through.

Although we have not had any physical monthly meetings, we have continued to provide the best service we can for our members. Here are examples of our work during lockdown:

- Sue, our Editor, continues to provide an excellent quarterly Newsletter for members. Do contribute if you can.
- Jennie, our Webmaster, keeps our website up to date and deals with any queries which come via our Facebook page.
- Hilary, with the cooperation of other committee members, makes sure that a monthly short article on Brecon History is provided for the local free magazine called “Local Beacon”. These articles are also included in our quarterly newsletters.
- Alison organises the “Breconshire Bitesize” monthly article sent to members. This is a replacement for our lack of monthly meetings.

-
- Hilary continues to provide family history help for any member, so if you need help to find that elusive family member, contact Hilary at blfhsenquiries@gmail.com

Committee members have continued to communicate with each other via telephone, email and Zoom, ensuring that the Society continues to function at this time.

We can but hope that things will continue to improve in the next weeks and months.

Meeting Reports

Meetings have been suspended for the time being due to the Covid-19 virus. Website. We intend to review the situation once the Covid rules are clear.

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. This situation is constantly under review and we will let members know as soon as we have agreed a plan for moving forward.

