

SUMMER MEETING IN LLANDRINDOD

We were based at The Hotel Commodore in Llandrindod where we had the use of the de Winton room adjacent to our own dining area for the evening lectures and the AGM during the week. The meeting was of slightly shorter duration than usual since 2018 was a three-meeting year. Members arrived by car and by train throughout the late morning of Monday 2nd July and assembled outside the hotel after lunch for a guided walk around the town led by Mr Mike Garner. A well-known conservation architect, and former member of the now defunct Ancient Monuments Board, his practice – and his home - is in Llandrindod. Several of the buildings viewed had been restored by his partnership through the Llandrindod Wells Townscape Heritage programme which provided grants between 2004-2009 to rescue, restore and enhance many of the splendid late Victorian buildings of what was from the 1860s onwards Wales's premier spa town attracting thousands of visitors. Many hotels and boarding houses of four and five storeys were built to accommodate them. Mr Garner explained how the hotels and shops and private dwellings were built to impress in a variety of exuberant styles but with a degree of unity imposed by the ubiquitous use of red and yellow Ruabon bricks and terracotta tiles. The perambulation concluded outside the offices of Powys County Council, built in 1985-90 on the site of the Pump House Hotel – but retaining the ornate boiler house of the hotel. Some of the party went on to view the remains of Capel Maelog, the ground plan of which was relocated to the park. This was an unusual double apsed medieval church excavated by the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust in the 1980s.



Mike Garner points out the faience tiles of The Automobile Palace, Llandrindod; photo Heather James.

The first lecture of the week was appropriately given by our Editor, Mr Bill Britnell on 'Llanelwedd Rocks- Radnorshire farming on the edge, 17th-19th centuries'. We saw a wonderful series of illustrations including paintings by the 18th century artist Thomas Jones of Pencerrig and Bill reflected on the material culture of those farming in a perceived (to us) marginal location evident from paintings and documents and what has been recovered from archaeological excavation of such sites.



Mr Lawrence Banks explains the history of Hergest Court; photo Heather James.

Tuesday was devoted to Hergest Court and Hergest Croft by kind invitation of Mr Lawrence Banks. We were relieved that our coach driven by the company owner Mr Martin Weale of 'Weale's Wheels' was able to drive right into the farmyard at Hergest Court and turn round ! We were very appreciative of the cold drinks provided by the Banks family as we sat on the lawn to be welcomed by Mr Lawrence and Mrs Elizabeth Banks, it being one of this last summer's hot and sunny days. Mr Banks is the great grandson of R.W.Banks , a founder member and indefatigable supporter of the Cambrian Archaeological Association. His career and contribution was the subject of the Revd Dr Roy Fenn's presidential address in 2005. The family has, uniquely, maintained a continuous membership of the Association since 1846. Hergest Court is described as 'one of the most important medieval sites on the Welsh Marches' in the Herefordshire 'Pevsner'. Lawrence Banks explained how his grandfather, W.H. Banks, had a long antiquarian interest in the house and was finally able to purchase it in 1912. (See his article on the Vaughan family of Hergest Court in *Arch Camb* for 1871).

We then embarked on a tour of both the inside and outside of the building under the spirited and comprehensive guidance of Mr Allan Lloyd, who has a lifetime's knowledge of the history and architecture of the house. He began by explaining that the lawn where we had sat to listen to Lawrence Banks occupied the area of a now lost 13th century great hall to which a later two storey solar block had been added (now a granary) at one end and another chamber at the other. Although what survives there is a late medieval two storey chamber block, a floor beam was dendrochronologically dated to 1267 showing reuse of earlier building materials. Moving to the lawn which extends in front of the east façade of the present day house Allan Lloyd pointed out how the late medieval house was extended northwards in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The defensive qualities of the site were very apparent from the lawn with the ground falling steeply away to the valley of the River Arrow. We were asked to imagine Lewis Glyn Cothi, at one time the resident bard of the Vaughans, by this time possessors of the famous Red Book of Hergest manuscript, adding his own contributions working in the upper chamber of the late medieval house. As well as explaining the complexities of the interior arrangements once inside the house Allan further exercised our imaginations with an account of the legends of Black Vaughan reappearing in the guise of a black dog presaging family catastrophes – a legend said to have inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Our final visit was to explore the granary with several medieval features such as a fine medieval fireplace visible to those who ventured up the wooden stairs of a building now used for storage by Mr Richard Banks who runs the farm and is restoring the house.



Allan Lloyd explains the architectural development of Hergest Court; photo Heather James.

We then arrived at Hergest Croft where lunch had been organised in what had been the dining room of the house, now turned into a tea room for visitors to the gardens. Lawrence Banks continued the family story of 'One estate and Three Houses' (the title of his article in the Radnorshire Transactions for 2002, circulated to members in their welcome pack) by explaining how their principal house of Ridgebourne became the residence of Emily Banks on W H Bank's marriage to Dorothy Alford in 1894 and a new house – Hergest Croft - was built for them in Arts and Crafts style. After lunch we divided into two groups alternately being guided around the celebrated gardens with their many champion trees by Mrs Elizabeth Banks (a former President of the RHS) and visiting the Banks family archive. Mrs Heather Pegg, the family archivist, had laid out a special display for the Cambrians which highlighted Cambrian items, the books of photographs by WH Banks and many other items highlighting the family and business interests in late 18th c Radnorshire and Herefordshire.

Appropriately, the evening lecture was given by Dr Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan on the Red Book of Hergest. This priceless manuscript contains the Tales of the

Mabinogi, much Welsh poetry and the medical texts supposed by Rhiwallon, of Meddygon Myddfai fame. She explained how the manuscript had been compiled for the Glamorgan *uchelwyr* Hopkyn ap Tomas ab Einion of Ynysforgan by Hywel Fychan and two other scribes, then came into the possession of the Vaughans of Tretower and then the Vaughans of Hergest Court, patrons of Lewis Glyn Cothi. Passing through various hands it was given to Jesus College and is now in the Bodleian. Cambrians who came to the Spring Conference at Jesus College in 2010 were privileged to actually see the manuscript in the Bodleian. The bulk of Dr Lloyd Morgan's lecture was a fascinating exposition of scribal techniques and roles – not just copyists but editors and she also showed images of the many fantastic images and doodles in the 'catchwords'.

Tuesday saw the party take to two minibuses in order to get up a narrow track and lanes to Pilleth and Cascob churches. Before entering the churchyard at Pilleth members assembled in front of a panel which commemorated the Battle of Bryn Glas of 1402 where Owain Glyndŵr inflicted what the late R.R. Davies described as 'the most devastating and decisive English defeat in the field during the rebellion'. Looking down the steep slopes below the churchyard Heather James explained how it was easy to see the difficulties encountered by Mortimer's forces trying to fight their way uphill to tackle Glyndŵr's troops who held their position at the crest of the slopes and how Glyndŵr had divided his forces so that a detachment concealed in the little cwm on the north side of the church had delivered the coup de grace with a flanking assault.

The church undoubtedly suffered in the battle and supposedly many of the dead lie buried in the churchyard. It has recently been the subject of a felicitous restoration by the Friends of Pilleth church which included re-roofing and a white lime wash render applied to the exterior. An 1847 description and Sir William Glynne's notes of 1873 in *Arch Camb* indicate what has been lost from the interior. A sensitive restoration by the Arts and Crafts architect W J Tapper included some almost garden-like ornamental features and a flight of steps in the churchyard. Members enjoyed the views down to the Lugg valley, the peaceful atmosphere of the church and the holy well on its north side.

We then made our way up 2 miles of a very narrow lane off the B4357 road to the remote site of Cascob – now a small hamlet with a typical Radnorshire country church in a large and somewhat overgrown churchyard, with ancient yews and a few chest tombs. A church-crawlers delight! Heather James briefly

described the exterior and interior explaining that large mound around the church is probably spoil from a rebuilding of the tower. Inside there are surviving fragments of the rood screen panelling. A particular reason for the Cambrians to visit this church is however the memorial slab with its lengthy inscription to William Jenkins Rees, Vicar of Cascob, 1772-1855. In the last afternoon of his Presidency Professor Prys Morgan gave an illuminating address on Rees's 'life and times' explaining that he was an enthusiast rather than a scholar unlike his nephew William Rees (Tonn Press) but that he was able to motivate a very wide circle. He campaigned for the revival of the Eisteddfod, the Cymmrodorion Society and was a member of the Welsh Manuscripts Society.

We then made our way to Presteigne for lunch and many members visited the Judges Lodging in the former Shire Hall. With the end of the court sittings there in 1970 its future looked uncertain but under the guidance of Dr Charles Kightly it has been restored as an atmospheric gas lit living museum as it would have been in the 1870s, helped by the discovery of a treasure trove of Victorian furniture and household fittings in the attic.

Unfortunately, with time marching on and the need for the minibus drivers to return in the late afternoon to their school bus duties, the two short field visits to roadside sections of Offa's Dyke at Yew Tree Farm and Rhos-y-Meirch had to be abandoned and we made our way to the Offa's Dyke Centre at Knighton. Mr Jim Saunders, stalwart of The Offa's Dyke Association and former footpath officer, kindly appeared earlier than planned and gave a slide show with many images of stretches of the dyke. He described the challenges of management both of the monument and the long distance Offa's Dyke Path in which he has been involved over many years as. Heather James passed around some illustrations she had intended to use in the field and described the seminal survey and recording work carried out by Sir Cyril Fox in the 1930s published serially in *Arch Camb*. She then described a new book by Keith Ray and Ian Bapty which has led to a renewed interest in the Dyke and the foundation of The Offa's Dyke Collaboratory – a discussion group which plans to issue its own journal on Dyke Studies. Sian Rees then led a group of members to the section of Dyke preserved mostly in woodland close to the Centre where further discussion ensued.

2018 was a year (once in every four) that the G T Clark awards were made for the best published work in the Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval, Medieval and Post- Medieval periods in Wales. All five prize winners (Elizabeth Walker,

David Hopewell, Thomas Charles-Edwards , Neil Ludlow and David Gwyn) had accepted the Association's invitation to dinner and the presentation. These were made by the retiring President Professor Prys Morgan who then handed over his Presidential badge to the incoming President Dr Mark Redknap. The new President said that he was very much involved, along with past President and trustee Dr Sian Rees, in the preparation of a book 'Wales and the Sea' intended for publication in this the year of the sea and that would be the subject of his Presidential address. His lecture was very wide-ranging and profusely illustrated and was followed by a convivial wine-reception .



Outgoing President Dr Prys Morgan congratulates his successor Dr Mark Redknap; photo Heather James.

Thursday was devoted to a visit to Hereford – both cathedral and town. Again we divided into two groups and had to stick to a timetable of military precision because there were rehearsals in the cathedral for a BBC broadcast and it was closed to the public for a recording in the afternoon. However, thanks to the organisation of Peter Challenger, Cathedral Visits Organiser, all went well. We were further divided into groups for the informative tours of the cathedral led by the cathedral guides and this informality allowed

members to ask questions and linger at places of interest. Probably the most striking recent structure in the cathedral is the reconstructed superstructure over the shrine of St Thomas Cantilupe which is highly coloured – as indeed it would have been in the Middle Ages – in deep reds, blues and purples. Amongst the miraculous cures effected by the Bishop listed in the petition to the papal curia for his canonisation in 1307 was the ‘resurrection’ of the hanged man William Cragh, born in Llanrhidian, a supporter of the rebel Rhys ap Iaredudd and , puzzlingly, interceded for by Maud de Braose.

Whilst one group was being guided around the cathedral the other group visited the Mappa Mundi exhibition. This medieval map of the world , made by Richard de Holdingham between 1296 and 1310, is one of the cathedral’s greatest treasures and one of very few such maps from medieval Europe to survive. Also on view was one of only four copies of Henry III’s reissue of his father, King John’s original charter. This was an absorbing and rewarding experience both for those who had visited before and those seeing the Mappa Mundi and the celebrated Chained Library for the first time. Our member Jean Currie works as a guide for the exhibition and was very helpful in directing members to and from their various tours and especially in then leading us through the Vicars Choral college to College Hall where we had a simple lunch in the splendid room hung with Episcopal portraits. The President suggested that we then all assemble on the cloister lawn for a group photograph.

The cathedral being closed at 1 pm Jean Currie suggested that those who did not wish to sit in the cathedral grounds before the final walking tour of the day should visit The Black and White House Museum a short distance away in the former Butchers Row. This is a three storey Jacobean timber-framed house, the sole survivor of a whole row of similar houses cleared away in the 1800s, now standing alone in the open market place. After various uses – and misuses - it is now a house museum run by Herefordshire Museums Service with reconstructed period rooms and good views of well preserved original 16th and 17th wall paintings.



Cambrians study the exhibits at The Black and White Museum, Hereford; photo Heather James.

Reconvening outside the west front of the Cathedral the group met Tim Hoverd Projects Manager with Herefordshire Archaeology who has many years of experience in excavating in the city and leading tours. Since there was not time for a total perambulation we concentrated on Castle Green where, from the name and from the known history of the city the visitor might expect to find the remains of a substantial castle rather than a pleasant tree encircled park. The Norman bailey of a substantial castle mound had been constructed over the cemetery of the Saxon monastery of St Guthlac, predecessor of the cathedral. Tim Hoverd pointed out what does survive of the ramparts of the bailey and a massive ditch. All was cleared after the Civil War and the area became an attractive park with a monument to Lord Nelson in its centre, a pillar crowned not with a statue but a less costly urn. Walking on the north east side of the park we could see the river Wye below and appreciate the defensive location of the site. Then it was down flights of steps and crossing the river Wye by the pedestrian Victoria Bridge into the Bishop's Meadow. From here we looked back towards the cathedral and the fine riverbank buildings of the Vicars Choral buildings, a view sketched by Turner in 1795.

Tim Hoverd then explained the rather complex history of the Rowe Ditch, originally known as the King's or Wall Ditch and the causeway across the meadows from results of excavations carried out as part of the Hereford Flood Alleviation scheme. The ditch had been in use throughout the Middle Ages and modified during the Civil War when the then walled city was under siege and attack and much damage done to extramural areas including the St Martin's suburb. We recrossed the river on the historic Wye Bridge and assembled promptly to be picked up by Mr Weale.

The AGM was held in the evening and before the business part of the meeting Professor Prys Morgan presented our retiring chairman Professor Muriel Chamberlain with a hamper, a token of the Trustees' – and he was sure, the general membership's - appreciation of her years of service as chairman of trustees. We were glad to hear that Muriel will however continue to serve as a trustee. Following the meeting Heather James gave an informal illustrated presentation of pictures of members and places at spring and summer and autumn meetings over the past decade.

Friday 5th July

Many members were not able to stay for the final morning's activities in Llandrindod itself. A small group however walked down to Rock Park and entered through the imposing iron gates beneath the letters 'Rock Park and Spa'. This 12 acre area was set aside at the time of enclosure of commons in the 1860s and early photographs show a complex of paths across an open hill slope either side of the Arlais brook, tributary of the Ithon. Tree planting in the second half of the 19th century have resulted in a splendid Victorian Arboretum, now cared for the Friends of Rock Park assisting Powys County Council who have produced a detailed 'Tree Trail'. There were many mineral springs on the flanks of the Arlais Brook site of the first spa activities in the later 17th century. Today only one chalybeate spring is accessible to sample encased in a marble drinking fountain which members duly sampled. We also looked at the surviving spa buildings. The 1895 Pump House is now used as a Complementary Health Centre but the 1908 Treatment centre and an open pavilion in front with delicate cast iron columns are struggling to find a sustainable modern use.



Cambrians were not overly-impressed by the waters of the chalybeate well at Rock Park! Photo Heather James.

We then walked back to the National Cycle Museum for the final visit of the week where we had a splendid tour by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteer guide. Beginning with the 'penny-farthings' we progressed through all the technical developments leading to the modern hi-tech racing cycles but with a great deal of social history on the way.

Heather James.