

CHRONICLE

Issue 3 Winter 2013

Presidential Lecture

Memories of Christmas

ONE Present!

Staffordshire Figures

A Strange Christmas

Italian Christmases

Burns Night

White Rock

Book Review

£1 (free to members)

CHRISTMAS ISSUE

Historical Association, Swansea Branch

Promoting History in South West Wales

From the Editor



Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born and the news was heralded by a large star in the sky over Bethlehem. There were no mobile phones or twitter, no sat navs or messages bouncing off orbiting satellites to spread the news; just a star.

But spread it did. Years later, Christians persecuted by the Roman Empire, used the profile of a fish, ichthys, to communicate their secret religion with other Christians. Yet modern means of advanced communication, although more technical were not readily accepted. When the engineer-in-chief of the British Post Office heard of Alexander Bell's invention, he replied loftily, 'The Americans have need of the telephone- but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys ...'

But, Americans were more enthusiastic about the telephone. The mayor of a certain American town pronounced: 'I can see a time when every city will have one'. Not all Americans agreed, 'An amazing invention but who would ever want to use one?' said the US President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876.

'Bell's proposal to place an instrument in every home and business place is fantastic ... in conclusion; the committee feels that it must advise against any investments in Bell's scheme. We do not doubt that it will find users in special circumstances, but any development of the kind and scale which Bell so fondly imagines, is utterly out of the question'. From the minutes in 1876 of Western Union.

Computers fared little better in having their usefulness recognized. In 1943 the chairman of IBM remarked, 'I think there is a world market for maybe five computers'.

Of course, in the fifties, one computer took up the space of a very large room. Not surprising then, that in 1977 Ken Olsen remarked, 'There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.'

'But what is it good for?' An engineer at IBM, commenting on the microchip in 1968.

On reflection, as people the whole world over still celebrate the birth of Jesus 2000 years later, the star, however non tec, did an outstanding job.

I hope that everyone has an excellent Christmas and that the Chronicle will continue to promote and communicate our love of History. Must go now, the phone is ringing.

Please remember our AGM takes place on January 4th 2014 at 10.30 am, Waterfront Museum.

New Officers and Committee Members will be elected so please come along and lend your support and give us your ideas. If you would like

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to propose someone to be elected there is a form to cut out at the bottom of page 19 where you can fill out details and bring it along to the meeting.

If you are not a member and would like to be one, there is a form on the back page that you can fill in and send off with a cheque. The membership year starts from January, so now is

a good time to join or renew your membership if you do not pay by standing order. Remember, Chronicle is free to members, so you will save £4 a year to start with.

The editor can be contacted at margaret.mccloy@sky.com

Margaret McCloy

Presidential Lecture

The Presidential Lecture by Professor Jackie Eales (President of the Historical Association) was held at the National Waterfront Museum on 21st September 2013. The hall was packed to hear a wonderful talk about robbery, murder and mystery; 'The Campden Wonder of 1662: The Murder and Miraculous 'Deliverance of William Harrison'.



Professor Jackie Eales with John Law and Colin James

Photo Roy Kneath

Jackie had previously received a copy of the first edition of Chronicle and had written to say 'I am delighted to see this initiative by the Swansea Branch, the magazine is interesting and informative to read'.

She also told us that only one other branch in Britain had produced a magazine; the monthly branch bulletin of Beckenham. We have sent them a copy of 'Chronicle' and have received a copy of their magazine (see page 14). From reading their programme it seems they have lots of outings in a year, including an annual dinner and a fish and chip supper. Perhaps our readers would write and let us know how they feel about more outings or dinners by this branch? We would also like to know what you think of Chronicle and which periods of history that you would like to see included.

“But You Only Got ONE Present!”

*Chestnuts roasting on an open fire,
Jack Frost nipping on your nose,
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir,
and folks dressed up like Eskimos.*

How many of us actually remember Christmases like this?

If you do, you are like me, part of a dying breed! It doesn't seem that long ago but, the Christmas holiday, and I use the 'H' word very guardedly, has changed beyond recognition for children of the 50s and 60s. By the way I was born in 1955

...

Recently I spoke to a class of 10 year olds at Waun Wen School in Swansea. I talked about the 'olden days' in the 1960s and happened to mention that when I was little we only had one present for Christmas. This caused uproar!

'You poor things!'

'That's terrible!'

'That's sad!'

Then one lad said 'Ssssh, stop it, they only had one present 'cause they were poor in the olden days'...

When I explained that everybody only received one present and that was 'your Christmas present' the children were horrified! Some even refused to believe it. I tried explaining that people were happy to get something that they really wanted – you saved up for that special gift or told somebody close to you what you really wanted.

'But you only got **one** present!!' 'One!!'

Thinking back to the days when most people had a wireless and some households even had a television set, possessions were few and far between – I can remember our first fridge arriving to great excitement in 1963 – and it was gas driven!

Houses were Spartan with just the bare essentials in use. Squares of carpet, that were taken out and beaten weekly, and ancient furniture that had been handed down since the ark! Indeed, one of my favourite games as a child was to thump the arms of our old settee and watch the clouds of dust dancing in the beams of sunlight from the windows.... And yes, the sun did seem to shine more.

Back to Christmas. It was called just Christmas. Not the holidays, or holiday season, or festive season, or happy holiday. Just Christmas.

We lived in quite a large rented house with my parents, grandparents, great aunts and cousin (who'd come to live with us from Cornwall for better job prospects). Big families with all generations living together were the norm

back then, no need for 'childcare' or babysitters as there were always plenty of people around.

There were lots of jobs for me to do at this time. Making huge lengths of paper chains from crepe paper (or painted newspaper) and 'Gloy', and helping to put up as many decorations as we could fit into every room. Popular decorations included the 'flat' Father Christmas or snowflake that opened up and was held open with a sharp metal paper fastener. Christmas tree baubles were made from real glass which would shatter at the drop of a hat! And Christmas lights! Different colours and shapes, like mini lanterns or pieces of fruit. Of course they were forever going off and my Dad would be there for hours trying to find the culprit bulb. Even worse, sometimes when they were switched back on

***Just after cigar time, I
was taken once again
one dark, wet evening to
look into the brightly lit
shop window.***

the whole house would be 'fused' and plunged into darkness. I got my first electric shock off the tree lights when I was about ten ...

Back to just one present. I was three years old and I can vividly remember being taken to town one dark, wet evening soon after the cigar smoke had started. We walked past brightly lit shop windows where I was lifted up to get a better view of what lay inside ... toys.

'What would you like Father Christmas to bring you?'

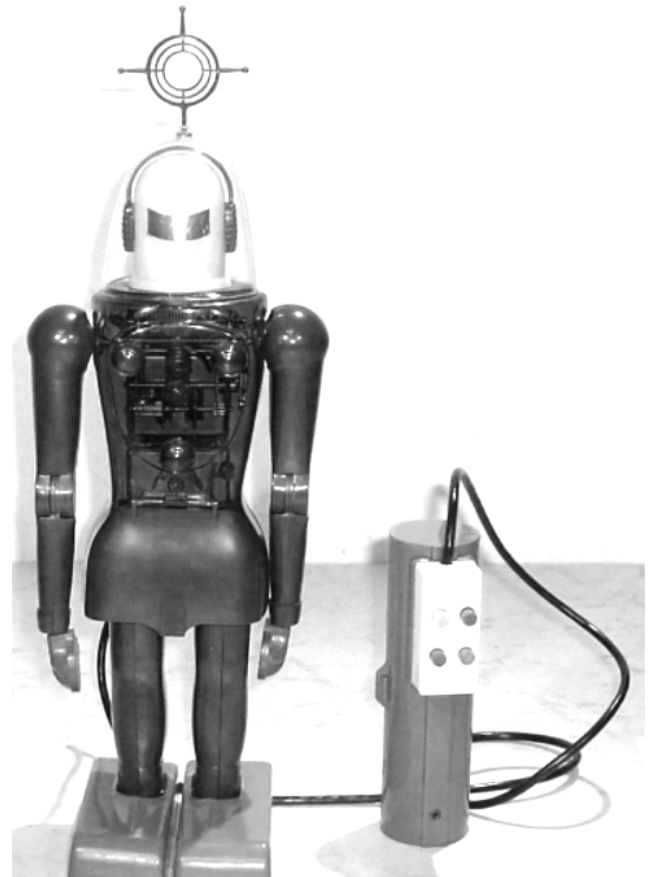
My eyes landed on a bright red, tinsplate Triang Crane, with a little hook on a round weight attached to a handle by black string. It was love at first sight. My dad worked at Swansea gas works and my mother did part-time bar work but I knew that they'd been saving for Christmas for quite some time anyway, well everybody did as there were no credit cards back then. It was either save up or buy from Grattan's catalogue and pay for things weekly.

Well Father Christmas got the message that year and the crane arrived well gift wrapped on Christmas morning.



A few years later, 1962 and I was seven, no chestnuts now because we had gas fires by this time (it might have had something to do with Dad working in the gas works). Just after cigar time, I was taken once again one dark, wet evening to look into the brightly lit shop window.

This time I spied a robot! Not just any robot, it moved by remote control!! (a wire attached in those days). It walked forwards and backwards, bent over and picked things up. It looked just like the one from 'Fireball XL5' – a television programme no less!



I just had to convince Father Christmas (yes I still believed) to bring it to me. Father Christmas did me proud! Robert the Robot arrived complete with batteries and pillowcase of fruit on Christmas morning, and by Christmas afternoon was resting after his batteries had run out!

I searched on Google for images of 'my' robot and found plenty surprisingly. One of the best was on eBay, where Robbie was up for sale for between \$1400 and \$1700 !!!

Poor Father Christmas would be turning in his grave!

(I found out later he was my Dad.)

Ian Smith

The Origins of Some Christmas Traditions



Even in this secular age, certain religious festivals are an important part of the fabric of our society. The word 'festival' ultimately derives from Latin *festum*, a feast, and feasting has always been an integral part of such occasions. Christmas, its name being originally 'Christ's Mass', might be assumed to be a strictly Christian religious occasion, dating from the beginning of the Christian era, and to have been celebrated in Britain since at least the end of the seventh century, when the conversion of the English was complete.

Christmas customs in Britain seem to be an amalgam of various practices from different religions which held sway here in the past. Primitive man attempted to re-energise the lacklustre sun at midwinter by sacrifice and feasting, fire and lights. In Europe, this happened on or near the winter solstice in the month of December, and was well-established by Roman times. Saturnalia began on 17 December. The Romans used the Julian calendar, which reckoned the winter solstice to be 25 December. On this day, the Nativity of the Sun was celebrated, because from then on the days lengthened and the sun's strength increased.

Mithras was another Roman deity closely linked with the sun, and had the epithet 'The Unconquered Sun'. The twenty-fifth of

December was celebrated as his birthday by his priests and believers. St Augustine exhorted Christians not to celebrate that solemn day like the heathen on account of the sun but on account of him who made the sun.

Nowadays, we feast on roast turkey and after the main course on Christmas day comes the plum pudding. This did not originate as a dessert, but as a 'pottage': a mixture of meat and vegetables, dried fruit and spices, cooked slowly and thickened with bread. It remained popular throughout the Middle Ages, becoming known as 'plum pottage' after prunes were added during Tudor times.

The history of that other Christmas delicacy, the mince pie, is similar. Mince pies were originally oval in shape, and date back to the Middle Ages. They contained meat baked in a pastry case, with spices and dried fruit to help preserve the meat. Henry V had such a mincemeat pie at his coronation feast in 1413, so next time you eat a mince pie, remember you are eating food fit for a king, and if you steal a kiss under the mistletoe, think of the Druids who believed it to be sacred!

Rhian Rees

Welsh Christmas Memories of Haydn Griffiths, 1938

Throughout the year, young children would be taking small amounts of money, weekly from parents, relatives or neighbours, to pay into the school bank. The release of all this annual thrift took place at the beginning of December. For the youngsters, who had undertaken this task for so long, it became a time when their efforts were rewarded, in the form of a few shillings.

There were other ways of earning a little extra cash for Christmas, carol singing all around the district as a soloist or in small groups. We would pick out a likely looking house, sing about six carols, and then expectantly knock at the door. If we were lucky we were given a halfpenny, an orange or sometimes a silver three-penny piece. The nights always appeared to have been colder and crisper but wrapped up in winter woollies, the only thing affected was our voice.

The hunt was on for sprigs of holly or mistletoe and evenings would be given over to making decorations or Christmas cards. We would help to mix the numerous ingredients that went into the Christmas cake. When the baking tins were filled, they would be carried to the nearest bake house, usually early in the morning, then cooked ready for collection in the evening. It was also a time when the Christmas puddings were made, complete with silver three penny or sixpenny pieces. The fruity mixture would be placed in basins, wrapped in cloth and placed in the boiler to steam away for hours. The interior of the kitchen was covered with a mist of steam but at the end of the day, when the puddings were taken out of the boiler and stacked away to cool, there was generally a very small one, which everyone had to sample.

By now the Christmas tree would be standing in a corner of the room in its tub, garlanded with bright coloured ornaments and little tin holders in which small coloured candles would be inserted. One gentle puff and the tree could catch fire, but somehow it rarely happened. Houses with children produced a Christmas stocking for each child, these being placed at

the foot of the bed waiting to be filled by Santa Claus. It is amazing, considering the poor living standards for many, but I cannot recall one instance when a child from the humblest of homes failed to receive something.

On Christmas day, the church bells would be ringing out from an early hour. After breakfast it was a case of making yet another journey to the local bake-

house. If you happened to be fortunate enough to have a turkey, goose or large piece of meat, this would be cooked in the bake house ready for collection at lunch time. The remainder of Christmas day, after listening to the King's message on the radio, would be very much for the children. They would play with their new toys and boxed games like Ludo, Snakes & Ladders or Tiddlywinks, the adults joining in the fun of Pin the Tail on the Donkey, Blind Man's Bluff etc.

And on the table, with a feast of other delicacies, would be tangerines, dates, masses of nuts, sweets, mince pies, jelly and blancmange, an occasion, maybe for many only once a year, when royalty could not have wished for more. At teatime there was always, along with the iced and decorated Christmas cake, the chocolate Yule log complete with robin and crackers containing paper hats and trinkets.

Pembroke turkeys 2/6 a lb

Geese and ducks 2/0 a lb

Chickens 1/6 a lb.

Oranges 4 for 6d

Dates 6d a box

Sherry 3/6 bottle

Player's cigarettes 50 for 2/6

edited by Royston Kneath

Santa Remembers ...

'Oh dear, I think I'm getting rather too old for this,' Santa thought as he climbed off his sleigh and hoisted the sack onto his back. He pushed himself gingerly down the chimney stack, held his breath and made it safely onto the floor.

'Oh, dear' he thought again, 'I could do with a rest'.

Wearily he looked around the room, then he saw a wonderful, dark brown leather buttoned armchair and in front of it a large matching ottoman.



'Perhaps I should just sit down for a minute, rest my feet,' he said to himself. He put his sack on the floor, lowered himself onto the seat, then carefully put his boots up on the footstool.

'Oh yes, my dear,' he said to the fairy on top of the Christmas tree, 'this feels extremely comfortable'.

His hands stroked the moulded, palisander plywood sides of the chair as he breathed in the aroma of the soft, buttoned leather upholstery.

Santa shut his eyes, suddenly remembering where he'd seen the chair before. It was back in the 1950s in America, in Los Angeles, when he'd been delivering presents to the furniture designer Charles Eames and his wife Ray. They'd left him a glass of bourbon and a blueberry muffin on their glass and chrome desk; right next to their original designs and drawings of the chair.

There was a note saying they thought it would make a great Birthday gift for their friend, the film director Billy Wilder. Lucky Billy, thought Santa relaxing further into the chair. Well, the design had certainly turned out well. Wilder must have loved the chair.

Santa remembered how Eames, when a student, had been asked to leave his university, mainly because of his too modern views and his enthusiasm for the architect Frank Lloyd Wright; later to be known as the greatest American architect of all time.

Santa then thought back to a visit he'd made to Wales, many Christmas's ago, to Taliesin a village in mid-Wales, where Wright's mother's family had lived. He remembered how all the houses he'd visited had left him a large slice of delicious barra brith. No wonder he'd put on weight.

Santa remembered that years later, in 1956, Wright had visited Wales looking for his roots. He had stayed with the architect of Portmerion, Sir Clough Williams- Ellis, to receive an honorary doctorate from Bangor University.

Taliesin, Santa reminisced, a delightful village and the name chosen by Wright for his home and foundation in Wisconsin; named after the 6th century Chief Bard who prophesied:

*'Their Lord they shall praise,
Their language they shall keep
Their land they shall lose-
Except wild Wales'.*

I shall be losing my job, Santa thought, if I don't get going soon. He eased himself reluctantly out of the chair. Looking around he saw a glass of whisky and a mince pie placed on a solid, dark oak sideboard that had been polished lovingly, that gleamed in the moonlight. He ran his fingers over the smooth surface. Santa loved oak. As soon as he arrived home, he would ask the elves to kindly make him an oak Welsh dresser for his kitchen. Mrs Klaus would love that...and perhaps a new armchair and stool for himself?

He took presents from his sack and filled the stockings hanging from the mantelpiece ...

'Goodbye my dear' he said to the fairy, 'see you next year'.

Margaret McCloy

Italian Christmas Memories

My childhood memories of Christmas in the fifties, are those that I spent with my family in Salerno, Italy where the festival is based on both religious and family traditions.

As the majority of the population is Roman Catholic, rules set by the church are observed, especially with regard to what is eaten prior to Christmas day. The family tradition is that members of the family, usually the females, are involved in the preparation of the food. This starts on La Vigilia (the vigil) which is Christmas Eve.



The dishes prepared are mainly vegetarian or fish based, often salted cod is used. Once fried it is then made into a salad with olive oil, garlic and lemon juice and presented with peppers, aubergines and endives stuffed with a mixture of olives, capers and anchovies.

After the savouries, came the desserts, pastries filled with chestnut puree, chocolate, pinenuts, mixed peel and spices. My favourite as a child was 'strufoli', fried pastry, drizzled

with honey and covered with hundreds and thousands.

This wonderful meal would not be consumed till after the family came home from midnight mass.

On Christmas Day, the meal consisted mostly of a capon which would have been boiled to make a broth in which home-made tortellini were cooked and served as a starter. The capon was then served, seasoned with herbs and accompanied with potatoes, vegetables and a winter salad.

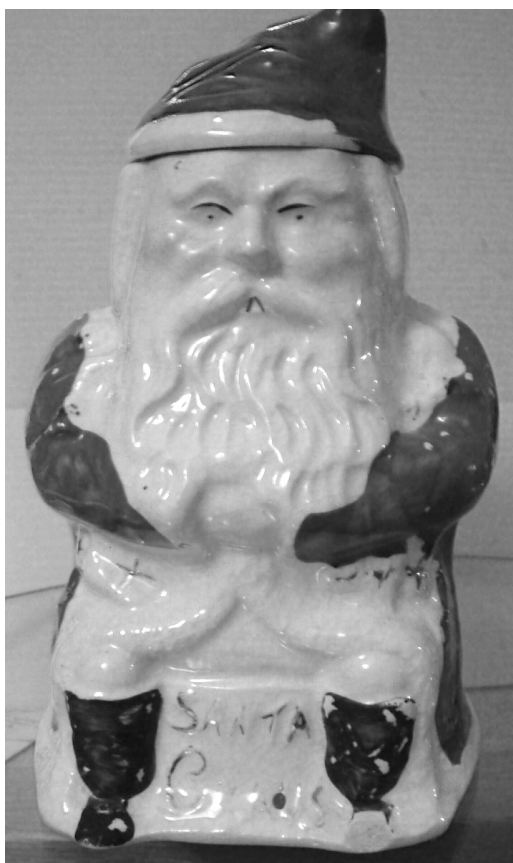
Salami and a selection of different goat's cheese would follow, all part of the feast. Then to the grand finale, the 'Pannettone' accompanied by a glass of Martini in which it could be dipped.

Presents were not given until the 6th of January, Epiphany, the day that the three kings went to see baby Jesus bearing their gifts.

Angelina Gallo

Religious Staffordshire Figures

Today when most of us decorate our homes we may hang pictures, choose posters or photographs of celebrities for our walls or place decorous object d'art on shelves or highly polished surfaces. In the past inexpensive Staffordshire pottery figures, brightly painted and often remarkably detailed, were the popular decorative items of the day. Made in great numbers they had a wide general appeal and were often referred to as 'penny plain, tuppenny coloured' depending on the colouring and finish of the piece.



Merry Christmas Character Jug

There were countless Staffordshire potteries in the 18th & 19th centuries that turned out these figures. In retrospect the variety of characters and themes produced was remarkably diverse and in some ways the output of these Midlands potteries can be seen to represent a social commentary of the time.

Figures produced represented contemporary

political, religious, sporting and even what today may be termed 'celebrity' personalities. They ranged from pastoral scenes of children with animals to Shakespearean characters on stage through to pugilists sparring or parsons preaching.

The lucrative Scottish market was also well served with countless highland tableaux adorned with unidentifiable but distinctive tartans – doubtless greatly influenced by Queen Victoria's well-known affection for the highlands.

People wanted affordable decorative items that mimicked the expensive porcelain groups also being produced around this time. The potteries eager to exploit the growing wealth of the working classes met this demand by producing quite literally thousands of figures, both individuals and group scenes.



John Wesley

What might surprise our more secular society today is the realisation that a small but significant section of this vast output was devoted to religious figures from both the Old and the New Testament as well as general figures portraying Christian faith. These evidently were popular and sold well enough to be re-produced and portrayed in more than one way.

For example, there are many depictions of Christ in a variety of poses. Also, the Apostles appear both singly, in pairs and in various groupings. This practise, of producing figures that could be sold independently but would also build towards a collection was a shrewd commercial move by the potteries, encouraging the purchaser to build up a thematic collection piece by piece. Group scenes depicting familiar biblical scenes

were also popular though perhaps less so as being more expensive to produce they were made in smaller numbers.

Today, most of these once popular and well-known figures go largely unrecognised. How many of us seeing Balaam's Ass would smile knowing he was the talking donkey of the Old Testament? Ask most people to name a talking donkey now and the usual response would be a grin and the answer 'Shrek' and his annoying but likeable sidekick donkey. Again, how many would realise the symbolism of Elijah being fed by Ravens or recognise St. Peter healing the lame man?

This is not so say that all the figures produced were biblical. Well-known contemporary pastors and preachers were occasionally awarded the honour of being immortalised in clay. The Revd. John Wesley (1703-1791), a huge influence in the growing Methodist Movement was depicted in several ways. A bust, pulpit figure and statute were produced, all of which proved

commercially successful.

Once on a visit to the potteries Wesley stayed with the Wood family, the foremost and one of the most innovative pottery families of the time. This visit by Wesley gave the potter Enoch Wood (1759-1840) the chance to model him and produce what became one of the most recognisable self-portrait pieces potted at the time. Such was the popularity of the bust figure that Wood produced it remained in production

for more than a century and still remains a collectors' item today.

Later as moulds became more commonly used in the production process the groups made became perhaps not simpler but certainly more uniform in character and quality. Indeed the same mould was often 'tweaked' to use for quite different characters, an example being the figure of

Robert Evans the Welsh preacher also sold as Palmer the poisoner.

The use of moulds heralded a revolution in manufacturing methods to what can be described as early assembly line 'mass production'. This had the advantage of reducing the cost per piece produced while standardising quality and enabling a vastly increased output.

As the appetite for religious figures diminished the potteries began to produce a variety of festive seasonal items. Both Father Christmas and Santa made an appearance in both useful and decorative forms. From tobacco jars shaped as Santa to cheerful Toby table decorations wishing Merry Christmas.

A far cry from the spiritual and educational symbolism of the religious figures they succeeded they have the distinct advantage of being widely recognised today, and perhaps more important in our multi faith society, appealing to many faiths.

Robert Leonard

What might surprise our more secular society today is the realisation that a small but significant section of this vast output was devoted to religious figures from both the Old and the New Testament ...

25 Things To Know About Christmas

1. Sir Isaac Newton, inventor and mathematician, was born on Christmas Day, 1642.

2. Germans made first artificial Christmas trees from dyed goose feathers.

3. Christmas trees grow for about fifteen years before they are sold.

4. In Poland, spiders decorate Christmas trees as according to legend, they wove a blanket for baby Jesus.

5. In 1870 Alabama was the first state in U.S.A. to officially recognize Christmas.

6. Holly berries are poisonous.

7. Saint Nicholas is the Patron Saint of banking, pawn broking and thievery (to nick something?).

8. Oliver Cromwell outlawed, by an act of parliament, the celebration of Christmas and carols in England in 1644.

9. Carols weren't sung in churches until introduced by St Francis of Assisi in the 13th century.

10. President Teddy Roosevelt, an environmentalist, banned Christmas trees from the White House in 1912.

11. Bing Crosby's record 'White Christmas' has over 100 million sales worldwide.

12. The word 'Christmas' is a contraction of 'Christ's Masse' from the Old English.

13. The letter 'X' in Greek is the first letter of the word 'Christ'. 'Xmas' has been used as an abbreviation for Christmas since the mid-1500s and the word is just as religious.

14. In 1843, London artist Joseph Lundall lithographed a drawing by the British illustrator, John Callcott Horsley, coloured it and sold over 1000 copies.

15. Letters to Santa Claus go to Edinburgh unless actually addressed to the North Pole.

16. Between 1900 and 2000 it has only snowed twice on Christmas Day, 1938 and 1976.

17. Christmas day was not declared a public holiday in Scotland until 1958.

18. Bread baked on Christmas Eve will never go mouldy.

19. It's considered unlucky to cut a mince pie with a knife.

20. Originally wassailing was quite an aggressive activity demanding drink, food or money from householders. 'Now bring us some figgy pudding...we won't go until we have some'.

21. Using robins on Christmas cards was meant to be comical, because postman, 150 years ago, wore red tunics and were nicknamed robins.

22. Some astronomers believe that the Star of Bethlehem may have been the planet Uranus.

23. Since 1947, Oslo has sent a Christmas tree to London as thanks for help given in WW2.

24. 25th December was not celebrated as birth of Jesus until 440 AD.

25. On Christmas Day, people in many parts of Wales, wake up very early to attend a special church service known as "Plygain" (daybreak) that is held between 3 am and 6 am. Men gather in local churches to sing (mainly unaccompanied) three or four part harmony carols in a service that goes on for nearly three hours.



A Strange Christmas

On Christmas Eve, as a child, I knew there was no point in staying awake for Santa Claus. My father, a strict member of the Plymouth Brethren would have asked for the place to be exorcised and fumigated if the chubby benefactor had set foot in our house or tried to slide down the chimney. Like most members of his sect he believed that the Christians had stolen Christmas from the Yule tide pagans. Trying to live his life only by the commands he discovered in the Bible, at the time of my childhood, he still hadn't found a Biblical exhortation, saying "Thou shalt remember Christmas."

His failure to find such a verse led to some fairly drab non festivals. Although my experiences of Christmas were slightly jollier than those endured by the writer Edmund Gosse. His father was also a member of the Plymouth Brethren and in his 1907 book "Father and Son" he tells the following story:

"On Christmas Day1857, our villa saw a very unusual sight. My father had given strictest charge that no difference whatsoever was to be made in our meals on that day; the dinner was neither to be more copious than usual nor less so. He was obeyed, but the servants, secretly rebellious, made a small plum pudding for themselves. Early in the afternoon the maidskindly remarked that "the poor dear child ought to have a bit anyhow" and wheedled me into the kitchen where I ate a slice of plum pudding ...

"At length I could bear my spiritual anguish no longer, and bursting into the study, I called out "Oh! Papa, Papa, I have eaten of the flesh offered to idols." It took sometime between my sobs, to explain what had happened. Then my father sternly said "Where is the accused thing?" I explained that as much as was left of it was still on the kitchen table. He took me by the hand and ran with me into the midst of the startled servants, seized what remained of the pudding and with the plate in one hand and me still tight in the other , ran till we reached the dust heap, when he flung the idolatrous confectionary on the middle of the ashes, then raked it deep down into the mass. The suddenness, the violence, the velocity of this extraordinary act made an impression on my memory which nothing will ever efface."

Booker Prize winning novelist Peter Carey, reworks this story in his book, Oscar and Lucinda. Oscar, brought up in a Brethren household succumbs to a slice of Christmas Pud on Christmas Day. Once he is discovered his father washes out his mouth with soap and water. This act forces the young Oscar to switch allegiance from the Brethren to Anglicanism. He prays "Dear God if it be thy will that thy people eat pudding, smite him!"

Whilst I had no maids or servants to call on as allies, uncles and aunts did try to relieve the dreariness. The drabest Christmas I ever endured was a lunch of bacon sandwiches and a box of jam tarts. In other years relatives did smuggle presents in and my mother's family, of agricultural stock and fiercely Anglican, delivered a chicken to the house.

The ironic thing about growing up in such a hot bed of religious adherence is that it teaches you to lie. After the holidays I would return to school with tales of how I had been inundated with presents from my parents. My fabricated stories also dripped with the tastiest Christmas Pudding. And I always found the hidden coin.

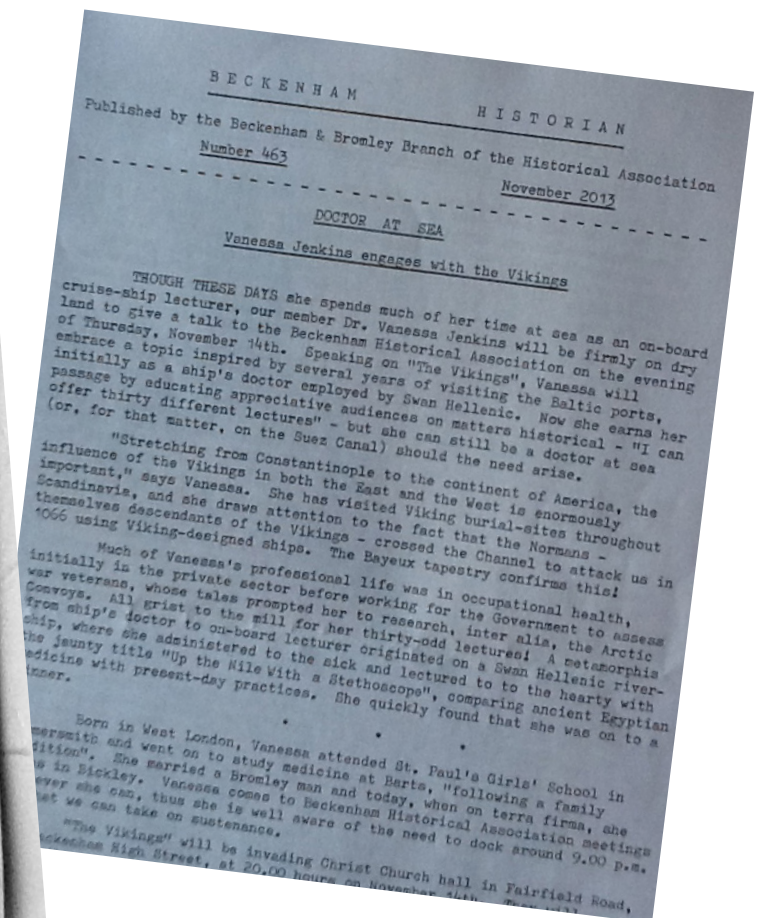
Peter Read

Beckenham Historian

Our editor sent a copy of Chronicle to the Beckenham branch of the Historical Society who are the only other branch to have a newsletter. They started their newsletter in 1967 and are now on number 463.

John Wagstaff sent a copy of the latest edition and a charming letter congratulating us on 'a superb publication' and 'Best wishes for the continual success of 'Chronicle'.

Well, we're on edition number three. Only 460 more to go to catch up. With four copies a year published by us that will be about the year 2128. Let's hope the branch and Chronicle will survive and still be promoting history in South West Wales.



Chairman's Christmas Message

The Chairman of the Swansea Branch of the Historical Association would like to thank the members of the Committee, and the membership who have supported the Branch over 2012-3. But please remember, we need more members, ideas and help. Also please remember that our remit covers South West Wales.

But for now, Happy Christmas and a historic New Year.

John Law

Christmas Day in 13th Century Tuscany

My name is Arturo Salvo, Christmas Day, the church bells are ringing and I have a raging headache. Yesterday evening, I drank too much. I blame my good friend Giacomo da Michele who came round to see me bringing a large flagon of Vernaccia white wine and a new poem that he had just written. He wanted me to read it as it's dedicated to December, part of his mesi, sonnets of the twelve months of the year. He writes his poems under the pseudonym of Folgore, he lives here in San Gimignano and he's one of Tuscany's finest poets.

*Last, for December, houses on the plain,
ground-floors to live in, logs heaped mountain-high,
and carpets stretched, and newest games to try.
And torches lit, and gifts from man to man
(Your host, a drunkard and a Catalan);
And whole dead pigs, and cunning cooks to ply
Each throat with tit-bits that shall satisfy;
And wine butts of saint Galganus' brave span
And be your coats well lined and tightly bound,
And wrap yourselves in cloaks of strength and weight,
With gallant hoods to put your faces through.
And make your game of abject vagabond
Abandoned miserable reprobate
Misers; don't let them have a chance with you.*

We've been friends for years ever since we went to school together, otherwise we would be enemies. His family are Guelphs who support the Pope while my family, the Salvuccis, are Ghibbelines and support the Emperor. But we remain friends, drink wine together and I am entertained by his comic poetry.

The streets are quiet today, people inside their houses celebrating Christmas with their families.

No fighting in the streets, no Ghibbelines squabbling with Guelphs. Won't be long before they start chasing each other through the narrow streets between the towers again. So many towers have been built in the town, nearly seventy now; they make the streets so dark, you can hardly see the sun anymore. The bells are still ringing, time I went to church. Happy Christmas.

Burns Night Dinner

We have a special dinner arranged for early next year at Sketty Hall.

Burns Night Dinner, Friday 24th January 2014 7.00 for 7.30 pm

*"Some hae meat and canna eat,
And some wad eat that want it,
But we hae meat and we can eat,
And sae the Lord be thankit."*

Robert Burns



The Burns Supper – 5 course meal for members £26.00, for non-members £28.00.

Requests for tickets, accompanied by a cheque payable to Dr John Law, to: 10 Penlan Crescent, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0RL

STARTER

*Vegetable Scotch Broth served with Pearl Barley and
Fresh Herbs*

APPETIZER

*Traditional Haggis served with Caramelized Shallots,
Neeps & Tatties and a Ruby Port flavoured Jus*

MAIN COURSE

*Lemon & Dill Crusted Wild Scottish Salmon served
with Pan fried Langoustines, Fresh Wilted Greens and
a Crab and Saffron Butter Sauce*

DESSERT

*Raspberry and Vanilla Cranach served with Fromage
Frais and White Chocolate Shavings.*

*Highland Shortbread Biscuits and Scottish Malt
Whisky.*

Tea/Coffee and Mints included

Christmas Greetings from Friends of the Branch



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White Rock - Connected Communities

The White Rock Trails project is now reaching the end of its HLF-funded life, but it is far from over. The team of forty volunteers will continue to pursue their various interests, and the Digital Trails app is under further development at Swansea University. There is a possibility of a second phase of funding – watch the web site for news.

White Rock Trails Celebration event will be held on Saturday 1st February at Swansea Museum's Collections Centre at Landore. The morning session will be by invitation, followed by an Open House at 2pm with an exhibition and guided walks around White Rock and the Hafod site.

Two of the six groups of Swansea University post-graduate MEng students have chosen the White Rock Digital Trails app for their 2013/2014 project. The teams are continuing development of the app beyond the original HLF-funded specification.



White Rock Ferry
West Glamorgan Archives Service

After a frustrating summer and autumn we are now talking to the council's staff with direct responsibility for maintenance of the White Rock site. This team cuts the grass paths and preserves the meadows between them, among other tasks. We plan to work with the team to restore the site to the condition it was in the late 1990s – an Industrial Heritage Park.

We still have to obtain Scheduled Monument Consent for each phase of the work and carry out risk assessments, ecological surveys and structural surveys. Not to mention arranging for equipment and vehicles, and the trained personnel to operate them, to be on site at the same time as the White Rock volunteers ...

The first target for clearance is the river bank from the car park to the dock. This is a lovely walk, spoiled only by the fact that unless you are on stilts the river itself is hidden by trees and bushes. Re-opening the view will be a major boon to the site. It will be appreciated by walkers, visitors to the Hafod side of the river, Swansea Community Boat Trust passengers, and by industrial archaeologists researching the various curious structures and tunnels dotting the quay.

Several new oral histories have been taken by Tudor and Janet Price, and more are planned. They are being transcribed and will be placed on the web site and in West Glamorgan Archives.

Images of White Rock sourced from the Royal Commission have been examined and considerable interpretation added, with the additional information returned to the Royal Commission. See the web site for this fascinating work.

A large number of documents have been discovered in West Glamorgan Archives and the Richard Burton Archives. These are proving a rich source of new information. A copy of the 1736 White Rock lease has been transcribed by student volunteers Dominic Williams and Stacey Tunmore.

Contact John Ashley for further information or to join the project.

john@globespinner.net

www.whiterocktrails.org

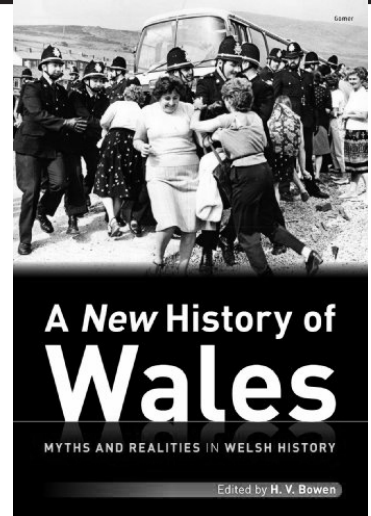
John Ashley

Book Review

A New History of Wales, edited by H.V.Bowen

Gomer Press £14.99

This fascinating publication, being the third in the series A New History of Wales, gives a fresh angle on what many perceive to be important historical sites. Looking not only at the usual castles, churches and other historically important sites, it shines a spotlight on more unconventional areas of interest. Bridges, motorways, sport arenas, slaughter houses and industrial works are all featured. Two of the twenty four essays in the volume even venture beyond the Principality to Scranton, U.S.A. and Mametz Wood in France where so many Welsh servicemen perished in battle.



It is a generously illustrated book with both glorious coloured photos and evocative black and white shots. Each chapter gives a helpful reading list for those who wish to pursue the essay subject further.

Puzzlingly, for a social history book it lacks an index which makes cross-referencing tricky. Despite this it would make a most welcome gift for anyone with an interest in the social history of Wales and all things Welsh.

Robert Leonard

Officers and Committee

John Law (Chair), John Ashley (Vice Chair), Ray Savage (Treasurer), Colin James (Executive Secretary), Claire Vivian (Membership Secretary), David Coley, Rosemary Crahart, Caroline Franklin, Rosie Gitsham, Royston Kneath, Robert McCloy, Margaret McCloy, Elizabeth McSloy, Eddie Owens, Ian Smith, Karmen Thomas. Representative members: Sid Kidwell (Citizen Historian), Brenig Davies (Friends of Carmarthen County Museum), Robert Leonard (St Mary's Church, Swansea), Irene Thomas (Neath Antiquarian Society).

Annual General Meeting

Nominee

Proposer

Secunder

The AGM will be held on Saturday 4 January, 10.30 at the National Waterfront Museum.

Nominations are invited for the committee and officers.

Please complete this form and bring it with you to the AGM.

If the nominee also wishes to stand as an officer, circle the role:

Chair

Vice Chair

Treasurer

Executive Secretary

Membership Secretary

www.haswansea.org.uk

HA Swansea Branch Programme 2014

4 January

Annual General Meeting (10.30) followed by the Branch President Professor Ralph Griffiths, **Where and Who is Richard III?**

18 January

Dr Ritchie Wood, **The experiences of South Wales miners within the tunnelling companies in the Great War and the effect on their families at home, and the work of women at home.**

15 February

Dr Nicholas Barley, **Get Off My Land! Aeneas Tacticus and the City-state in Fourth-century Greece.**

15 March

In commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas, Peter Read presents **Dylan's Day . . .**

11 am: **Dylan's Final Journey; a one man play of Dylan Thomas's last days in the USA.**

2 pm: **Dylan Thomas at 100.**

26 April

Dr Leighton James, **Total War: Nationalism and the Wars of Liberation, 1813-14.**

17 May

Professor Maurice Whitehead, **Wales and the Grand Tour.**

21 June

John Ashley, **Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Swansea.**

19 July

Dr Lesley Hulonce, **A Social Frankenstein in our Midst? Prostitution in Victorian Swansea.**

16 August

Dr Simon John, **A History of Cricket during the Great War.**

(20 September and 18 October to be arranged.)

15 November

Professor John France, **Warfare in the Age of the Crusades: A Clash of Contrasts.**

(20 December to be arranged.)

All events are at the National Waterfront Museum, 11:00 Saturday, unless otherwise stated.

Members of the National Historical Association living in the area have automatic Branch Membership. www.history.org.uk

Membership Form

Name

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.....

.....

Phone

Email

Send with cheque made payable to *Historical Association Swansea Branch*:

Membership Secretary
Historical Association
c/o National Waterfront Museum
Oystermouth Road
Swansea SA12 3RD

Individual membership: £10.

Concessionary membership: £5.

Family (household) membership: £15.

Student (to 30 September 2014): £3

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