LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 191 AUGUST 2024

Including
`A Time-Traveller's Guide to Llancarfan'
One way of introducing the treasures of the village

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*That winged chariot – **time** - is the theme of this season's newsletter. This issue's "long read" reflects on the works of Llancarfan's 18th century clockmaker, Henry Williams. Ian Fell traces his life and work, and investigates how our ancestors stayed punctual over the centuries. Then we share an account of this year's May Day walk, tracing stories from our village's rich history. For those who couldn't be with us, read on . .*

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Time Trails and Tales – Monday 27 May 2024

For this year's May Walk, we stayed close to home and very much celebrated living history. The journey was short but crammed with tales, taking the form of a circular trek around the village in the company of President Barbara Milheusen (née Jenkins) and her brother, Clive.

Between them, this redoubtable pair have clocked up nearly 175 years of Llancarfan memories and they, and others, shared stories en route.

Barbara starts:
" Along with about 35 other people, I arrived at the Village Hall to begin our walk, joined by my brother Clive who came all the way from Kent with his son and grandson – a family tradition! He doesn't often miss a May Walk. Clive was born at Ford Cross here, some 85 years ago and has lived in three houses in Llancarfan.

" I remember Clive being baptised in St Cadoc's on Christmas Day, 1939, when I was just five. This year, to help cover the ground, he brought his electric chair and led us past the Old Parsonage, and the old carpenter's shop to the Post Office, where our mother was the very first Post Mistress."

Along the way Clive and Barbara stopped to answer questions about their earliest memories. Barbara recalled her uncles tossing her from one side of the river to the other; and the wonder of moving from their former home, *Ty Uchaf* – then (very different from today's desirable residence) with no running water or indoor lavatory. She regarded the Post Office, with its relatively mod cons, as the next thing to heaven.

En route, Clive recounted his days spent in the carpenters' shop where, for half-a-crown (12 1/2p for youngsters), he worked as Saturday boy "tidying up" the considerable chaos. We also passed the spot where Harry Hughes (have new neighbours ever wondered who *was* the Harry of *Harry's Bar* in the Fox?) started to build himself a house back in the fifties.

Clive recalled that Harry lived with his brother & sister-in-law in Llanbethery : "Then the wife got fed up of him and threw him out". Homeless Harry set to creating his own place. However, he sadly died before finishing it. Now not a sign of it remains - only Harry's legendary reputation.

From here we May Walk history-hunters travelled as far as the house where Clive was born, at the turning to Ford Farm – and looked up the valley to the birthplace of Llancarfan's arguably most famous son, Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams). The house is now marked with a blue plaque, up at *Pen-onn*.

A little daunted by the hill, we turned on our heels (or wheels), and back into the village. Clive recalled acquiring a bus when he left school, and running a shop selling groceries in the area. (Tesco hadn't eyed up the market yet.)

Barbara continues - "We returned via the churchyard where Ian talked about the sundial outside the church" – the very earliest time-keeper for labouring villagers. "Then we travelled on to the very first Post Office, where the current postbox still sits, and to the Blacksmith Shop and the old Bethlehem Chapel".

Among our walkers, we were delighted to welcome Gill and Gail (nee Liscombe). They recalled their 'Bampa' - Jehoiada (Joe) Lewis - who not only ran the Blacksmith's but also celebrated chapel services. Their mother Dilys, who sadly died this year, talked in a previous *Newsletter* of how her father never missed a Sunday service, even if he was the only congregant. But he was never *quite* alone. His dog always joined him, especially in the hymn singing (high notes a canine speciality). With all the echo of a blacksmith's hammer, their voices carried together to the far side of our valley.

Gill and Gail brought along family photos, including this little known image of Jehoiada at work. They also showed a picture of the last gates to be made in the village forge, a photo with the legend "installed at the entrance to *Crynallt*". Gillian wondered whether they are still there. They are not! Nearly twenty years ago, Clare Thomas of Tenby House rescued them from the skip outside *Crynallt* and stored them. When she found us (Ian and Penny Fell) measuring up for new gates at White Chapel, Clare asked if we'd like them.

Would we?! We thought they were beautiful! So we had them galvanised, painted and installed - and they are still there, just a few feet from where they started life. Until now, we had no idea of their place in history.

Our walk, in fact, took us past those very gates on our way to the Ford. So we took time to talk about the "other Chapel", the Wesleyan one. This has had around three rebuilds since it was first erected as a much smaller, humbler place of worship in 1814.

At least one of the leaded stained glass windows is supposed to be late Georgian; and the chapel has been home to least four different sets of occupants since it was deconsecrated back in the 1950s. During his boyhood, Clive remembers sneaking up the back to climb in through the (then!) holes in the roof. playing among the beams. Such shenanigans stopped when it became the studio of the celebrated artist Andrew Vicari in the 1960's.)

Still following the history trail, we crossed the bridge to the Green, past Broadhayes where Llancarfan's clockmaker lived (see Ian Fell's article on page 7). Then it was on to the Green where, within living memory, villagers heard the thunderous pumping of The Ram, which forced water up to Pancross. Its disappearing traces can be made out along the river path.

All village residents are familiar with the romantic old water wheel (the one repurposed to create a cover for this issue). Not many of us though had seen its internal workings. As an unscheduled finale, the Highfield family generously invited the hordes of walkers to crowd into their basement for a privileged viewing. This was a rare treat. The wheel workings are beautifully restored from their former ruined state, and look smart as new.

By then our ramble through the centuries had taken over two hours, and most people called it a day. But not Barbara.

"For me," she confessed, "I decided to carry on past my old home, *Ty Uchaf*, and past my old school. Though Clive had brought his electric chair, there was no room for it to return in his son's car so - who came to the rescue? None other than *Ty Uchaf's* present long-time occupants, Steve and Georgina Powell. It was ironic that they kindly stored the chair in our old home. See you all again in May 2025!"

Penny Fell & Barbara Milhuisen

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Showtime Summer '24

This year, **Llancarfan Village Show** will open its doors at the Village Hall on **Saturday 31st August, at 2 pm**. From chrysanthemums to courgettes, from dahlias to dogs, we welcome all entries. This year we have increased the number of classes including a section for our four-legged friends!

Please help to make this the best Show yet, by entering as many classes as you are able, or by coming along in the afternoon to join in the fun.

The Village Show Committee is grateful to Mr and Mrs Edward Thomas of Pancross Farm for sponsoring the marquee where, following the Show, there'll be a traditional Hog Roast with live music from Pluck and Squeeze, the Twmpath Folk Band made famous by *Gavin and Stacey.* Tickets are £15 per person and children go free!.

If you still haven't received a Show Schedule, and to book your place at the Hog Roast, please contact Katherine Kemp (07766 244141 or gordon.katherine@icloud.com)

Time-Traveller's Guide to Llancarfan
One way of introducing the treasures of the village

You could have knocked me down with a feather, to see our sheltered little community this year (2024) named as one of only two Welsh places to be 'revealed' in a list of 'Britain's 48 poshest villages'. Posh? True enough, you'll easily find the odd pheasant or hen's feather here for knocking-over to be attempted. But 'posh'? Well, if you happen to be a visitor reading this (and thank you for noticing us), try chatting to us in the street or pub. We're certainly not what *we* think of as posh!

One of the things we ***can*** recognise though in those flattering write ups of our village is (to quote *Country Living*) that this secret valley does offer visitors a "step back in time". Which, assuming then that we're all time-travellers, gave an excuse to pull together this philosophical guide to at least one way of thinking about and understanding the treasures of our village.

As it happens, a good century and a half ago, one of the finest clockmakers in Wales created his time-pieces in a house here. Who better then than Henry Williams of Llancarfan to welcome us time-travellers – even though, when he created his clocks, time hardly needed to travel at all.

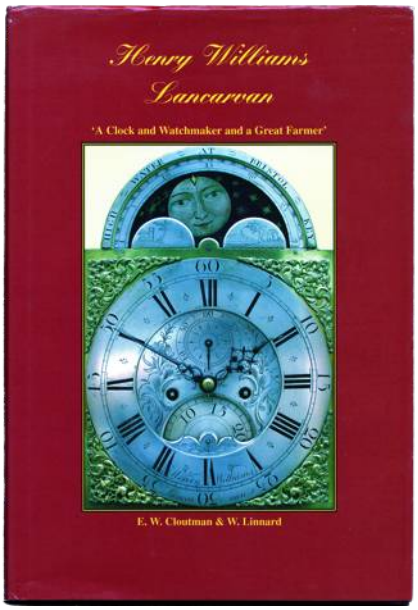
Back in 1749, when 22-year-old Henry settled here after training in Gloucester, time was of course still local. Henry could in fact make a good living out of knowing that while 'real' time might pass with indivisible fluidity, us simple folk could hardly make use of time without breaking it up into clockwork fragments. Even if the sun was doing its best to mark a particular point in time in London a full 14 minutes earlier than in Llancarfan, this need have no influence on Henry's clock-engineering skills. You doubtless know that not until railway timetables publicised arrival times did standardised time become critical.[1] So, until that point, Henry's clocks could confidently tick away Vale of Glamorgan time with nobody missing the boat or mail coach.

Llancarfan's 'World Famous Round Here' clockmaker is memorialised in the village by the clock, now tucked around a corner in the *Fox & Hounds.* And there are rather more elaborate Henry Williams' clocks to be found elsewhere, the qualities of which

[1] East-West rail time transmission largely depended on a standardisation communicated through the electric telegraph, significantly developed by Charles Wheatstone and William Fothergill Cooke after they formed a partnership in 1836 (5 years after the Great Western Railway opened their London to Bristol rail route.) Interestingly, Cooke later squandered his telegraph wealth in a North Walesian slate quarrying project, and in buying 'Aber Ia', later named 'Portmeirion' where, as you surely know, 'The Prisoner' was filmed!

are documented in a very collectable book, published in 2003 (in association with a conference held that same year in Llancarfan), by E.W.Cloutman & W. Linnard, called *Henry Williams, Lancarfan*.[2]

The book (shown here) illustrates 14 of the clocks created by Henry Williams.

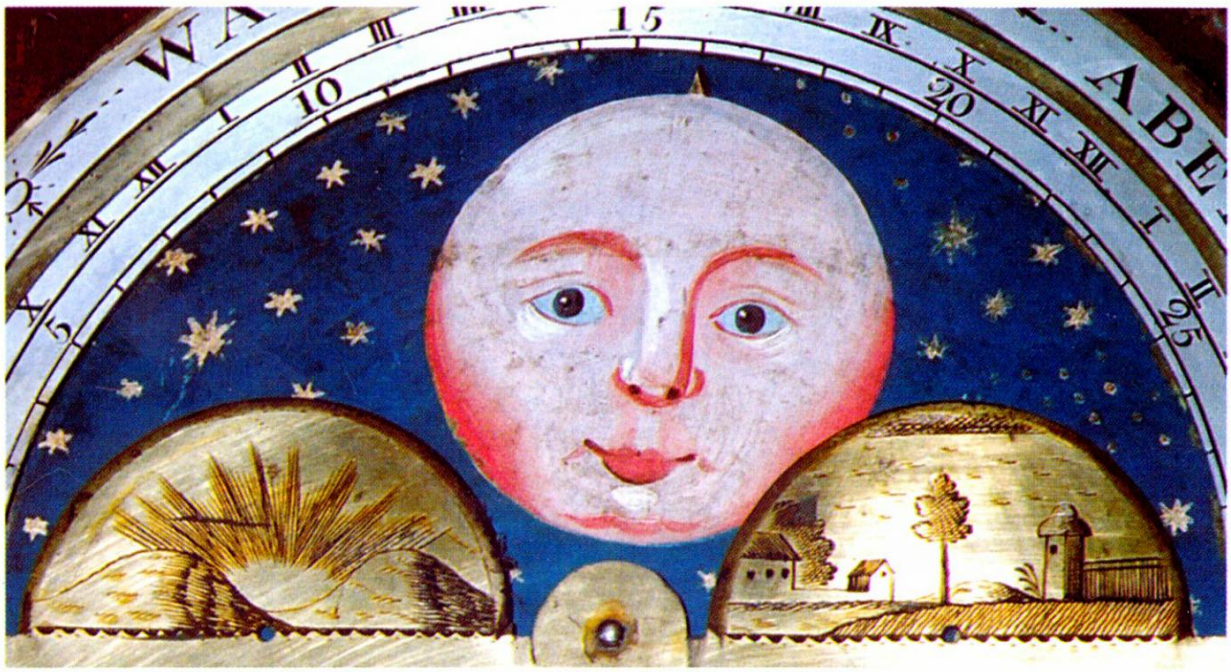


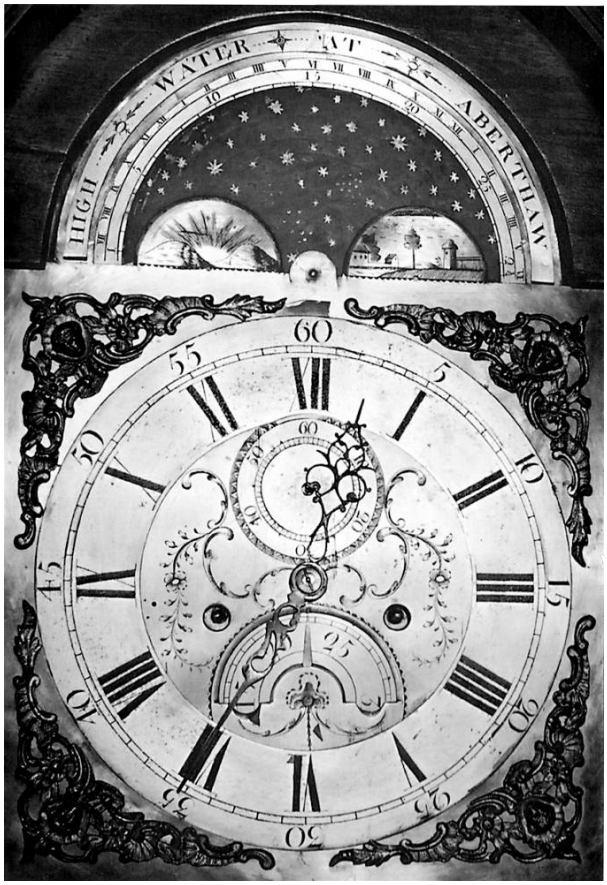
Subsequently, as a result of the interest generated, others have been discovered. Most of those surviving were built (we assume) in the village house (captured above in an old postcard) now known as 'Broadhayes', then as 'Broad Wayes'. This was Henry Williams' home (with his village-born wife Mary) during some forty years of Llancarfan clock-making, and happily the house has since given shelter to several long-standing Llancarfan families.

We have already noted - surely an excuse for a pint or a glass of wine for any Llancarfan time-traveller - the clock owned by the Llancarfan Community Council, clearly engraved with Henry Williams' name, and currently freezing a moment of time in the *Fox & Hounds.* There are those who have studied the intricacies of its mechanisms, but to the less informed eye, this particular longcase might seem a humbler beast than other Williams clocks now recorded. This is perhaps to be expected, for many of the clocks made were commissioned, it seems, by the higher landed gentry of the Vale. Identification of commissions by those rich enough to tell the time with style is not entirely certain, but among the initial owners are thought to be the Joneses of Fonmon and the Butes of Cardiff. A further two clocks are known to have been commissioned by the Morgan family of Tredegar House.

[2] Both the Llancarfan Society Chairman Gordon Kemp, and Ian Fell, were recently reminded of this during a stimulating evening talk hosted by the Cowbridge Historiical Society, and given by William Linnard, the mainspring of timepiece knowledge, who is based in nearby St. Athan.

Perhaps among the more delightful, and locally practical, clocks is one that is richly illustrated in the Cloutman & Linnard book. This is the clock (said in 2003 to be still time-keeping for at least the 5th generation of the same family) which was made for Captain William Davies of Eglwys Brewis. What really delights the eye is that the mechanism reveals at the appropriate intervals the time of 'High Water at Aberthaw' – our nearest harbour.





One is tempted to romance, of course, as to whether the spirit of sea-going Captain Davies – his remains now lying maybe in the sadly impounded grave-yard of Eglwys Brewis – allows himself those Captain Cat-like dreams of catching with his 'dead dears' the high tide at Aberthaw.

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Time and tide wait for no man. And clearly, while the local gentry were in a privileged position, able to buy a more accurate display of time than most citizens of the Vale, it was on the porch of St. Cadoc's church that your average villager found his time-piece.

Just how soon religion moved in on the need for punctuality is a question locked into mystic henges of wood and stone. But our church clocked our human needs, and dials of rutted stone have long vied with saint's heads for a glimpse of the southern sun.

How long have we done this? Well, apparently a painted time-measuring stick, said to date from 2300 BC, has been dug up at Taosi in China. And it seems in Llancarfan that (from this evidence) one of our wall-borne sun-clocks required the time-seeker to insert their personal stick, or gnomen.

The lower snap above was taken on Sunday 14 April, 3.06 PM BST. One wonders how that shadow would have been read in the past? And this might well set you considering whether our clockmaker Henry Williams himself captured the local time from one of these sundials? Then again, *his* devices were surely set to reflect the 'local' time of his clients, whether marking Vale time, or adding (as one of his clocks does) the 'High Water at Bristol Quay'.

Funnily perhaps, it also makes you ask whether at least one of the church sundials shown above was carved by a celebrated local rascal, born up the hill in 1747, two years before Henry Williams arrived here. This genius was Henry Williams' family namesake Edward Williams, better known as Iolo Morganwg. Iolo outlived Henry Williams by 36 years, and was, one recalls, trained as a worker in stone. It seems that Iolo not only invented a great deal of Welsh history, but he also got his mason's hands on time!

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Now Iolo of course spent much of his time well beyond the borders of Wales. It is intriguing to note that, over in France (and now online) one can find a little paperback book transcribing 'Les Dicts du druide Cadoc', a series of quips and sayings alleged to have been coined by St. Cadoc, who is a saint almost uniquely owned by and celebrated in South Wales and Brittany. It is thought though that in fact these aphorisms were devised by Iolo. And so here, not for the first time, Iolo reminds us of what might be our earliest device for sharing the time across the landscape. This, of course, is the church bell.

The French version of this 'St. Cadoc witticism' reads

'Si chaque niais portait une cloche autour de son cou,
on ne trouverait dans église que des prêtres et des sonneurs'.

This can be re-translated as

'If every simpleton wore a bell around his neck,
we would only find priests and ringers in the church'.

Clearly Iolo felt that there were plenty of simpletons around these parts, and that St. Cadoc['s bells would bring the congregations to *them*, rather than to the church itself. I don't think he was commenting on the non-conformists!

And it is of course the church bell that links us into another forceful narrative of time. Visitors may know that this wall-painting below is among those thrillingly revealed in our St. Cadoc's church well over two hundred years after our Llancarfan clockmaker died. Neither Henry nor Iolo could have known this sleepy gentleman – 'Sompnolencia' – although he is surely someone who would have benefitted greatly from one of Henry Williams' clocks!

You may not have realised that sleeping in when the priest rings the church bell – the village timepiece – to summon you to Matins, Lauds or Prime, is very much one of the *Seven Deadly Sins*. But the wall is here to tell us so!

Time-travellers, visiting or local, might well wish to track down a surviving copy of Messrs. Cloutmann & Linnard's fascinating book (or hopefully find a republished edition?). They may also wish to buy - for a token sum - any or all of three 'wallpainting' booklets on sale in the church, each unravelling the traditions of time and the diversions of sin, each depicted in internationally important murals, only unearthed from limewash in 2008, over 500 years after they were painted. How a morally-deprived (if posh!) Llancarfan managed not to sink into the slough of sinfulness remains one of the wonders of time.

But then again - 'time passes' - to quote once more from the revered, but less than divine, Dylan Thomas. And as our time-travellers find reason to explore this special hidden village, they might wish to discover some of those other traces of time past, fingerless clock faces in their own right. These are faces without hands, their eras of importance frozen into a single surviving moment.

If your clock allows then, discover the hooping plate of the village blacksmith, the iron ring on which the wheelwright roasted the band to brace the farmer's cart wheel. Look for the water wheel which, not too many clock-hands ago, ground the grain for the village bread. And maybe think again of the gnomon which trapped time with a shadow, and then nailed it down with a church bell.

Garnllwyd Barns – an Update

Over the last year, as many know, Garnllwyd Barns has been undergoing a transformation to adapt the house to a home for young adults with additional learning needs. In mid-July, villagers were specially invited to drop in, see the changes, ask questions –and have a coffee.

The home will be run by the much-praised Welsh charity, *Elidyr Communities Trust.* Their credo is ‘’We believe that every person, regardless of learning need or disability, should have the chance to live a meaningful, fulfilling life.” When your *Newsletter* did its reccy, most of us visitors pretty well felt we’d like to move in (preferably tomorrow) to the calm, beautifully lit, warm home we found. There will be a family-sized maximum of five residents, supported by staff. The young adults settling into Llancarfan will be encouraged to cook for themselves, manage the enclosed and pretty gardens, hopefully grow fruit and vegetables, use the secure swimming pool (only in summer, if we ever have one again) and make use of a well-laid out craft room.

Villagers find the kitchen

Worriers amongst us (aka your editor) were concerned about the hazards on the road from Garnllwyd to the village, but residents will have their own little bus, and will also always have accompaniment.

Elidyr Communities Trust has typically supported those with autism or Downs’ Syndrome.

One Garnllwyd resident will already be known to many in the village - Edward, son of Isabel & Geoff Graham, is to live there. He and others will start to move in at the end of August.

The Llancarfan Society looks forward to making them feel properly at home!

Boules Is Coming Home….

In a drenching summer, the rain stayed away for once to allow the *Ruth Watts Petanque Challenge* to take place without flippers. With Olympic tenacity, an all-Llancarfan team triumphed (clearly very grateful for a preliminary community effort in clearing invading greenery from the piste). Against a field of some twenty contestants, Anne Ferris, Edward Knott and Sue Taylor

reclaimed the shield for the village. They are pictured here with (on the left) our own Father of the Piste, Phil Watts.

Beware Children In Church

Orthodox thinking has it that church congregations are getting older, but St Cadoc's has had an uptick in youthful attendees this summer. Baptisms featured regularly on the calendar – including sisters Holly and Daisy Farquharson, pictured here (with parental permission) in a fleetingly angelic mood in June.

Meanwhile (see overleaf) on June 11th a considerable number of youngsters joined a 'Lifepath' day in St. Cadoc's.

They were there (maybe around 60 of them from local schools) to adopt for a day the habits of the monks who once inhabited (!) the site of our church.

This snap was just the start of a routine monastic day. Each small group of ‘brethren’ took part in a series of short sessions, run by a team of volunteer grownups, helping the young monks to recapture (with a hint of poetic and practical license) some of the experiences of monastic living.

Of course, given that a monastic community lived in some form in Llancarfan for perhaps one thousand years, the norms of their lives, stretching from wooden huts to stone-built Llanvythin mansion, clearly changed significantly. But the needs of the daily round remained – so our refectory monks did cooking exercises, gardening monks discovered medicinal herbs, ringers learnt to sound the (hand) bells for Matins, and artists puzzled to recreate the illustrations that their predecessors chose to draw in the margins of holy texts.

Weaving skills were also practised with colourful plaited threads, pebbles painted, and memorial thoughts polished from glistening brasses. Wrapping around their daily deeds, our monks then came together to sing their positive songs for the future, all in a day beautifully melded under the happy direction of Father Michael John.