



Cymdeithas Treftadaeth Dyffryn Conwy Conwy Valley Civic Society

CYLCHLYTHYR/ NEWSLETTER

January 2008

COACHING DAYS AND THOMAS TELFORD

On 14th November 2007 Eryl Rothwell Hughes spoke to us on “Coaching Days: Thomas Telford and the Holyhead road.”

This was a perfect follow-up to our September lecture on Roman roads. The lecturer then, David Hopewell, had inspired us to search any obvious routes for signs of the small round quarried the Romans dug for their road stones. Now we (passengers not drivers) can keep our eyes peeled for “depots”; semi-circular lay-bys where the stones were broken up to make gravel for Telford’s road.

But before we got to Telford we were treated to a travel history beautifully illustrated with slides—pictures from the time or photographs from Mr Hughes own collection—showing exactly what any particular coach would have looked like, views of the areas surveyed and engravings of travellers tales, such as that of a man in a carriage losing a wheel in a thunderstorm.

It was as long ago as Elizabeth I that Parochial Church Councils were given responsibility for maintaining roads—rough tracks in the main, which never-the-less had to support heavily laden wagons with huge wheels drawn by eight horses. But in Wales it was 1622 before the first mention was made of a coach. Until that date everything was carried on pack horses or lumbering carts and it would be more than another hundred years before Turnpikes appeared in 1789 between Chester and Holyhead. The journey from Chester to St Asaph took one day and that between St Asaph and Conwy, a distance of 14 miles took another day. Crossing Penmeanmawr could take ten horses in front of the coach and six horses behind. No wonder this was known as the most terrifying road in the country.

At this point Mr Hughes showed some photos, not only of where Telford had built his road but also where there had been two unsuccessful and unsatisfactory roads before his and it was clear how desperately Telford’s genius was needed and what a revolution his road would be.

Telford was first consulted about a road in 1810 but it was another five years before he could begin to survey the route and the whole project, at 24 feet wide double the width of former roads, took 15 years to complete. However, long before it was finished coaches were able to use it and when the Menai Bridge was opened in January, 1826 there was a direct road from London to Holyhead at last. At that time the Menai bridge was the largest bridge in the world and had cost £162,000 compared to the mere £50,000 for Telford’s Conwy bridge

which was opened just six months later, taking the road from Chester to Holyhead. The greatest benefit of the bridges was to do away with the need for ferries which were slow, uncomfortable, dangerous and expensive—one scheme for extracting money from travellers was to take the horse across first and then demand an extortionate amount to carry the rider across to join his horse.

Apart from the “depots” there are still many indications of a Telford road, mile posts, for example. Between Llanrwst and Nebo there are nine remaining. (Cadw should do something about them!) There are still plenty of Toll houses to be seen and the one in Llanrwst still has a board showing the charges. Reminiscent of the wheel changing in a Grand Prix was the information that good ostlers could change a team of horses in 58 seconds.

Mr Rothwell Hughes has a real gift for lecturing and with the addition of his beautiful and unusual slides he provided us with an evening of historical and visual delight.

Christmas Lunch in Maenan Abbey

In slightly crushed surroundings—the main restaurant was hosting a Golden Wedding party— 35 members enjoyed a happy meal. James and Isoline Greenhalgh were, as ever, warm and welcoming Master and Mistress of Ceremonies and in addition Isoline had produced an excellent raffle with a wide variety of prizes. An extensive menu, at an amazingly reasonable price was served with great dexterity by a team of charming young staff. A very good beginning to the Christmas season.

New Venture. New Venue.

Once upon a time,(January 16th) on a dark and stormy night, 42 members (yes, 42 people prepared to turn out in dire weather) gathered at the Tal-y-Cafn inn for supper and an evening of story telling by Eric Maddern.

It was a new venture and a new venue for the Society and proved very popular. We bought drinks in the bar and then went upstairs to a book and bottle lined room (bottles ranging from a gigantic Marmite to a Methuselah) where we had a buffet supper before Eric began his stories and songs. I wonder how long since we last sat and listened to stories? It seemed amazing that the old tradition of the minstrels and bards still exists in the twenty first century, and is still appreciated if the attentive audience was anything to go by. Eric Maddern, in the timeless garb of shirt and waistcoat, a vet turned actor turned storyteller, was enthralling, funny and moving by turns and his reminiscences about his grandparents must have invoked many distant memories. Certainly I was entertained the next morning—with my early morning tea— by Shôn’s descriptions, with actions, of butter churning with his Nain. The smell of the old milk, the slurping and slopping noises as you churned, the whooshing as you pressed a button to release the pressure, the huge wheel and the aching limbs at the end of the morning.

Many thanks to Kath Barrar for organizing something so refreshingly different in pleasantly fresh surroundings.

ARTHUR ROWLEY

Arthur Rowley, who died on 24th December, 2007 was born and brought up in Holyhead. Those of you who knew Arthur well know that sport played a large part in his life. He played football for his school and while

in the ATC played for Wales against England and Scotland, one game being at Ibrox. He was also selected as one of 90 schoolboys from all England and Wales to play for the English Schools FA there being no Welsh equivalent. He represented Anglesey in athletics being a member of their relay team. He played badminton for Talybont and Dolgarrog and cricket for Llanrwst and was a county player for Anglesey. When he retired from football golf became his passion and he was a committee member of Betws-y-Coed Golf Club for over 20 years. He was elected Captain and then President and two years ago he received the honour of being made a life member. On top of all this he was a teacher of mathematics at Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy for over 35 years. As to his illness he always insisted he was not ill; he just had a problem he did not want. Arthur was a proud family man and leaves behind his three children, Alan, Catrin and Peter and the greatest love of his life, Pat, to whom he was married for 42 years. He will be missed by all who knew him, including his friends in our Society of which he was an active member.

Graham Ball

HOW OLD IS YOUR HOUSE

Margaret Dunn will be talking about “Dating Old Houses in Snowdonia” on February 19th in Aberconway Hall, Eglywsbach.

I, for one, am very much looking forward to this talk. Thanks to an earlier speaker, Frances Lynch-Llewelyn, I know that my old barn was the original farm house. It will be fascinating to learn more about old houses from Margaret Dunn. But even if you live in somewhere more draught proof and rainproof than Ty Uchaf the subject of dendrochronology is a subject of universal appeal and should provide a fascinating lecture.

SOCIETY WEBSITE

The Conwy Valley Civic Society is leaping into the digital age. At the last Committee meeting early this month Peter Barrar gave a fascinating presentation of our new Website. Idris Hughes has been developing it over the last few years and now Pete has joined him in getting it up and running.

Go to www.conwy-valley-civic-soc.org and be prepared to be amazed! If you click on any of the topics in blue on the left of the screen various things will appear. Past issues of this newsletter, for example, the committee members, details and adverts of our corporate members as well as what, in this day and age, is I suppose our Mission Statement. As it says, the site is under development, so the topics in black on the right of the screen are not yet ready. This is where Peter could do with your help, He would like to hear from you with ideas, information, photos and suggestions. You can contact him by e-mail, pete.barrar@virgin.net, by phone (01492 650764) or even snail-mail – River View, Ty'n-y-groes, LL32 8SS. He will be delighted for any help or contributions.

FLOOD PREVENTION

Headline in to-day's NWWN: FLOOD WORK STARTS over a picture of a car ploughing its way through deep water on a road approaching Llanrwst. The report says ‘work will start on School Bank Road this week’—they must mean next week—‘and will take 30 weeks.’ The scheme will help reduce the likelihood of flooding, particularly around Chapel St., Glanrafon and the Station Bridge area leading to the Old Tannery. The residents in the 60 properties directly affected must be sighing with relief. Residents in the low lying areas of Trefriw and users of the roads along the river will just sigh!