



Roath Local History Society

Bringing History to Your Doorstep - since 1978



Dear R.L.H.S. Members,

I received a lot of positive feedback in response to last month's E-Newsletter and thanks to this and contributions from the Committee, this month's 'Lockdown Special', has actually turned into a bumper edition! I've come to realise the advantage our E-Newsletter has over other news sheets - old news is exactly what R.L.H.S. Members want! Penny Roberts writes:

When I received your newsletter I thought you would be in the situation of making bricks without straw. This was clearly not the case as you have produced a very interesting newsletter. Also in any case my use of the term was inaccurate! However it made me research the origin of the phrase for as far as I knew we didn't need straw for brick making – which was true BUT I discovered it has a Biblical reference which I found interesting.

Making bricks with straw

Many clay products require the addition of other materials to add strength and durability. In the case of bricks in Old Testament Egypt -- river clay is usually composed of very fine particles and so would dry slowly -- adding straw would "open up" the clay, allowing it to dry more readily in the sun. In addition to aiding in drying, the linear nature of straw adds stability to the clay brick in much the same way that rebar or wire mesh reinforce modern day concrete. Bricks made without straw would break and crumble easily. Adobe bricks used around the world are generally only sun dried but grasses, straw and other materials are added to the clay for the same basic reasons.

The ancient brick-making process can still be seen on Egyptian tomb paintings and models.

Dear Members,

I very much hope you are staying safe and well in these difficult times and managing to get any help you need.

It is with regret that we have taken the decision to cancel our Summer programme of visits that normally take place in June and July. I'm sure you will understand the reasons why but at the same time share my disappointment that we will have to wait another year before venturing out together.

We will continue to monitor guidelines and developments and review the Winter 2020/21 lecture programme in due course. There is no need for us to make a decision on this just yet and we will keep you fully informed.

In the meantime I'd like to thank Elizabeth for her hard work in producing the Newsletter and to others who have made contributions. It certainly helps us all stay in touch. May I encourage people to make contributions either for the Newsletter or Website or both.

These could be bits of local history or reminiscences you have of growing up in the area.

Take care

Ted Richards, Chairperson

Timbers Square, Roath, Cardiff

Timbers Square lies off Albany Road, close to its intersection with Newport Road in the Roath area of Cardiff. The square represents post-Second World War private housing development, the first house building plans dating from 1955. The architect of the semi-detached properties was J. E. J. Lewis, the developer being C. H. Palmer. The square is located on what had formerly been the Roath Court estate whose last occupant was Miss Rose Williams (1875-1952). In 1953, the Roath Court mansion of the Williams family - in whose ownership it had been since 1827 - was sold to the funeral directors, James Summers & Son, whose business still operates on the site today.

The death of the last Williams occupant of Roath Court also resulted in a nearby area of land being sold for development. This land, which had previously been designated as the Roath Court pleasure gardens on the Roath tithe apportionment of 1841, became known as Timbers Square. The name derives from Miss Edith Timbers, born in 1901 in Whitney-on-Wye, Herefordshire, who came to Roath Court as a girl in the early 1920s. Her subsequent life was devoted to serving the Williams family until the death of Rose Williams sent her into retirement in her native Herefordshire, where she died in 1963. In recognition of her long and faithful service Timbers Square was named after her.

Edith Mary Timbers was aged 9 when the 1911 census was taken. Her father was Arthur Edward Timbers, aged 46, described in that census as a 'Crackman (Domestic)' who was born in Witton, Norfolk. Edith's mother was Sarah Jane Timbers (43) born in Ipswich, Suffolk. Her brothers were Francis Edward Timbers (12) and Arthur David Timbers (2) both of whom were also born in Whitney-on-Wye, Herefordshire. Arthur Edward Timbers, as head of household, gave his postal address as The Stables, Whitney-on-Wye, a four-roomed property which lay in the Breconshire part of Whitney-on-Wye. Edith's parents had been married for nineteen years in 1911 and there was an older sibling who had no doubt left home.

Jeff Childs
Penarth

- 1 Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff Building Plans, BC/S/1/46146, BC/S/1/46376 and BC/S/1/46442
- 2 *Ibid.* There are forty-four properties listed for the square in the current *Postcode Finder – Find an Address/Royal Mail Group Ltd* website. See www.royalmail.com/find-a-postcode (accessed 03/01/2017).
- 3 Glamorgan Archives, P 57/2.
4. Details kindly supplied by the late Mrs Susan Williams, former lord lieutenant of South Glamorgan and a descendant of the Williamses of Roath Court and which is contained in her foreword to my *Roath, Splott and Adamsdown* (Chalford, 1995).
- 5 http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=ONSDeath93&gss=sfs28_ms_db&new (accessed 03/01/2017).
6. This is either, the north Norfolk village and civil parish of that name, located five miles east of North Walsham and nineteen miles north of Norwich, or the Witton in the parish of Postwick, which is eight miles east of Norwich. A study of the various censuses and BMD entries via the *Ancestry.co.uk* or *Findmypast.co.uk* genealogical websites makes it clear that the primary ancestral county of the family was Norfolk.
7. TNA, RG 14/33638/41 obtained from ancestry.com. *1911 Wales Census* on 03/01/2017.

The above account first appeared in *Morgannwg* (LX, 2016), pp. 199-200 and is reproduced here courtesy of that journal.

Part of Vision 21 social enterprises, Covid 19 meant the wonderful Oaks Garden Nursery (Highfield Road), had to close to the public, as the start of the busy, gardening season.

Fortunately, the Key Workers and their trainees have been able to safely continue their studies and look after the plants.

They are now able to offer Cardiff residents a selection of ready-planted Hanging Baskets and Planters, delivered straight to your door.



THE OAKS IS NOW TAKING ORDERS!

The Oaks Garden Nursery is now taking orders for the listed items below, subject to availability.

This service is only available for deliveries in the Cardiff area and will be made from the beginning of May. Minimum order of £25.

Large Mixed Planter 13" x 10" - £16

Extra Large Mixed Planter 18" x 15" - £26

Wicker Hanging Basket 14" - £19

Surfinia Hanging Baskets- £15

Herb Planters (mix of 4 herbs) - £12

To place your order please ring The Oaks

029 2068 9922

Open Monday - Friday 9 am - 4pm

Card payments or bank transfer only. You will be contacted by telephone for payment closer to the delivery time.

The team at The Oaks are hoping to add more items to order as they become available, including large perennials and smaller planters.

Name: Tim Orrell

Email: tim.orrell@cardiff.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.cardiffharbour.com/flatholm/>

Comment: FLAT HOLM – A WALK THROUGH TIME HERITAGE PROJECT - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

I am Project Manager for Cardiff Council working on a National Lottery Heritage Fund project based around the island of Flat Holm in the Bristol Channel. This tiny island is steeped in fascinating history and heritage and rich in wildlife interest.

Essentially the project is aiming to secure funding from NLHF for three key aims:

To repair and bring into use some of the island's key historic buildings – the Cholera Isolation Hospital, Foghorn Station and one of the World War 2 searchlight stations

To manage the island better for nature conservation, particularly its key important feature of the largest breeding colony of lesser black-backed gulls in Wales

To bring the amazingly varied stories of the island's history and wildlife to the wider public – both those who are able to visit the island and audiences on the mainland on both sides of the Bristol Channel

To this end we are seeking views on our plans via an online survey from a wide variety of the public, particularly those with a known interest in heritage and/or natural history such as your members.

I would be very grateful if you would be willing to circulate the following link to our survey to your members and network via email and/or your social media channels.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FlatHolm>

You can find out more about the island at: <https://www.cardiffharbour.com/flatholm/>

The survey takes about five minutes to complete and as an incentive we are running a competition to win a weekend stay on the island in our self-catering holiday cottage for up to four people.

If you would like any further information, or to discuss how your group could get more involved with the project or the island in future please do not hesitate to email or call me on 07738 221983.

At a time when grandchildren, estranged from their grandparents, are being encouraged to ring them for oral history lessons, Margaret Butler was wondering

Do youngsters really want to know the tales of 70 years ago?

and oft quoted in today's national emergency she ponders

Dunkirk spirit - that old cliché does it still exist today?

We might have to form queues, 2 metres apart when we shop, or possibly have to patiently wait for our groceries to arrive on the doorstep, but Margaret has vivid W.W.II memories of her London childhood:

- Jumpers made of darning wool
- Belts of cellophane
- Powdered egg and carrot cake - *no point in complaining*
- Bare legs coloured brown to imitate nylons
- Lint pyjamas - *what a notion!*
- Barrage and Blackout
- Doodle Bugs
- The dread V2
- Platforms sheltering crowds below - *was it really ever so?*
- In which we serve
- Stiff upper lip
- Propaganda
- Censorship

FAKE NEWS

FROM CAROL & CHARLES 'TRUMP' BALL

It is with great sadness that I have to mention the loss of a few further businesses around town. The bra manufacturer has gone bust, the specialist in submersibles has gone under, the manufacturer of food blenders has gone into liquidation, a dog kennel has called in the retrievers, the suppliers of paper for origami enthusiasts has folded, the Heinz factory has been canned as they couldn't ketchup with orders, the tarmac laying company has reached the end of the road, the bread company has run out of dough, the clock manufacturer has had to wind down and has gone cuckoo, the Chinese has been taken away, the shoe shop has had to put his foot down and given his staff the boot and finally the launderette has been taken to the cleaners.



A People's Story of Wales

Wishing Well at Penylan

Description. This term in folklore is used to describe wells where it is thought that any spoken wish would be granted. It is thought that water had been placed there as a gift from the gods, since water is a source of life and often a scarce commodity.

Photography by Frederic Evans
www.peoplescollection.wales

“Well, well!” A short history of two Roath water sources.

Modern Roath is very much the product of late Victorian and Edwardian urban expansion, but the brook which gurgles picturesquely through its parks is a rather contrived reminder of Roath's very real, and very recent, agrarian heritage. The wells which dotted this part of Glamorgan were another such reminder of Roath's rural past, and although now sadly lost still provide us with a fascinating insight into Roath and its character and history.

Arguably the most famous of these wells was the Ffynnon Bren, which since antiquity, existed on the road now known as Albany Road. Cited on the northern side, immediately opposite what is now the junction with Claude Road, the well was reputed to have particularly healing ocular powers and for centuries people came to bathe their eyes in its clear waters. Despite the well's medieval provenance, and its subsequently giving its name to both Wellfield Road and Wellfield Place, the modern visitor to Albany Road would be supremely unaware that such a thing ever existed, and some confusion endures regarding the date of its destruction. Dic Mortimer describes the well as being 'brutally buried under tarmac in 1890', but such an approach would be inconsistent with Victorian treatments of ancient wells elsewhere in the city, such as at Llandaff, and moreover Tarmacadam was not in use until after the turn of the century although other forms of cement were. Furthermore, in Edgar Chappell's writings published in 1945, the well is described to still be standing in a former cottage garden, implying the feature survived into that period and well beyond the initial development of the area by the Victorians. Of course, as the site is adjacent to the Globe Centre which has undergone considerable redevelopment since Chappell was writing, even if the date given by Mortimer is incorrect then the well's eventual destruction may indeed have taken place as he describes. However, it is also possible the well may still live on behind the maze of buildings which now occupy the site; if so, could something not be done to reinstate this feature in the public realm and put some interest back into this somewhat neglected stretch of road?

The name of the well presents another mystery. Likely derived from the fourteenth century rebel Llewelyn Bren, the name is particularly interesting when taken alongside the historical name for the Roath Brook, Nant-y-Llechau (or Lleici, Lecky or Lleuci etc), which is itself derived from the name of Llewelyn Bren's long-suffering wife, Lleucu. However, while the Roath manorial records confirm a disruption in production over the period of Llewelyn's rebellion, there is no ready connection between the rebel and Roath which would explain why two prominent natural features in the parish would bear his name and that of his wife. Does this toponymy record some historical event or connection in the parish during the course of the rebellion which has gone otherwise unremarked or unnoticed? Although waged predominantly from bases further north in the historic Senghenydd heartlands, it is not improbable that Llewelyn's grievances would have resonated strongly with the inhabitants of Roath, who as tenants on the demesned manor would doubtless have their own experiences with the generally unpopular Hugh Despenser.

On a purely speculative basis, it may also be worthy of consideration that such toponymy comes from the aftermath of the rebellion. Lleucu survived her husband by three decades, and although eventually restored with her sons to their lands and titles found herself much persecuted by the Despensers and their allies following her husband's death; there are many examples of dispossessed noblewoman taking sanctuary in monastic settings and Roath Keynsham, owned by Keynsham Abbey and lying just north of the brook which would later bear her name, may have proved ideal for such a purpose. We may also speculate whether this mystery may have a bearing on another much debated local story regarding the legendary interment of the decapitated body of another Llewelyn, Llewelyn the Last, at nearby Llanrumney Hall downstream. Also owned by Keynsham Abbey, could it be, perhaps, that local legend has confused Llewelyns, and that the local Welsh toponymy actually records the association of the area with the resting place of Llewelyn Bren? More research is required to provide more definitive answers to these questions, which are intrinsically linked to Roath, and also to Cardiff's, complex cultural and linguistic provenance and identity. Whatever the explanation, however, something must first be done to ensure that these historically fascinating names are preserved, and to prevent the generic and characterless names of 'Wellfield' and 'Nant Fawr' from supplanting the more historically appropriate and interesting forms entirely.

The second well in the parish which has been noted as significant was that in Penylan, known as the Penylan Wishing Well or Hen Ffynnon. Located on higher ground, to the west of another ancient road, Penylan Hill, on land formerly belonging to Ty Gwyn Farm, the exact location of the well is somewhat difficult to ascertain, it having already been largely abandoned by the 1940s. Two wells appear on historic OS maps roughly in the correct location: one, with adjoining springs, to the right-hand side of Bronwydd Avenue, immediately to the south of the current course of the A48, and another labelled 'Trial Well' south of the Convent of the Good Shephard (now St David's Catholic College). It has further been noted elsewhere that the Hen Ffynnon stood where Oldwell Court now stands, and was destroyed in the 1970s during the construction of that complex which sits on the junction of Bronwydd Avenue and Penylan Hill; no such well, however, appears on historic maps, nor is the arched stone entrance which is said to have survived until that time visible with any clarity. Unfortunately, as both the locations on the maps have themselves been extensively redeveloped both by modern housing and with the construction of the A48, the destruction of the Hen Ffynnon in the 1970s seems almost certain, making identification harder.

The traditions relating to this well were predominantly romantic. Edgar Chappell relates that an 'old inhabitant' described the well as being a 'bowl about six inches in diameter with a lip that was supposed to be the impression of Jesus Christ's knee. The water emerged from the rock and was walled over. On Easter Monday, a large number of people wended their way thither to drop bent pins into the well'. The tradition stood that young couples would make a wish using bent pins, which were said to be deposited in such quantity that the well was almost full.

Formerly, on Easter Mondays, a fair was also held in the environs of the well; this seems to have stopped with the encroaching gentrification of the area in the Victorian period, along with a number of other Cardiff locales which succumbed to similar forces to the detriment of the local community, such as the Great Heath and the Castle Green.

The well, in common with many across the country, also had its own resident ghost straight out of a gothic novel: the Black Lady of Penylan. Her wails and cries were said to keep all but the most daring away from the well, and the myth ran that she suffered from a curse which could only be lifted by a man holding her firmly and silently by the waist. This was reputed to have been tried, but the young man cried in pain as he did so, renewing the curse for another 200 years. The ‘trial’ aspect of this mythology is exceptionally common in folklore, and one may speculate that the reference to the ‘Trial Well’ on the OS map is a reference to this tradition. Indeed, the seeming incompatibility to the romantic and spectral legends may lead one to hypothesise that the traditions actually relate to the two different wells which appear on the map, with the subsequent belief that the myths related to the same well stemming only from the vagaries of oral transmission.

Of course, only two wells have been discussed here, and others existed in the parish which have not been mentioned. The named wells mentioned here, however, are those which have been given most attention in secondary accounts and serve as a fascinating springboard for further discussion into a number of aspects of Roath’s history. While the loss of these wells is to be lamented, society’s evolution beyond reliance on such sources for water is naturally not to be; the provision of sanitation to Cardiff, though hotly contested at the time and subject to much self-interested opposition, would be the keystone of improving the sprawling city’s public health, and to this day we continue to make use of the water systems which supplanted these wells. However, it is an interesting lesson to take for today’s urban planners that simply because a feature is redundant, it need not necessarily be lost entirely. As local curiosities and historical markers the loss of Roath’s celebrated wells is surely to be regretted.

Geraint Denison-Kurg

Bibliography

Edgar L. Chappell, *Old Whitchurch: The Story of a Glamorgan Parish* (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 1945)

Jeff Childs, *Roath, Splott and Adamsdown* (Stroud: The History Press, 2012)

Dic Mortimer, *Cardiff: The Biography* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014)

All OS Maps consulted using the National Library of Scotland’s online resource.

NOTICE

Single man with
toilet rolls looking
for single lady
with hand
sanitiser for some
good clean fun!

Thanks to all the people that suggested places I could obtain yeast for my neglected bread-making machine. Alas, none of them supplied 'cheats' fast action dried yeast! However, Green & Jenks deli at 61 Wellfield Road, are purveyors of the real thing. This new business is run by the descendants of The Roath Park Dairy company which ran from 1 Albany Road for 70 years. Their motto was "Unexcelled for Milk & Cream" and they delivered milk by horse and cart, with a shop selling groceries, cream, butter, cheese and milk brought in by farmers from the surrounding countryside. On one of my walks I happened to pass a friend treasuring a seething tub of live culture. She told me that as a nurse, she'd been delighted to find they offered NHS workers a generous discount. All together good eggs!

Very best wishes,

Elizabeth Morgan, R.L.H.S. Honorary Secretary

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