



# E-NEWSLETTER

## MAY 2024

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## E-NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S WELCOME

We are now well into spring, and so what better time to reproduce the wonderful watercolour painting of Spring Cottage on Albany Road. Spring Cottage stood where the Roath Clinic is now. It lay opposite 187 Albany Road, which in 1912, was the home of 14 year-old Kate Marjorie Roberts, who painted the scene from her bedroom window. The houses on the right-hand side of the painting are the backs of those in Connaught Road, prior to the building of the houses on Roath Court Road. With thanks to Hilary Roberts.



After a very successful string of monthly talks, we have just one meeting left this season before we start our summer programme of visits, which I'm delighted to hear have sold like hot cakes. This month's newsletter features more accounts from Les Phillips and Gareth Brown, along with a sneak preview from Elizabeth about the Newport Transporter Bridge Visitor Centre.

As always, I'd love to receive your own stories or accounts of your own research interests, or even suggestions for stories.

Have a good summer!

Jon Roberts  
Newsletter Editor

# Recollections of the later WWII days and nights in Roath

## Les Phillips

Experts in the cognitive neuroscience of memory say that children usually start remembering happenings from the age of four. I was born in 1940 and firmly believe that my recollections of the later war years are part of my earliest memories and not what was related to me.

German bombing attacks on Cardiff began in 1940, the final raid taking place in March 1944. That last raid is the one I probably remember most clearly. Cardiff Docks became a strategic target for the Luftwaffe, being one of the biggest coal ports in the world. However, several surrounding areas were also heavily bombed. Around 2100 bombs fell in Cardiff during WWII, killing 355 people. Many people were left homeless. The Cardiff Blitz was not as severe as that endured by Londoners, but nevertheless the city suffered from many visits by German bombers between 1940-1944.

First let me set the family scene. We lived in 6 Cyfarthfa Street just under three miles from the Docks as the Luftwaffe flew. Dad went to enlist in the army but was turned down on medical grounds. So he continued delivering milk by day - Moreton and Phillips, Dairymen - and a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service at night. Mam was a housewife, as was the norm in those days. My brother Den, five



years older than me, started at the Church-in-Wales Primary school in Croft Street next to St Anne's when war was declared. Our Anderson Air Raid Shelter in the back 'garden' was not fit for purpose as it was prone to flooding. The Slomans next door at No.4, didn't even have an outdoor shelter as their yard was too small. Their refuge was under the kitchen table which was reinforced with iron-sheeting - an extremely tight fit, as there were four of them at home. The Bevans at No.8 let us share their shelter.

### **An Anderson shelter (used as a garden shed)**

When the air raid siren sounded - I can still recall that wailing and whenever a piston-engined plane flies overhead that sound also stimulates the hair on the back of my neck - Mam would come into our bedroom to wake us up. Dad would usually already be on fire duty. Reluctantly we would get out of bed, often in the middle of the night, quickly put on dressing gowns and slippers and Mam would take us downstairs. Three options faced us. If the Air Raid Warden advised it was likely to be a 'mild' raid we'd leave by the front door, carefully passing through the blackout curtain so as not to show light to alert the enemy overhead, and proceed through the Bevan's house and go into their shelter.

Heavier raids meant that we had to climb over our garden wall into their garden. If bombs were already falling the three of us would shelter in the very small cupboard under the stairs. I am still not sure how the severity of raids was determined. Wherever we went, Den and I carried our gas masks in cardboard boxes. Mine was a Donald Duck mask.

Usually there were five of us in the Bevan's shelter which was not that large. Mr Bevan smoked a pipe and he, without fail, had it with him in the shelter. Along with his tobacco pouch and box of Swan Vestas. If the weather was cold a paraffin heater provided warmth. Not the most healthy of environments and we were often in the shelter for a long time. Some raids lasted 10 hours. Den would on times petrify me saying that he could hear Germans outside. Mam would scold him. I would burst into tears, and it was a while before I became reassured that it was not true. Sometimes Dad, if in the area, in his fireman's uniform would come to check that we were alright. I longed to hold his axe. He was always smelling of smoke and in winter his uniform was often frozen. He drove one of the fire engines and on one occasion his friend, a fellow fire fighter and also a Splott lad, asked Dad when they were summoned to a fire if he wanted to drive the engine or the tender. Dad opted for the fire engine. His friend in the tender drove ahead of him and was killed by a landmine dropped by parachute. Close to the CWS biscuit factory in Moorland Road, Splott I think.

We were all very relieved when the All-Clear Siren sounded. A most welcome sound. We could again go to Mr Bailey's sweet shop on City Road opposite our street with our Ration Book. I can still savour the tantalising aroma of the sweets in open boxes. Jars full of favourites like Mello mints and aniseed lined the shelves. Under rationing we were allowed 12 ounces of sweets every four weeks. Another war time memory, also a very frightening one, was hearing the voice of the Irish-American William Joyce, aka Lord Haw Haw, on the wireless spewing Nazi propaganda. As soon as my parents heard "Germany calling, Germany calling" they turned the wireless off. After the war he met his end at the hands of Albert Pierrepoint at Wandsworth Prison, the last person to be executed for treason in the United Kingdom. Churchill's speeches, which we listened to keenly, reassured us that Britain and allies were winning. The war time Prime Minister visited the bombed sites in the Croft Street area in 1941 as part of a morale boosting tour of the south-west of Britain.

The only damage our house had was one broken window in the back bedroom. We were very fortunate. Several houses were destroyed in Talworth Street two streets away. A large war time water tank was placed where the houses once stood and we would often implore Mam to take us to see it. As we made our way down two blocks of City Road she would sing "Please Mum, can we see Uncle Jim jumping in the water tank and learning how to swim." Uncle Jim we never saw but often watched children venturing into the water. Until the friendly Bobby told them it was dangerous and that they had to get out. Going to see the barrage balloons was another treat.

A large number of homes at the end of Rose Street and on Croft Street were demolished by bombs and many of their occupants were killed. Poets Corner, Milton and Shakespeare Streets, I believe, escaped. Those bomb sites became



our playground for a number of years. After a raid we would go into the street to see if we could find any shrapnel. Genuine pieces could fetch a good number of comics in a swap. On the other side of Richmond Road, over the railway line in Llanbleddian Gardens and Wyverne Road, 23 people were killed. Ten were members of the Palmer family who had taken shelter in the Anderson shelter in their garden. Wikipedia also tells me that the parish hall on Wyverne Road was destroyed but, remarkably, the 4th Cardiff Scout flag carried to the Antarctic on Scott's fateful expedition was recovered from the rubble undamaged. One of the websites relates that on a final raid headed for Cardiff one of the German aircraft mistook the Irish Sea for the River Severn and bombed Cork in neutral Ireland!

One time Mam was standing in the backyard and called Dad to come and see the pretty lights in the sky. Far from that, they were the usual precursory flares or incendiaries followed by landmines on parachutes. Dad quickly took us and Mam to the shelter to avoid being hit. Llandaff Cathedral was hit by one during the heaviest raid on 2 January 1941 causing much damage to the spire and the roof of the nave, south aisle and chancel. I remember being taken to see the damage after the war. A church on the corner of City and Newport Roads, opposite the Post Office, was totally destroyed. Other parts of Cardiff suffered badly as well. In Grangetown, which was hit by 100 German aircraft in one raid, the Hollyman Brothers bakery was hit by a landmine and 32 people who were using the basement as a shelter were killed.

Victory in Europe was a time to celebrate. Like many other streets in Roath we had a VE street party. Tables and chairs stretched along the middle of the street. Mothers did a great deal of cooking and baking and there were ample supplies of jelly, too. With blancmange. Strings of flags and bunting stretched across the street from the upper windows of opposite houses creating a colourful party atmosphere. Afterwards Mr Oram, who lived at No. 7 opposite us, took us children on the back of his lorry around the nearby streets singing our heads off. Strains of *"She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes"* and *"Roll out the Barrel"* - it was said that we could be heard in Albany Road. Possibly up Pen-y-lan hill in Cyncoed as well. The Matron at Cardiff Royal Infirmary, I gather, complained at the noise, as it was disturbing the patients. VJ day, marking victory over Japan, was similarly celebrated with considerable enthusiasm, although the Far East was a far-off place. Times of joy and thankfulness, instead of fear and anxiety, before we faced the austerity of post-war Britain.

# Cardiff Royal Infirmary and my family

## Gareth Brown – RLHS Chair

This article is based on a talk I gave to attendees in November 2022 as one of a series of talks of local interest at Capel i Bawb, CRI, by members of Roath Local History Society. Capel i Bawb houses the Roath library and has cafe facilities and is intended to serve as a community facility for Adamsdown and the adjacent part of Roath. Memories of medical training at CRI and growing up in Roath was the intended subject matter of this talk! But my medical training at the Infirmary was very limited and my upbringing in Roath was very ordinary so that the subject matter of the talk broadened and encompassed other topics. I have amended or left out some of what I spoke about and added some other details. Those expecting lots of tales of medical emergencies will be disappointed.

Unlike my brother Graeme I was born the wrong side of the road and it would have been the wrong side of the tracks when the trams were running. By that I mean that whereas he was born a Roath boy in Rose Street, I was born in Glossop Terrace, on the other side of Glossop Road, twenty yards maybe over the borderline in the parish of St John. I shall not go into which electoral ward or district that was in, as we learned from Ted Richards's talk that the names have repeatedly changed - Adamsdown or Tredegarville maybe?

So I cannot say I was born a Roath boy, only bred and brought up as one. I was not even born in the new Maternity hospital that was started to be built across the road from CRI before WW2. Building was halted during the war and although it was supposed to have opened by late 1953, according to my mother, it had not been completed when I was born 3 weeks early, in November 1953 in one of the old houses



that had served as maternity facilities. Visitors were not allowed in those days, much like in the Covid pandemic, so my father had to show his concern for my mother by whistling a certain tune as he walked by to show he was thinking of us. Two days later Cardiff beat the All Blacks and I was named Gareth after Gareth Griffiths, one of the Cardiff threequarters.

### **The “new” maternity hospital (now demolished and replaced by student flats)**

After discharge from the hospital, I lived with my parents in rooms at 1 Theodora Street, off Broadway. This was most definitely regarded as Roath in those days and for many years after. On 1 March 1956 we moved to 24 Rose Street, where an aunt of my mother had lived till her death, and next door to where my mother was born at no 25 and where she lived until she was about 10, when the family moved to a bigger house, no 15 System Street, Adamsdown. My mother was one of 12 children, but two had died before she was born. My brother was born at home in Rose St, in June 1956.

24 Rose Street was a two bedroomed terraced house with no bathroom and an outside toilet attached to the back of what we called the back kitchen. Access to the toilet

could only be gained from the outside, so a cold dark experience in the middle of a winter's night after avoiding the cockroaches, or black beetles as we called them, on the living room floor on the way. We were occasionally woken up by merry gentleman singing on exiting the Roath Cottage Public House 2 doors away. My paternal grandmother and aunt and uncles lived in sight of our house in Plasnewydd Road, but my grandmother died when I was six.

Graeme and I went to infants' school down the road at St Anne's in Crofts Street where our parents and countless family members, including our maternal grandmother and her sisters, had attended. We then followed our father's footsteps in attending Albany Road Junior School. My year were the first not to take the 11 plus exam after a number of changes of mind by the Education authorities in Cardiff in the Spring of 1965. We were bussed out to Llanrumney Junior High School in Ball Road. I remember wearing long trousers on a daily basis for the first time and the enormosity of the school. There were 10 classes of about 30 pupils each in Form 1. After two years we or our parents could choose for us to go to a different High School to complete Secondary Education. I came back to Roath to Cardiff High School for Boys on Newport Road which still had the ambience of a Grammar School.

Looking back, my life was very simple and quite restricted. I was in the St Annes' Cubs and Scouts, but I didn't enjoy Scouting very much. Other than that, there were no obvious outside activities available. We went on holidays to Mumbles each year for many years as a family friend had a bungalow there, but we never went abroad or anywhere else in Britain and no one else I knew locally did either. What you never had, you never missed, I suppose. I did go on a school trip to Denmark by boat and bus with Llanrumney School, however.

I wasn't very good at sport but did play for the B team of my year at rugby in Llanrumney and the 2nd XV in Cardiff High. Following Cardiff RFC and Glamorgan County Cricket Club were major interests. My parents said as long as you do your best that is all they expected of me academically. I took this to heart and was very studious and diligent as a schoolboy with very little social life, particularly compared to school children these days.

We met up with cousins, aunts and uncles in System Street and then Comet Street in Adamsdown every Saturday night till I was in my mid to late teens. Particularly when I was younger, shopping in Albany Road or Clifton Street with my mother and brother was part of the summer holidays. Those streets were so much nicer back then. We also used to meet up with my mother's family, cousins and aunts at Barry Island, Roath Park Lake, Victoria Park or visit Bristol Zoo or go in mystery bus tours around South Wales in those days.

Tarring the road in the summer, the incursions into Rose Street of the rag and bone man, the salt and vinegar man, the knife sharpening man, Tommy Champ pushing his cart laden with fresh fish on a Friday, Brains workmen lowering barrels of beer into the cellar of the Roath Cottage with ropes were regular features of the pageant of life on Rose Street. I can also remember being held by my father's mother and seeing di Mascio's horse and cart coming along Plasnewydd Road selling ice cream - well, the man in the cart was doing the selling, not the horse! Sunday treats of Thayers ice cream blocks wrapped in newspaper rushed home from Wellfield Road before the ice cream melted is another happy memory.



A simple life, maybe, and although there were not many boys of my age on the street, I felt as if I belonged in Rose Street. My father had family and step-family around the corner and there was a cousin of my mother and his family and people who had known my mother as a young girl living in Rose Street. We left Rose Street in July 1972 after the threat of demolition of the house for the proposed infamous Hook Road. We moved to Princes Street between my doing A levels and starting medical studies. Although Princes Street was my official home address till 1982 it was only my regular place of abode for one year.

What about CRI I hear you say! Well, for one thing, it was always referred to as "the Infirmary" by the family and I only called it CRI after I was a student. An early memory is of walking home from Adamsdown, System Street, I think, on the night of Boxing Day 1962 in a blizzard - the first day of the big freeze which lasted till almost Easter 1963. My father carried my brother on his shoulders when we were crossing the Newport Road by CRI. Because the toilets outside in the school yard were frozen at Albany Road School and the depth of snow persisting for weeks was making walking difficult (there were igloos built in some streets) we were off school for quite a few weeks. It was maybe that night or possibly another in the depths of winter that I saw a barn owl for the first time. It flew across Newport Road towards CRI right over our heads. It was a ghostly white spectre with dark eyes. It remained my only sighting for many years and I can still count on one hand the number of times I have seen a barn owl.

What about medical experiences as a patient at CRI? I was lucky. I never had an accident needing attendance at Casualty and neither did my brother. These days I am sure I would have been taken to CRI for a deep cut I had across my knee that became infected. I was racing up the pavement on my tricycle in Rose Street to meet my grandmother, Nanny Rees, when I skidded on some loose small stones that had ended up there when the road was resurfaced. I came off the three-wheeler and had a long cut from the stones across my kneecap. The wound was suppurating, and my mother was applying a poultice to it for weeks. There was no visit to hospital or the GP, or asking for antibiotics, in those days. I still have an obvious scar on the knee today.

Talking of visits to the GP I was in the third generation of my family to be patients of Dr Williams surgery on the corner of Albany Road and Trafalgar Road. The doctor was the second of three generations of Dr Williams GP in the practice. We hardly went there, only attending for confirmation of infections such as measles. I remember going there for the smallpox vaccination during the outbreak in Cardiff and South Wales in 1962. I also remember from other visits that Dr Williams put the instrument, possibly a spoon he used as a tongue depressor in the flame from what was probably a methylated spirits light on his desk. This I assume was to sterilise the implement. Disposable wooden tongue depressors were presumably not available. Walking up Princes Street to the doctor's I remember thinking how posh the houses seemed, never thinking we would end up living there.

When my infants' school was about to close down, ex-pupils were invited to visit, and I took the opportunity to look at the school log book. I saw an entry describing an accident in the playground to my best friend, and that his father came to school and took him to CRI Casualty. He lived in Cyfarthfa Street then, and I still see him, my oldest friend, occasionally at the Arms Park or at school reunions.

My first experience as a patient in a hospital was here at the Infirmary was when I was about 17 and had all four wisdom teeth and two others removed under general anaesthetic. I was an in-patient on Mametz Ward. I asked my parents why the ward had such an odd name and was told it was because of a battle in the First World War. My curiosity ended there. The Ward was named to honour the memory of the soldiers of the 38th (Welsh) Division killed at the Battle of Mametz Wood on the Somme in July 1916. Many of these soldiers had joined battalions as "pals", e.g. the 16th (Cardiff City) Battalion of the Welsh Regiment renamed the Welch Regiment in 1920 and nothing to do Cardiff City FC. Many Cardiffians as well as other Welshmen lost their lives. Photos of paintings of the battle at Mametz Wood show the horror of this particular battle.

There is quite a history of my ancestors associated with the Infirmary which was a Voluntary Hospital i.e. funded by voluntary contributions until the NHS was formed in 1948 and certainly in the early days only accepted people who were regarded as poor as in or out-patients.

My father's paternal grandparents arrived in Cardiff from Upper Clapton, Hackney in 1888 the year of Jack the Ripper, having previously lived in the East End. They also changed their surname to Brown. We do not know why they came. It seems my great grandfather, who was a hairdresser, was not Jack the Ripper but was also a bookie's runner. He was also described as a hawker on some family death certificates from Cardiff. My maternal grandfather had his haircut by him and he also said that William John Brown was a bookmaker at Ely racecourse under a black umbrella with the words 'Honest Bill Brown pays out in gold' painted on it in gold paint. It has been conjectured that he may have run off from London with a bookie's money. No one has any memory of him but from what I have said and his treatment of his baby and her mother after his wife Charlotte died, he has been regarded perhaps unfairly as a bit of a bad'un. My recent research has suggested that his mother-in law and his wife's half-sister were in Harriet Street in Cardiff around the time he and his family came to Cardiff. Certainly the latter's daughter was 6½ years old and born in Cardiff, as recorded in the census of 1891, so was the choice of Cardiff for family reasons, not because it was a growing town where he could earn a living but could disappear from the view of the authorities in London? Did Charlotte's mother and half-sister follow her to Cardiff or did William, Charlotte and family follow them?

They lived at 22 Meteor Street, just down the road from CRI, and my great grandmother Charlotte, aged 40 and the mother of twelve children, died in CRI on 27 January 1899. She died of the effects of burns accidentally received at 22 Meteor Street when a paraffin light she was carrying exploded when she fell downstairs and set fire to her nightdress. She died 3 days after the accident from the effect of the severe burns to her face, arms and chest. There was an inquest and the jury's verdict was accidental death. This sort of accident with its tragic outcome was not unknown in those days before electric lighting. An online search of Welsh newspapers found about half a dozen deaths due to burns from paraffin lamps being overturned and exploding in 1899 just in Glamorgan alone, at Cardiff, Barry, Merthyr and Neath.

Her son Henry died at CRI, described as being in St Johns Cardiff UD, in 1900. He was 18 and died of morbus cordis, acute gastritis and heart failure. My paternal great grandfather William John Brown and one of his teenage daughters died at the Union Infirmary during the following decade from TB. He was 56 and she was 18. It took me a

while to realise that this was not at THE infirmary but at the infirmary at the workhouse, i.e. the place which became St David's Hospital. I should have "twigged" this earlier to use a Johnsonian expression because their deaths were in the subdistrict of West Cardiff, whereas Henry and Charlotte had died at the Infirmary in the Central Cardiff sub-district. I should also have remembered that the word "union" implied that the infirmary was at a workhouse which was the responsibility of a Poor Law Union of parishes.

Other members of the subsequent families, adults and babies died at home often tragically from conditions we would treat in hospital these days, e.g. puerperal sepsis or dehydration in babies. One of William and Charlotte's sons, Arthur Edward, my grandfather, died in CRI in 1925, a month shy of 38, when my father was less than 3 years old. He died of acute lobar pneumonia with a secondary cause of heart failure. He was a labourer at a railway wagon builders. A simple course of penicillin, if discovered by those days, would have cleared the pneumonia. (Penicillin only began to be used widely on humans to treat bacterial infections in the 1940s.) He was in the Royal Munster Fusiliers in the First World War and had survived Gallipoli, battles in the Balkans and Palestine, where he was part of the army that liberated Jerusalem, and then on the western front in France. He had not succumbed to the so-called Spanish 'flu but died of pneumonia in Cardiff.

We do not know if he had experienced a gas attack in the war. My father knew nothing of this history of his father till he and my mother did research in my father's latter years. My father had just one memory of someone who may have been his father, carrying him on his shoulders across Crwys Road railway bridge.

One of my cousins on my mother's side has told me that her great- grandmother on her father's side had died in 1900 after being hit on the head by her brother with a poker at their house in the City Road area, after what would seem to be some provocation. Some hours after the attack, when other relatives called, she was able to talk and got up from lying down and walked to the Infirmary with assistance. She was examined after her admission on 16 October and was found to have a compound depressed fracture of the vault of the skull, i.e. there was an open wound down to the fracture and a simple fracture of the frontal bone and some other minor injuries with bruises to the forehead. She was operated on and a clot which had settled on the top of the brain was removed. This, I expect, was an extra-dural or possibly a subdural haematoma. Infection set in on 18 October and she died a week later. There were a number of court appearances. The jury at the inquest found the brother guilty of manslaughter. The Stipendiary at another hearing in Cardiff insisted upon by the Treasurer or Treasury, committed the prisoner to the next assizes in Swansea on the charge of wilful murder of his sister. My cousin thinks he was found guilty of manslaughter and sent to prison, but he did have a psychiatric illness and went to a hospital for this subsequently.

In World War 1 the Infirmary was the headquarters of the 3rd Western General Hospital for wounded soldiers, with 100 beds put at the disposal of Lt Col. David Hepburn the commanding officer. Five schools in Cardiff were converted for use as hospitals with less badly wounded soldiers or ones recuperating from surgery placed there. One of these was Albany Road school and our Society had the pleasure of attending a celebration at the school a few years ago in which a display of the school as a hospital was a

feature and some of the children were acting as doctors, nurses and patients. There is a family connection here too. My paternal grandfather saw service in the Royal Munster Fusiliers in WW1 although he was not Irish, being born English, but who had lived in Cardiff since he was 1½. As I have said, he had seen service in Gallipoli, Greece, Palestine and Egypt and took part in the liberation of Jerusalem. He then ended up on the Western Front in France. As I have also said, he died in 1925 of pneumonia before my father was 3, so my brother and I didn't have a close relationship with my father's birth family but, a story came down the family from a sister who was a year younger than him. She had a vivid dream that he, Mick, as they called him even though his names were Arthur Edward, had been injured in France and was in Albany Road School and she insisted on going there. Eventually she persuaded the family to go there, if only to shut her up, and then after more persuasion they were allowed in and found him there. Whether this is a true story or not, I will never know, but I like it!

See [albanymilitaryhospital.wordpress.com](http://albanymilitaryhospital.wordpress.com) and [www.roathcardiff.net](http://www.roathcardiff.net) which include a photo of injured soldiers being driven down Plasnewydd Road from Albany Road and turning into Strathnairn Street, presumably entering the hospital through the school yard. Note the large crowd of well-wishers, possibly including some relatives. I do not know if the wounded had come from CRI, or rather the King Edward VII Hospital as it was called at that time. This is very likely but they may have come directly from France or other hospitals. See the photograph of wounded soldiers in Thomas Andrew Ward and the photo of the painting by Margaret Lindsay Williams of wounded soldiers and doctors and nurses in the infirmary during World War1, possibly in the ward that became Mametz Ward. I shall give details later.

In the Second World War, the Infirmary at first dealt with civilian casualties from German bombing raids. Parts of it and its associated buildings were hit on 15 September 1940 and 3 March 1941. After the latter raid, the damage was such that the patients were evacuated to hospitals at Whitchurch, Mountain Ash and Merthyr. One hundred beds were made available at Whitchurch Mental Hospital and the Surgical and Medical units remained there until the end of the war. The emergency surgical unit operated on civilian casualties including some from the bombing of Swansea and then with casualties from Normandy after D-Day. Injured servicemen were flown to Swindon, and some came by train to Coryton to be operated on at Whitchurch by the CRI surgeons. A memory my mother had was of a poor man, known as Andrew Bloater, who had a very deformed face. It sounded as if he had severe neurofibromatosis, like the "Elephant Man" at the London Hospital. He was a well-known figure and used to sit on the wall of the infirmary opposite Tredegarville School, which my mother and many of her siblings attended. This probably would have been in the 1930s or early 1940s (my cousins Susan and Karen told the meeting that he sold the "Echo" from here, something I had forgotten).

Now what about my medical training at CRI? There wasn't much actually. I started preclinical studies in Cathays Park in 1972 and then clinical studies in 1974. When I was a student, most of the medical and surgical services were delivered at UHW at the Heath, which opened in 1971 and at Llandough, so clinical teaching was therefore based at these two sites. Keen students, of which I was not one, would go to the Casualty Department at CRI at night, but this was purely voluntary and not part of the curriculum. Renal Medicine and the dialysis service were based at CRI and I had a teaching block of a few weeks here. Prof William Asscher, a Dutchman and Dr Dave Fisher were in



charge of the teaching. They were friendly and likeable and interested in teaching unlike some consultants. One of my uncles, a painter and decorator, remembered Prof Asscher asking loudly "Who is using organic solvents?" after my uncle, who was working there, washed white spirits or similar down the drains.

I may be wrong here, but in my memory, the two House Officers on the renal ward were a Lionel Bloodworth or Bloodworthy, who I thought had a superb name for a doctor, and Leszek Borysiewicz. Borys came from Llanrumney, was born in Cardiff to ethnic Polish parents who were evacuees in the WW2 era, from a town in present day Belarus. He was a few years before me in Cardiff High, but I didn't know him from school. He was extremely intelligent, and I remember him as a Senior House Officer in the Heath, being in a ward round and the Consultant asking for his opinion on a patient and treating him as an equal. He went on to Cambridge University. He was a consultant at Hammersmith Hospital. He headed the Department of Medicine at UHW and set up clinics for viral diseases, HIV and ME. He then became deputy rector at Imperial College. In 2007 he was announced as head of the Medical Research Council. He was knighted in 2001 and became Vice- Chancellor of the University of Cambridge from 2010 to 2017. He was honoured by the land of his parents' birth with the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, the highest honour that can be given to a person living outside Poland of Polish heritage. He was approachable and a good man. He used to get down the Arms Park to watch Cardiff rugby and this meant as much to me as all his honours, many of which I have not mentioned!

During the talk in Capel i Bawb on 2 November 2022 by Ted Richards, Ted said that he believed that this chapel was designed by EM Bruce Vaughan, as he was known. This is confirmed in Arnold S Aldis' book *Cardiff Royal Infirmary 1883-1983* in which he wrote that it was not built until 1921, after Bruce Vaughan's death, being funded as a gift to the Infirmary by Mrs John Nixon.



**Capel I Bawb seen to the left of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary**



**One of several stained-glass windows in the chapel**

John Nixon (1815-1899) was a mining engineer from the north-east who became a coal mine developer in South Wales, after pioneering the use of steam coal, which was virtually smokeless from South Wales, initially to the French navy. He had a number of mines in the valleys, notably Navigation Colliery at Mountain Ash. He also sunk the No 1 mine at Merthyr Vale in 1869 as part of Nixon's, Taylor and Co (later Nixon's Navigation Coal Co). Merthyr Vale No 2 was sunk some years later. The [welshcoalmines.co.uk](http://welshcoalmines.co.uk) site states that it was a tip of coal waste from these mines that caused the Aberfan disaster



in 1966. Nixonville is a community between Aberfan and Merthyr Vale on the same side (east) of the River Taff as the latter. In 1851 Nixon was living at Rothesay Terrace, St Mary, Cardiff, a coal proprietor, born in County Durham, unmarried and in 1861 he was 46, unmarried and a coal proprietor living at 4 Brighton Terrace, Roath Road. In 1881 he was a visitor, coal proprietor, age 65 and married, staying at a house named Monchester, Manor Road, Christchurch, Hampshire, in the household of Hugh Taylor JP aged 63 and his wife Eliza, age 40. In 1891 he is again a visitor to the home of Hugh Taylor, JP, then age 72, a coal mine owner, born in Westminster, then living at The Limes, Regents Park Road, Finchley. John's birthplace is clearly written as Barlow which is still in the countryside, west of Gateshead in County Durham. I speculate that this Hugh Taylor may have been his fellow coal owner in the Nixon's Taylor company or possibly a relative. There was also a Nixon, Taylor and Cory company. John Nixon died in London in 1899. A line in the Bristol Mercury of 31 July 1899 read that he had left an estate of £1,155,069, 17s 6d! He was succeeded as head of Nixon's Navigation Company Limited by a Mr H.E Gray and when John Nixon was starting his mining career he was apprenticed to Joseph Gray of Garesfield, the chief mining engineer of the Marquess of Bute. Both with the same surname as his married sister. Was this just coincidence? I have been unable to narrow down his marriage between 1861 to 1881 to less than seventeen possibilities, but Eliza Davies in Cheshire in 1869 possibly would seem most promising as a candidate for his wife. But there was an Eliza Davies living at 5 Brighton Terrace, Newport Road according to the Slaters Commercial Directory of 1880 under the heading of Cardiff Proprietary Schools Co Ltd as on the Genuki site. John Nixon was a benefactor of the Infirmary and I have read that there was a John Nixon Ward in CRI. As well as the gift of the chapel Mrs John Dixon made other gifts of donations in memory of her husband to develop the hospital. There certainly is an Elize Nixon ward there and despite the difference in spelling from Eliza it is tempting to believe it was named for her. Elize Nixon also gifted a five- light stained-glass window to St Margaret's Church in Mountain Ash, in memory of her husband. Elize Nixon is a 70 year old widow, head of household, born in "Carnarvonshire" living on private means at Collingwood House, 127 Marine Parade, East Brighton, Sussex in the 1911 census. Her charitable nature continued there according to my reading. Yet again, I have to apologise for leading you into the field of genealogy. I am afraid I am like a dog following the scent of a squirrel and I am sure there are books out there that have all the details of the Nixon family laid out plainly to read.

After that diversion, I am coming back to Mr Aldis's book which is an excellent read on the history of the infirmary and its development, albeit sometimes factually incorrect when he strays from medical grounds into local history. He was a Consultant Surgeon at UHW and CRI when I was a student.

Edwin Montgomery Bruce Vaughan to give his full name deserves to be better known in my opinion. He was a Cardiff boy, born and bred, and I have previously written full accounts of his life achievements and his family history for the Society. (See the Roath LHS newsletter of February 2023). He was born in Great Frederick Street in 1856 and his family subsequently moved to East Terrace, which was on the site of the car park of the present-day Cardiff International Arena or Utilita Arena. He was educated in Cardiff in Charles Street and trained as an architect in Cardiff.

He designed a number of prominent public buildings in Cardiff and Southern Wales but is best known in the field of architecture for being a prolific ecclesiastical architect,

designing no fewer than 45 churches in Glamorgan alone. His greatest ecclesiastical design is regarded as St James the Great Church on Newport Road opposite CRI on Glossop Road.



He did not design CRI but designed or influenced additions to it. The Infirmary was designed by Seward of James, Seward and Thomas and the foundation stone was laid by Marquess of Bute in January 1883. This and the start of construction of the Roath Dock by Bute occurred on consecutive days. Mr Aldis's illustration from the Illustrated London News said it was the new West Dock. This is surely incorrect as the Bute West Dock opened in 1839 and the Roath Dock in 1887 after parliamentary approval in 1882.

Bruce Vaughan had only just started his independent career as an architect when the Infirmary was designed and built. He never married and lived with family members and servants all his life. In 1901 he was the head of household at 14 Newport

Road which was on the southern side of Newport Road between I believe what is now Fitzalan Place and Fitzalan Road, and almost opposite the structure which is regarded as his greatest architectural achievement, namely the Queen's Buildings tower.



This was the frontage of the department of physiology of the preclinical medical school. It is of Gothic Revival style and contains high quality sculpture including representations of some pioneers in the field of medicine. Geraint Denison-Kurg started his Tredegarville walks in 2023 under the tower. It subsequently became the frontage of the Engineering Department of University College Cardiff after the old buildings were demolished in 1966 and it seems that the School of Physics and Astronomy occupies the northern side of the building opening onto the Parade. I confess that I am not entirely certain of my facts here.

Bruce Vaughan became interested in the nearby Cardiff Infirmary as this hospital was renamed in 1895, after previously being the

second incarnation of the Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire Infirmary and Dispensary. He was appointed as Chairman of the House Committee in 1903 and set about improving and increasing the facilities and the bed numbers to cope with the still increasing population of the town. He also raised almost £½ million for the hospital in his lifetime from wealthy benefactors such as John Cory, and donations from

ordinary working men. This was a colossal amount of money in those times. He was known as the Prince of Beggars. He increased bed numbers from 188 at the start of the 20th century to 260 by the end of its first decade.

He gave impetus to the profession of physiotherapy in Cardiff after seeing the benefits of physiotherapy on wounded soldiers in the First World War at the Infirmary in his role of Lt Col of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion of the Welsh Regiment. He was in the Volunteer movement in the last two decades of the 19th century rising in stages to the honorary rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, the Welsh Regiment in 1900. He remained involved in the volunteer movement until his death. He persuaded the Board of the Infirmary to increase the accommodation of the quaintly named Electrical Pavilion and to increase the massage department.

The Cardiff Medical School was founded in 1893, but only taught preclinical subjects and was part of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire. EM Bruce Vaughan was determined to keep the Medical School in Newport Road and not move to Cathays Park as was the college's wish. He succeeded in getting a pathology department and a Professor of Pathology in the Infirmary in 1910. He persuaded Sir William James Thomas to fund a Physiology Department on the condition it was built at Newport Road, much to the College's annoyance. It was ready in 1919 and the gothic tower entrance is regarded as Bruce Vaughan's greatest architectural achievement.

Of course, to be a proper medical school there has to be clinical teaching. Bruce Vaughan and John Lynn Thomas, the senior surgeon of the hospital, collaborated with the medical school and persuaded the other clinicians to join in persuading the University of Wales and the Treasury to establish clinical teaching at the Infirmary. Sir William James Thomas increased his donations to £90 000 to fund a Department of Preventative Medicine at Newport Road. This thwarted the University College's ambitions and the Principal accused Bruce Vaughan of only being concerned with the medical school and hospital, and basking in the glory of his buildings as the self-appointed architect.

The Welsh National School of Medicine opened as a clinical institution in partnership with the King Edward VII Hospital, as the Infirmary was then called in 1921. Unfortunately Bruce Vaughan did not live to see his ambitions realised, as he died in June 1919. Among the people who accompanied him to his final resting place in Adamsdown Cemetery from St John's Church were many bare-headed medical students. His gravestone daubed with red paint leant against the wall of the old disused cemetery for many years but has since disappeared.

Therefore, Bruce Vaughan's final home, his greatest architectural achievement - the Gothic tower in the old preclinical building, his biggest contribution to Welsh life - the medical school, his ecclesiastical masterpiece St James's Church and his greatest gift to his fellow Cardiffians, the updated, well-provided Infirmary, were all within a couple of hundred yards or so on the same road.

To end, I asked a question for the attendees: "Which two Welsh rock/ pop stars lived in Orbit Street and Piercefield Place just a stone's throw from here?"

Answers: Dave Edmunds and Andy Fairweather-Low of Love Sculpture and Amen Corner respectively. Dave Edmunds had hits with *Love Sculpture* and as a sole

contributor with *Sabre Dance*, *I Hear You Knocking* and *Girls Talk* etc and many more hits as a producer. Andy Fairweather-Low sang *Bend Me*, *Shape Me*, *If Paradise*, *High in the Sky*, *Wide Eyed and Legless* etc with Amen Corner, and as a solo artist.

(My cousins Susan, Karen and Gillian knew the answers to the question and had a few stories about these two, including one about the Edmunds brothers. I didn't know that Dave Edmunds's brother was a big friend of our Uncle Colin's and was in school with him - Metal Street presumably. As we walked along the corridor in CRI to get to Susan's car parked at the back of CRI we came across by chance a memorial of sorts to EM Bruce Vaughan. See photo.

### **Sources:**

Wikipedia

*Cardiff Royal Infirmary 1883 to 1983* by Arnold S Aldis

Dictionary of Welsh Biography.

Northern Mine Research Society.

[welsh.coalmines.co.uk/GlamEast/MerthyrVale.htm](http://welsh.coalmines.co.uk/GlamEast/MerthyrVale.htm)

### **Further information on CRI**

There were dispensaries in the town of Cardiff before the Infirmary. The Glamorgan and Monmouthshire dispensary, the first public health facility opened in 1823 in Mellards Court, Working Street. It proved too small so the dispensary moved to a larger house, 65 Union Street in 1828 and this property remained owned by Cardiff Royal Infirmary until 1957. The Glamorgan and Monmouthshire Infirmary and Dispensary which had accommodation for 33 patients opened in 1837, close to the site of the Spital Barn, where there was a leper house in medieval times. This was on the north side of Newport Road, 300 yards nearer town than the present-day Infirmary. The buildings when vacated were occupied by the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire.

In 1882 work started for a bigger hospital of the same name at the present site on the old Longcross Barracks and the foundation stone was laid on 31 January 1883 by the 3rd Marquess of Bute, who was the landowner. In 1880 he offered to lease the site for 850 years at an annual rent of £15 and also contributed £1000 to the building fund. From 1895 till 1911 the hospital was called the Cardiff Infirmary. From 1911 to 1923 it was the King Edward VII Hospital after Royal permission was sought to rename the hospital when the Lord Mayor launched a Cardiff City Memorial Fund to finance new buildings in memory of the King who had died in 1910.

From 1923 on it has been known as Cardiff Royal Infirmary after it had a Royal Charter so it could become incorporated and hence obtain an overdraft of £50,000 which would relieve the Hon. Treasurer, Lord Aberdare, of personal responsibility for the debts of the hospital.

As I have said, until the NHS, it was a voluntary hospital funded by donations from the wealthy and the ordinary working man. With the opening of the University Hospital of Wales at Heath Park in 1971, CRI soon lost acute medical admissions. Emergency surgery continued there for a while but by the time I became a clinical medical student in the mid-1970s, it was predominantly used as the site for Casualty patients



and the renal unit. Care of the elderly persisted over the road in West Wing. Subsequently, all in-patient care has been removed from CRI, but in more recent years it has housed various outpatient and investigative functions.

PS In October 2023, Roath Local History Society was contacted by an Australian of Welsh descent named Paul Cowled. He is an Australian army veteran and collects ceremonial swords. He had one belonging to EM Bruce Vaughan. He felt that the sword should return to Wales.



He offered to donate the sword to our Society. Although EM Bruce Vaughan was well known to us, we did not have the facilities to house the sword. As seen in the accompanying photos it is an impressive looking implement. It was presented to Bruce Vaughan when he was made an honorary major in 1896. The London Gazette of Friday 14 August of that year had the following announcement from the War Office: "The Queen has been graciously pleased to confer the Volunteer Officers' decoration upon the undermentioned Officers of the Volunteer Force, who have been duly recommended for the same under the terms of the Royal Warrant dated 25<sup>th</sup> July 1892". The list included "3rd Volunteer Battalion, the Welsh Regiment, Captain and Honorary Major Edwin Montgomery Bruce Vaughan".

Bruce Vaughan was made an honorary Lieutenant-Colonel in 1900. When he resigned his commission in October 1908, he requested permission to retain his rank and wear his uniform and these requests were granted. He remained associated with the Volunteer Force until his death.

Ted and I discussed various options for a place to house the sword, including Capel i Bawb, the Cardiff Story Museum and some other locations. We decided that a military museum would likely offer the greatest security. Maindy Barracks does not have a museum and the Welsh Regiment has become part of the Royal Welsh Regiment whose museum is in Brecon. The curator told me that she is the person who decides on whether to display exhibits there and at the Firing Line Museum at Cardiff Castle but could not guarantee that sword would be on permanent display. I gave Paul Cowled and the curator each other's email addresses and await the outcome.



## CORRECTION – WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Gareth Brown – RLHS Chairman

In the article about EM Bruce Vaughan (RLHS newsletter Feb 2023) I referred to an article stating that the first synagogue in Cardiff was on the junction of East Terrace and Bute Street. I implied that a mistake was made, and it should have been Bute Terrace. When the synagogue was built in 1858 it is likely that the street was in fact Lower Bute Street, as it was named on my 1851 map.

It would seem that the road or lane leading eastwards from the Glamorganshire Canal and East Canal Wharf was originally Whitmore Lane. This street, certainly the western part in town, acquired an awful reputation. By the time of the 1851 map the part from the Glamorganshire Canal to the junction with Bute St leading southwards to the docks, and Lewis St leading northwards to the centre of town, was still known as Whitmore Lane.

The part from the Bute St/ Lewis St junction eastwards to the dock feeder and the Taff Vale railway at least was called Lower Bute Street. The 1851 map does not indicate the name of the road through Newtown (only the part of which was north of the South Wales Railway was built then), but at the eastern edge of the map, the road is again named Whitmore Lane.

In the 1899 OS map Whitmore Lane had been consigned to history with its unsavoury reputation, although the equally repulsive Charlotte Street still existed.



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According to Anthony Rhys ([upsetvictorians.blogspot.com](http://upsetvictorians.blogspot.com)) the name change was in 1872. From the Customhouse Bridge and East Canal Wharf to Bute Street, Whitmore Lane had become Customhouse Street. The Bute Street to the Taff Vale Railway bridge section was now Bute Terrace. From the Taff Vale Railway bridge to the Rhymney Railway bridge or possibly the Gaol Lane / Windsor Road/ Davis St junction, it was Adam Street and from there to Meteor Street it was Moira Terrace. It is much the same now apart from the long-lost Rhymney Railway.

In early April, following a Chepstow Walking Festival event on the Gwent Levels, Julian and I had the surprise opportunity of taking a hard hat, hi-vis site tour of the

## NEWPORT TRANSPORTER BRIDGE VISITOR CENTRE

Here are our impressions ...



MAKING IT HAPPEN  
as printed on our fluorescent jackets!



Approach to Visitor Centre, viewed from  
across the busy road.



First impressions from the ground up:

The back of this 3-storey building looks out across the River Usk, facing the historic Gondola Operation Control Centre, on the opposite bank. Using 3-levels, outside walkways, and ultimately, a platform, linking the 2nd floor of the Visitor Centre to the Transporter Bridge itself. The Centre cleverly accommodates a lift, reception, gift shop, lavatories with a changing place (accessible to severely disabled people), exhibition space with virtual, interactive walkway (simply for fun, or for those who don't feel inclined to walk across the Bridge itself), offices and stores, meeting rooms, and a café with panoramic views, with the possibility of *al fresco* dining.





The developing interior spaces



Watery views from a rain-soaked window



Eventually, the new walkway will soar above this space, directly linking the Visitor Centre to the original zig-zag stairway, visible in the right-hand leg of the Transporter Bridge.

The Site Manager, Ollie, was confident that all building work, both inside and out, would be finished by the end of this year. Of course, the project will then be run by administrators and interpreters, ironing out all teething problems, before opening to the public. It is my hope, that, when all is successfully accomplished, Roath Local History Society will be one of the first to make a Group Visit.

**Elizabeth Morgan**  
**RLHS Programme and Events Organiser**

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Elizabeth Morgan, RLHS Programme and Events Organiser

### ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2024

The Parish Churches and Parishes of  
the Lordship of Gower  
*an illustrated Talk with Honorary Life President*  
Jeff Childs



Llanmadoc Church (image courtesy Jeff Childs)

The parish churches of Gower were essentially the product of the Norman conquest of this part of south Wales in the twelfth century.

The talk will focus on those that fell within the lordship of Gower and the parishes they served. Topography, landscape, landed estates and some secular buildings will also feature.

#### SAINT EDWARD'S MUSIC & ARTS CENTRE

Start **7.30pm** access from **7.00pm**. For live stream Zoom link please apply to:

**RLHSZoom@gmail.com** no later than **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May**

**ALL WELCOME! GUESTS** in-person, or online **£3.00**

**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP £13.00**



## OTHER LOCAL HISTORY LINKS

If you can't get enough local history, there are other avenues to explore – here are two we think might be of especial interest to members.

### Rumney and District



### Local History Society

Their meetings are held at 7:30pm on the second Thursday of every month (excepting January and August) at Rumney Baptist Church Hall, Tyr-Y-Sarn Road, Rumney, CF3 3BD.

The annual subscription is £20 and visitors can pay £3 per meeting. Their next talk is on 9 May 2024, and is to be given by Lloyd Glanville, the CEO of Insole Court, entitled The History of Insole Court.

Find them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/rumneyhistory](https://www.facebook.com/rumneyhistory)

### The British Association for Local History

The Roath Local History Society is a member of the British Association for Local History. Their website

[www.balh.org.uk/](http://www.balh.org.uk/) offers a varied collection of local history stories, 10-minute videos and loads of helpful ways of researching local history. Some is of general relevance, but there are also pieces on very specialised subjects, for example, the history of Durham City Football Club or Tudor and Stewart handwriting. There are many very local stories, some including those relevant to Wales, such as [Victorian Workhouses in Wales](#).





## GET IN TOUCH

For newsletter submissions contact:

Jon at [RLHSEditor@gmail.com](mailto:RLHSEditor@gmail.com)

To request loans from the R.L.H.S. Archive, contact:

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