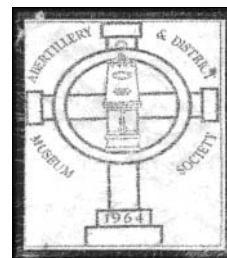


ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



September 2009

Coffee Morning - Wedding Photos

Please come along to our coffee morning on **Saturday 12th September** when the theme is wedding photos. We'd like to have a good display so please bring your (or your family's) wedding photos to the Museum, as soon as possible, so that the display can be organised. It will be interesting to see how many faces we recognise!

Autumn Trip Saturday 26 Sept

Roy Pickford is organising a trip to Wells Cathedral on **Saturday 26th September**. Will you please contact Roy on 01495 213377 or ring the Museum on 01495 211140 (or call in) to put your name down. More details will be available when we have a better idea of numbers.

Lecture Programme – don't forget this takes place on the first Wednesday of the month. We have a talk on 'Rape of the Fair Country' in September, and Roy Noble in October.

Christmas Fair 5th December

Please start collecting items for a bumper event.

Contact Names

Mrs Peggy Bearcroft, Chairperson	01495 213806
Mr Don Bearcroft, Curator	01495 213806
Mr Ron Selway, Vice Chairman	01495 215775
Mr Trevor Cook Secretary- c/o Museum	01495 211140
Mrs Margaret Cook Assistant Secretary	
Mr Bernard Jones, Treasurer	01495 213185
Mrs Enid Dean, Fund raising Secretary	01495 212880
Mrs M Gilson, Schools Liaison	01495 212413
Mrs M Selway, Programme Sec	01495 211960
Mr Roy Pickford, Social Events Sec	01495 213377
Mr Bernard Hill, Asst Curator	01495 212864
Mrs Jen Price (Newsletter)	01633 482851

100 Club We will have a bumper draw at the September lecture. As always, this is a plea to encourage new members - £1 a month, a bargain!

Cordell Country Festival will be held at Blaenavon on 12th -13th September. Well worth a visit; try the Heritage Centre for starters.

Diary Dates

Wednesday 2nd September 2009 – Anniversary of the Rape of the Fair Country by Ivor Beynon.

Saturday 12th September 2009 – 'Wedding Photos' coffee morning

Saturday 26th September 2009 – Autumn trip to Wells Cathedral contact Roy Pickford or call the Museum

Wednesday 7th October 2009 – An Hour with Roy Noble

Saturday 5th December 2009 – Christmas Fair

Lectures start at 7.00pm in the Metropole Theatre, with teas and a chat downstairs in the Museum afterwards. Entry is £2 and the public are most welcome.

Please call at the Museum for more information or watch the Newsletter for coffee mornings and other events .

Museum opening times

The Museum is open to the public, **free of charge**:

Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 1pm 2pm - 4pm

Friday & Saturday 10am - 1pm

Museum phone number **01495 211140**.

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome so please call in as often as you can.

Email address: abertillerymuseum@tiscali.co.uk

Web: www.abertilleryanddistrictmuseum.org.uk

Details of coffee mornings etc are posted on the notice board at the Museum or at the following websites where you can also read the Newsletters:

www.cwmillery.com www.abertillery.net

Thank you GAVO

The Museum Society sends a big thank you to the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations for their generous award of £1512 under the Capital Assistance Grants Scheme. The award was available thanks to Welsh Assembly Government support via the CFAP scheme.

Fund raising August - £174

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Poet's Corner

TO SEE THE SEA

By bus we travelled,
for our first day by the sea,
Organised by a social club,
we children travelled free.

Money clinking in a pocket,
sandwiches to sustain us all day,
With constant excited chatter,
we were sped on our way.

Barry Island was a marvel,
popular day-trippers paradise.
Everything so very different,
to where we'd spent our lives.

Down the crowded beach
we slowly made our way,
Then paddled in calm water,
watching others at their play.

Clouds dodged summer sun,
but dreaded rain kept away,
So there was nothing to spoil,
enjoyment of our special day.

Such a crowded beach with
hardly room to place a deckchair.
It seemed that all South Wales,
had come for a breath of sea air.

Sandwiches eaten, we wandered
past photographers and vendors,
To enter the huge fairground,
with its pleasures and wonders.

Then when the sun sank low,
we wearily boarded our bus,
Singing as we travelled home,
for life seemed very good to us.

Gordon Rowlands, December 2008

Vice Presidents (Annual Subscription £25)

Mr Keith Dykes
Mrs Esme Heal
Mrs Kathleen Davies
Mrs Margaret Herbert
Mrs Carole Brooks
Mr Arthur Lewis OBE

Mr Carl Jones
Mr Glyn Saunders
Rev. R Watson
Prof. Gerwyn Griffiths
Mrs Jeanette Fulton
Mrs Thelma Griffiths

The Welsh Hat

The distinctive Welsh hat first became popular during the 1830s and soon became an icon of Wales, although why two English firms should have produced quite large numbers of a unique shaped silk hat which was bought only by the women of Wales remains something of a mystery.

The Welsh hat is distinctive in having a broad stiff brim with a tall, flat-topped crown. During the 19th century they were made of linen buckram covered with silk plush – the same materials that were used for men's top hats. Evidence from the hats which survive suggest there were two main types with a range of shapes between the two.

Most hats have a slightly tapering crown, are about 9inches wide and about 15inches maximum width; most of these were made in England and worn in south-west Wales. The second type is shorter with almost vertical sides about 7-8inches high and 13-15inches maximum width. These were mostly made by Welsh hatters and worn by the women of north Wales.

There were also differences in the method of manufacture – the English products have one piece of plush folded right around the rim, whereas the hats made in Wales have separate pieces of plush on the upper and underside of the brim. The hats were certainly being made by the mid-1830s but it is not clear when production ceased although the period of the 1880s has been suggested. There are many questions still to be answered including why and how the hat came to be popular and how it was popularised as no-one has yet discovered an advert or catalogue for Welsh hats. Accounts books can, however, tell us how much the hats cost, with entries in 1860 citing 9/-, rising to 10/- in 1866 and 16/- in 1879.

The cost of the hats suggest that they were probably bought by the likes of successful farmers' wives and daughters who wore Welsh hats at market, chapel and church and at special events when they wore their 'Sunday best' clothes (which included a nightgown!). Most of the pictures show the hats worn by market women which suggests they may not have been widely worn by townswomen. What is known is that by the end of the 19th century the Welsh hat was only usually worn for special occasions such as Royal visits and celebrations, and by choirs and for staged photographs. The evidence suggests that these women were wearing old hats, possibly bought when they were young or handed down from their mothers. Is there one in your attic?

Source: Cymal magazine

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Local Voices

The Ebbw Fach Valley

The heather covered moor is very beautiful at Brynmawr and the sunsets are second to none. The valley then gently slopes to Nantyglo and Blaina where, although pleasant, the mountains are not spectacular and the valley is comparatively wide.

On leaving Blaina and heading to Bournville there is a vast change. The valley narrows with majestic mountains closing in, which gives one a feeling of being protected. We see nature's work in evidence with the 'slips' which appear to originate in Cwmtillery, emerging on the eastern side of Bournville and passing through to the Arail Mountain – movement which still goes on. I remember several years ago going for a walk along Roseheyworth Road when I heard a mighty bang. Looking towards the source of the bang I saw a scene of dust and tumbling boulders, the result of movement under the Arail 'slip'. Quite magnificent really.

The confluence with the Tillery is a wonderful sight with the Tillery stream fast flowing near the fire station and small waterfalls banked by woods below St Michael's Church. It really is lovely. Go up the Tillery valley and you reach the reservoir and lake. The fast flowing stream reminds me of Tennyson's poem 'The Brook' *'I come from the haunts of coot and hern*

I make a sudden sally

And sparkle out among the fern

Toicker down the valley'.

Carry on through Bluebell Wood and a panorama opens up – the Horseshoe Bend. Nestling in the hillside is lovely St Paul's Church. Many are the walks I took with my parents when a child, past St Pauls and then a very steep climb to the flat hilltop where we picked wimberries. We did not often go to Barry for the day because we could not afford it but wimberry picking and a nice picnic was very enjoyable and as a young child a ride on my Dad's back when, tired and sleepy, we headed for home.

On the east side of the valley are some lovely horseshoe bends, one above the Duffryn, one above Cwm Cottage Road and one above Six Bells park. To me they are like giant armchairs.

From Victoria Road there is a magnificent woodland of broad leafed trees. It is a sight second to none except perhaps the Cwm Valley which is very beautiful. I love the interlocking spurs carved out in the ice age. At Aberbeeg the Ebbw Fach is joined by the Ebbw Fawr and the woodland continues past Crumlin and on for many miles through Abercarn. The by pass road seems to make this scenery more evident.

Why is this lovely valley not publicised more? The other Heads of the Valleys towns do

not have the narrow valley and steep high mountains of the Ebbw Fach. The other valleys seem quite nondescript in my judgement. Could not coach operatives from other places be persuaded to run day or half day trips taking in 11th Century St Iltyd's Church, a genuine Victorian Arcade, and Victorian Theatre and Museum. Do people in other parts really know how coal was extracted? A tour like this could end at Cwmtillery Lake and children would enjoy feeding the ducks. It would be nice if some enterprising small businessman fitted out a van and on clement days located it at Cwmtillery Lake and dispensed tea, snacks and ice creams.

The Roving Reporter

Book Corner

USK, Castle Priory and Town

Edited by Jeremy K Knight & Andy Johnson

The town of Usk was established around the Castle and Priory by the Normans whose occupation of the area had been preceded by the Celts and the Romans.

This series of essays by various eminent contributors outlines the history of the town spanning the years from pre-history to the 21st Century. They explain the life of its inhabitants, and how they lived, by examining the many historic buildings that still remain in the town as well as the archaeology of former times.

One chapter tells the story of Adam of Usk who was renowned for his Chronicle of Medieval Wales and England. Born in Usk, he is buried in the Priory. Another of Usk's famous sons was St David Lewis, a 16th Century martyr who is remembered with a memorial in the churchyard.

Jeremy Knight has contributed a chapter on the history of the Castle from its earliest beginnings to the 20th Century when it was purchased by the Humphreys family. A chapter on the garden at the castle was written by the present owner.

Among the notable contributors are Frank Olding with a chapter on prehistoric Usk and Madeleine Gray who co-wrote a chapter on the medieval priory and its inhabitants. Both these contributors are well known to members of Abertillery & District Museum.

The final chapter discusses the current problems and future of Usk.

This is a well produced book, illustrated with black and white plates and figures, and some delightful coloured prints of the Castle gardens. Lord Raglan has written a foreword and commends it as informative reading for those who know Usk as well as for the visitor.

Jean Colwell