



E-NEWSLETTER MARCH 2026

ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Society was founded in 1978 by the late Alec Keir. Our focus is on the ancient parish of Roath - the modern-day suburbs of Adamsdown, Splott, Tremorfa, Pengam, Plasnewydd, Penylan, parts of Cathays and Cyncoed as well as Roath itself.

Our lively and interesting meetings are held at 7.30pm on the second Wednesday of the month from September through to May. See [Programme](#) for details. We meet at [St Edward's church](#), Westville Road, Pen-y-lan, Cardiff CF23 5DE. Annual membership is just £13 ([membership form](#)) and visitors are welcome to attend any meeting, in person or on Zoom for £3.

In May, June and July we undertake a series of trips to places of historic interest in Cardiff and the wider South Wales area.

Our Life President is Jeff Childs and our Life Members, appointed in recognition of the service they have given to the Society, are Dr Diane Brook, Gwyn Smith, Judith Hunt, Peter Gillard, Martin Sheldon and David Parry.

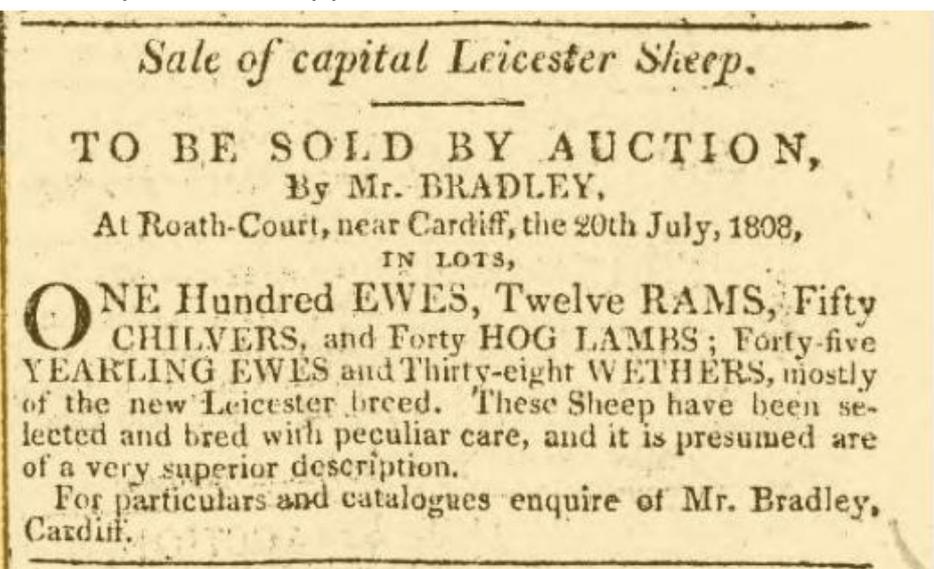
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EDITOR'S WELCOME

Happy St David's Day - Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Sant Hapus! I talked about St David last year, so I won't go there again. There are also other memorable days in March, not least being International Women's Day, which is celebrated on 8 March. It is often the case that history is told by men about men, and the role of women is so often underplayed and unrecorded. The Purple Plaques campaign has been created to improve the recognition of remarkable women in Wales and award them with a Plaque to commemorate their achievements and cement their legacy in Welsh history. Of the 22 women across Wales who have been commemorated to date, two have Roath connections. Benice Reubens and Irene Steer. If you are aware of any other women with Roath connections whose stories deserve greater recognition, do get in touch.

Of especial relevance to Wales is National Sheep Day, celebrated on 13 March. Whilst of little or no relevance to Roath now (are there **any** in sheep in the parish?), in the past, sheep were very important. William Bradley, who, in 1808, farmed land on the south side of Newport Road, opposite Roath Court and as well as land in Adamsdown, offered up for



sale some 285 sheep in one offering. By 1891, 2000 sheep a week passed through Roath Cattle market, many of them driven through local streets to get there. The sound of sheep bleating and their smell must have been characteristic features of Roath in those days.

In last month's editorial, whilst writing about the Claude Hotel, I inadvertently referred to the Williams family owning the Albany Hotel – of course I meant the Claude!

Jon Roberts
Newsletter Editor

47 The Walk/Stanley House/The Medical & Nursing Institute/Our Lady's Convent School/Cardiff Muslim Academy

By Nicky Macartney

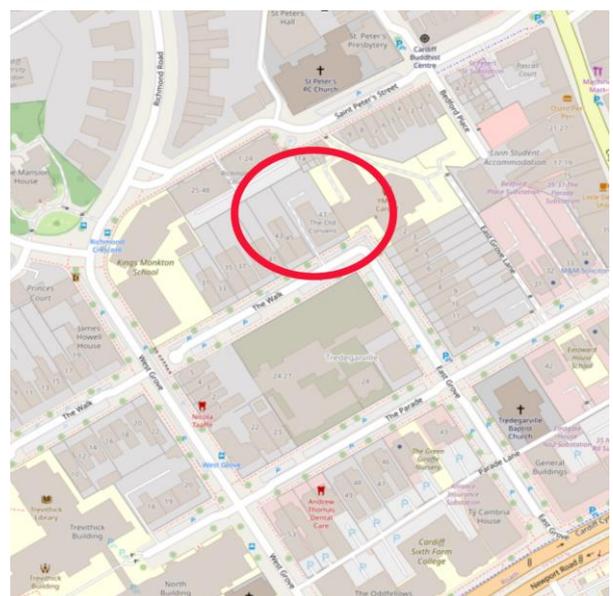
To recap from part one of this odyssey, Stanley House was built between 1881 and 1884 on a plot of land on the corner of The Walk and East Grove in Tredegarville, Roath, Cardiff. The Ogleby-Davies family, headed by John and Mary (née Cory), have lived here with their family and servants for about 22 years, having moved out by 1906.



47 The Walk in 2026

N. Macartney 2026

In the 1911 census, we see that it has become a Nursing Institute under Matron Mary Josephine O'Callaghan. She has 4 nurses, a cook and a housemaid. Mary is from Paisley in Scotland; 3 nurses and the cook are from Ireland, the housemaid is from Cardiff and one nurse is from Abercarn in Monmouthshire. No mention is made of any patients being present at this point. It's not known whether this change in use for the house had been arranged with Mary before she died, but it



Tredegarville

Map data from [OpenStreetMap](https://www.openstreetmap.org/)

would have sat well with her, since the Cory family were strong supporters of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary. Did the Institute open its doors to take cases when the King Edward VII Hospital (Cardiff Royal Infirmary) was too full, which was a well-known practice elsewhere?

Entry from the 1911 Census

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------|----|------------------------|
| Mary Josephine O'Callaghan | Matron | 38 | Paisley, Scotland |
| Anna Maria Graham | Niece | 11 | Downpatrick, Ireland |
| Frances Chambers | Sick Nurse | 29 | Co. Clare, Ireland |
| Mary Rose Shee | Sick Nurse | 29 | Co. Tipperary, Ireland |
| Margaret Connor | Sick Nurse | 25 | Co. Clare, Ireland |
| Sarah Elizabeth Perris | Sick Nurse | 25 | Abercarn, Mon. |
| ?Jiela O'Brine | Cook | 24 | Cork, Ireland |
| Nora James | Housemaid | 17 | Cardiff |
| Kathleen Isaac | Visitor | 38 | Ruperra, Brecon |

By 1921, our Matron has only one nurse living in, appropriately named Nannie O'Shea, from Tipperary, at the Medical and Surgical Nursing Institute at this address, but also referred to as Stanley House. However, we do have mention of 4 'inmates', who are of both genders, ranging in age from 30 to 63 years old and originating from just across the garden wall behind the nursing home in St Peter's Street, from Pontypridd, Treforest and Merthyr. Regrettably, no mention is made of their ailments. Mary Rowcliffe seems to be an enigma, being both a part-time student and patient, but not inmate.

1921 Census

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----|-----------------------------|
| Mary (Maria) O'Callaghan | Matron | 50 | Paisley, Scotland |
| Louis John O'Callaghan | Nephew Student at Law | 22 | London |
| Nannie O'Shea | Nurse | 29 | Co. Tipperary, Ireland |
| Margaritta Isaacs | Niece | 9 | Australia |
| Mary Constance Rowcliffe | Student (also says Patient) | 16 | Llandaff North, Nr. Cardiff |
| Annie Poyser | Patient (Inmate) | 41 | Merthyr Tidvil (sic) |
| Michael Fitzgerald | Patient (Inmate) | 63 | St Peter's St, Cardiff |
| Anne Collier | Patient (Inmate) | 47 | Treforest, Glamorgan |
| Catherine Bowen Davis | Patient (Inmate) | 30 | Pontypridd, Glamorgan |

Unfortunately, a search of local newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s reveals quite a number of obituaries of patients who have died whilst in the care of this private nursing home. This might reflect the severity of their illnesses when they entered the institute or may be a result of the variety of operations that were performed whilst there.

- Edward G. Smart died here on 11th May 1911, following an operation. He had worked for more than 40 years as a docksman for Messrs. Guest, Keen and

Nettlefolds. He was over 6 foot and a very familiar figure in the Cardiff Docks, so the article claims. He had remained a bachelor and lived in Penarth.

- Elizabeth Mary Quinn was 64 when she died here on 13th October 1914, having been born in Waterford, Ireland. Her son, Aiden Patrick Quinn, lived with his family at 32 Richmond Road and was co-director of an import/export merchant company, based at 84 Merchant Exchange, across the Oval Basin from the Pier Head Building in the docks, Cardiff. At the age of 77, Aiden is recorded as living in Lake Road West and a certified accountant.
- The saddest report is of Reggie Blake, of Montgomery Street, Roath, who died in Stanley House at the tender age of 3 years on 2nd October 1915.

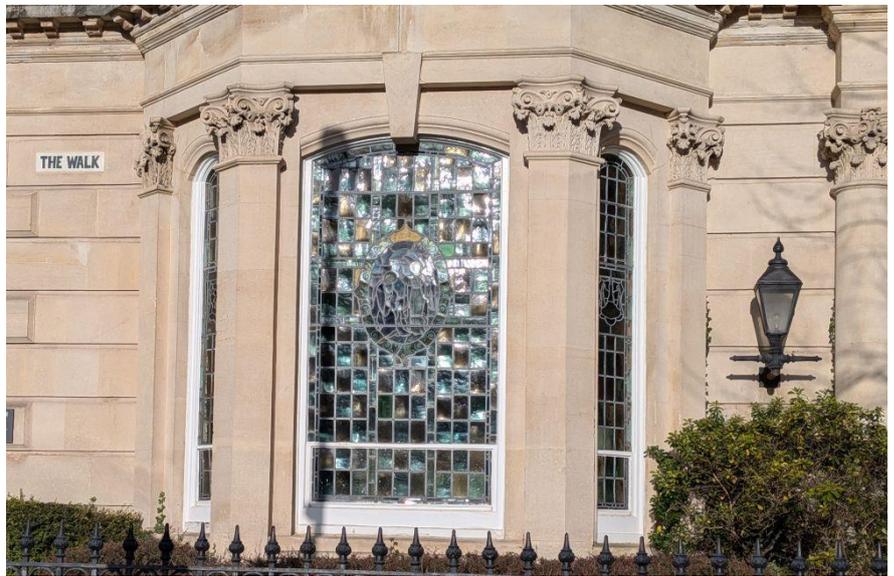
On a more up-beat note, there is mention of a successful operation by Dr Cornelius A. Griffiths, based at the Cardiff Royal Infirmary, being performed at Stanley House on 12 December 1925. Stanley House is indeed described as being owned or run by Dr Griffiths. The patient was Councillor Isaac Edwards of Cwmdare, who recovered sufficiently to become Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil in 1938.



Front Door of The Convent House

N. Macartney 2026

After about 13 years as a healthcare facility, Stanley House is taken over by The Rosminian Sisters of Divine Providence in about 1934. This Roman Catholic community was founded by Blessed Antonio Rosmini-Serbati in 1832-33 and its mission was focused on providing education for the young, pastoral care and charity for the poor. Therefore, a school was established in Our Lady's Convent. By 1939, there are 4 teachers listed as being resident, 5 teacher assistants, with Sarah Cecilia Callaghan, aged 67, from Cardiff, as their Mother Superior. They employed 2 domestic servants to cater to their needs.



A front room of The Convent had been converted into a Chapel
N. Macartney 2026

Don't forget that in the next street up, we have St Peter's Roman Catholic Church and School built by the Rosminian Fathers, so this area is becoming quite the Catholic nexus.

The 1939 Register

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Cecilia S Callaghan | 28/08/1867 | Superior of Convent |
| Clare Neesham | 09/08/1884 | Teacher Head |
| Mary Donovan | 28/04/1898 | Teacher Head |
| Cecilia M Symons | 01/01/1890 | Teacher Head |
| Alice R Allen | 08/09/1895 | Teacher Assistant |
| Sarah E Smith | 23/12/1885 | Teacher Head |
| Lilian M Seymour | 15/10/1898 | Teacher Assistant |
| Kathleen Donnellan | 10/10/1898 | Teacher Assistant |
| Ellen M Kenney | 18/04/1893 | Domestic Work |
| Mary McCarthy | 20/05/1903 | Teacher Assistant |
| Margaretta M Shea | 02/09/1904 | Teacher Assistant |
| Ellen Doherty | 09/01/1909 | Domestic Work |

The education provided by the Sisters was sufficiently popular to require the gardens to the east of their house to be used to build a dedicated school building, which can be seen on maps from about 1947 onwards. A 1958 map shows the school has extended further round the corner, into East Grove. The map names the house as Our Lady's Convent, suggesting that it is now accommodation only. Sister Mary Angela Bennett was in charge at that point.

However, in 1974, the East Grove school site was sold to allow the building of the YMCA, which opened in 1980. The Sisters continued teaching, in Heathfield House RC High/Grammar School for Girls, until it moved to a new site in Ty Gwyn Road, in the 1970s, then to Newport Road, Rumney, as it merged with St Illtyd's High School for Boys.

Heathfield House School had been established by the Sisters in 1867 on David Street and is described as the oldest Catholic school in Wales. It was originally called St Joseph's Grammar School and it moved to Heathfield House on Richmond Road (where Kings Monkton School is today) in 1877, hence the change of name. Curiously, it appears in many pieces of



Heathfield House, taken from Richmond Road – now Kings Monkton School

N. Macartney 2026

documentary evidence as in *The Walk*, suggesting that this south-easterly aspect was the front of the building. By 1996, Sister Mary Angela Bennett made the decision to close the convent at 47 The Walk for good.

On 24 May 2002, the building was classified by CADW as Grade II listed. The reasons for this listing are given as follows:

Listed for architectural interest as a well-detailed classical house that makes an important contribution to the historic character of Tredegarville conservation area. Historic interest for association with other Catholic establishments in the neighbourhood, especially St Peter's Church.

Reproduced from CADW Full Report for Listed Buildings reference number: 26655

In September 2014, it reopened its doors as a school – Ihsan Academy, later renamed, in 2018, the Cardiff Muslim Academy. It taught about 70 students each year, both primary and high school, boys and girls. Their mission statement was '*Developing through Faith*'. However, by 2021 the building had been sold to developers and was converted into 12 flats.

Grateful thanks go to Geraint Denison-Kurg, who inspired my research into this fascinating house, and to the Roath Local History Society website for resource material.

Fedele Primavesi - the Jeff Bezos of his day, selling from Cardiff to the World

By Jon Roberts

I came across the name Fidele Primavesi in connection with a previous article in the newsletter about stained glass in St Peter's Church, Roath, where one of the windows was donated by Mr Primavesi. The Italian name sparked my curiosity, and I endeavoured to find out more.

A note of caution needs to be sounded as the Primavesi family loved the name Fedele (also spelt as Fidele and Fedeli) – there are at least three generations of Fedele Primavesis, and it's not always clear which of the Fedeles is being referred to in the various sources.

Fidele (I) was born in Italy in 1802, moving to England in 1841 with his family, including Xaverio Fedele (II) (born in Lecco on 3 July 1838). He set up in business in barometer making with a relative of his wife's called Defendente Michele Ortelli, initially in Reading and then in Kennington Green, London. Fedele I's wife Martina died in Reading in 1844 and is buried in St James's Churchyard in the town.

In June 1850 the family moved to Cardiff where Fidele senior started a business as a general china, hardware and leatherware merchant. The business did not go without its difficulties, as, in 1852, Fedele (I) spent some time in Gloucester gaol for indebtedness. However, he clearly bounced back, and his business in Cardiff prospered allowing him to expand with branches in Swansea, Newport and London. The business, Primavesi & Sons, continued until 1915. The Primavesis' main business was located at 6 James Street, at the bottom of Bute St and their shop was a cornucopia of goods, many stamped with his name on them, although he did not manufacture anything. He sold nautical instruments, clocks, barometers, Welsh and Staffordshire pottery, carriages, firearms and many more things besides.

In 1868, Fedele II married, Sarah, the sister of Alfred Thomas, Lord Pontypridd, a one-time Mayor of Cardiff and MP for East Glamorgan. The marriage no doubt helped in securing Primavesi's high standing in Cardiff society. In 1881 a 250-ft cargo steamship named the SS Fidele Primavesi was launched from Palmer's shipbuilding yard on the Tyne to carry coal

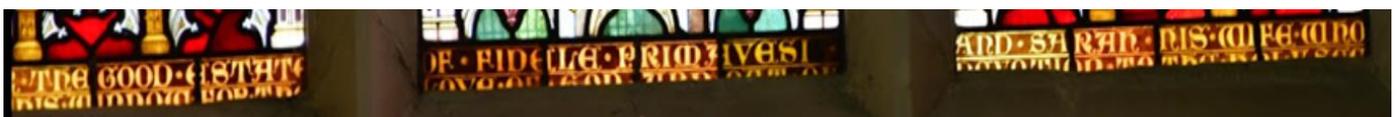


for its owners, the Cardiff-based firm of J & R Bovey – clearly a tribute to a local man of influence¹.

The Primavesis became wealthy landowners, owning amongst other properties shops and houses in Park Place, Louisa Street, City Road, Bedford Place, West Bute Street and James Street. Fidele II was an active member of Welsh society and a stalwart and benefactor of St Peter's Church in Roath, St Albans Church in Splott and St David's Cathedral in Cardiff city centre.



The central stained-glass window behind the high altar of St Peter's Church in Roath was funded by the Primavesi family (with the Marquess of Bute's smaller window occupying a side wall). The window was made by the acclaimed German stained glass maker Mayer & Co and was erected in 1883. The inscription at the base of the window (presumably added after his death in 1913w2) reads: *"Pray for the Good Estate of Fedele Primavesi and Sarah his wife"*.



¹ In 1892 the SS Fidele Primavesi sank in Roath Dock whilst being loaded but was successfully salvaged by the Bute Dry Dock Company. It was sold a few years later and sunk as a result in enemy action in WWI.

One unusual item sold by Primavesi and Sons was a carriage which can today be seen in the Surakarta palace museum in Java.



A landau carriage used by the Royal Princesses of the Palace of Surakarta, provided by F. Primavesi and Sons Photo credit: Aditya Darmasurya on [Flickr](#)

A 12-shot pinfire revolver sold by Primavesi was put up for auction some years ago. His goods went all over the world and even today Primavesi marked goods can be found on auction sites. At the time of writing, eBay has 43 Primavesi lots, being offered from the UK, France, Italy, Slovakia, Macedonia, Israel, South Africa and the USA, perhaps reflecting the worldwide market for the firm's goods in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Have a look and snap yourself up a bit of Cardiff history.

Such was the success of the business that Fidele Primavesi built Penylan House in the 1860s, one of the first stately villas of the Cardiff nouveau riche to be built on Pen-y-lan Hill (pictured right).

The 1871 Census shows the occupants were:
Fedele Primavesi (I) age 69, merchant-hardware/leatherware, born in Italy
Fedele Primavesi (II) age 32. his son, born in Italy

Sarah Primavesi, age 29, his son's wife, born in Blackwood, Mon
Fedele Primavesi (III), age 2, his grandson, born in Roath.



Fedele Primavesi (II) appears in the directories from 1875 to 1881, but the family were not at Pen-y-lan House at the time of the 1881 Census – they were then living in Roath in a house called Fernleigh on Newport Road. The young Fedele III was sent to boarding school at Prior Park College, just outside of Bath. Pen-y-lan House was then occupied by colliery owner John Osborne Riches and his family and staff for a period of about five years, until his death at Penylan House in 1886. The Primavesi family re-appears in 1887 and continues at Pen-y-lan House until 1927.



In 1881 the partnership of Fidele Primavesi I, Fedele Primavesi II, and Fidele I's other two sons, Almachilde and Egidio was wound up, suggesting that not all was running smoothly with the business. Just five years after, the business then carried on by Egidio Primavesi and Almachilde Primavesi, under the firm of F. *Primavesi* and Sons was also wound up. Fedele (I) died at his daughter's home in London in 1884 and is buried in the same plot as his wife in Reading.

Fedele (II) moved to Le Havre in France in around 1890 but returned to Cardiff and died at Pen-y-Lan House on 15 September 1913 and is buried in the Roman Catholic section of Cathays family, along with other members of his family.

Fedele III caused something of a scandal when in 1890, age 20 or 21, he eloped to Paris with Angiola Maria Romilda Baghino, the wife of another Italian merchant, some 20 years his senior, and the adopted daughter of his great-aunt's. The Baghinos were divorced on the grounds of her adultery with Fidele. Subsequently Angiola and Fidele married in Paris

in 1895. The 1911 census shows Fedele III as a visitor at a house in the rather grand Queen Anne Square in Bath - he clearly had a penchant for Bath, as local newspapers recorded him in their visitors' lists as staying in various hotels in the city in 1910, 1917, 1920 and 1923, which makes me wonder whether he frittered away the Primavesi fortune. Angiola died at Penylan House in Cardiff in 1915, age 71. Fedele III died in Newquay Cornwall in 1923, age 54, although his address was still given as Penylan House.

Both Fidele III and Angiola are buried in the family grave in the Roman Catholic section of Cathays Cemetery. It is a vaulted double tomb standing on a large plinth surmounted by a Celtic cross monument. Also buried here are Fedele II and his wife Sarah, Ernest and Martina Primavesi and Captain John Crichton, the husband of Fedele II's daughter Minnie. Capt. Crichton was killed on active service with the Parachute Regiment in North Africa on 11 November 1942.



Photo courtesy of Ted Richards

The Primavesis had left Pen-y-lan House by 1928 when the directories show it was occupied by a Mrs Webb. In 1937 it was occupied by Thomas Henry Turner, grandson of the founder of E. Turner and Sons, the well-known Cardiff building contractors.

As far as I can work out, the last Fedele Primavesi (Fedele Alfred Thomas George Hubert Primavesi – conveniently known as “John”) died in Bath in 1980. By 1921, the only Primavesi left in Cardiff (according to the 1921 census) was Adrian Primavesi, a Catholic priest, a grandson of Fidele I and nephew of Fidele II. He moved to Cumbria by 1939 and remained there until his death in 1972.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Elizabeth Morgan, RLHS Programme and Events Organiser

ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, 11th MARCH, 2026

Five Ladies of Tredegar House *Siobhán Hayes*

National Trust Volunteer, working as part of the team at the Tredegar House Archive.



©Photograph licensed under [CC2 BY-SA](#)

Throughout history, men have typically been the main owners and heirs of property. Wives and daughters of the Morgan family of Tredegar House, one of the most important families in Wales, sometimes sought to question this - often with little benefit except to the lawyers. This is the story of five ladies of Tredegar House and their attempts to challenge the status quo.

SAINT EDWARD'S MUSIC & ARTS CENTRE

Westville Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF23 5DE.

EVERYBODY WELCOME!

Doors open at **7.00pm** - Meeting starts at **7.30pm**.

For live-stream Zoom Link contact **Jon Roberts** on:

RLHSZoom@gmail.com

GUESTS *in-person, or online* **£3.00**

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP £13.00

OTHER LOCAL HISTORY LINKS



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.

Their next event is their Annual General Meeting on 13 March 2026.

The annual subscription is £20 and visitors can pay £3 per meeting.

Find the Rumney and District Local History Society on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/rumneyhistory>

Grangetown Local History Society



At the time of going to press, no details of their future talks were available, but have a look at their [website](#).

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/ 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. Have a look at back issues of *The Local Historian* at <https://www.balh.org.uk/thelocalhistorian> . Members of the BALH are also entitled to a [discount on](#) courses. If you'd like the code to obtain the discount, please email me.



If you wish to be kept up to date on events held by BALH, please subscribe to their mailing list at <https://www.balh.org.uk/#subscribe>

Roath Local History Society on the web

There's also lots of Roath history on the [RLHS website](#), and in the excellent blog posts – do subscribe. There is also the re-energised [Facebook group](#) which has lots of interesting posts and comments. You need merely to answer 2 simple questions to join. And find us at [roath_history](#) on Instagram.

Latest blog stories are:

- [Margaret Lindsay Williams – Royal Portrait Artist](#)
- [Memories of a Steelworks Electrician](#)
- [Preswylfa School, 82 Pen-y-lan Road](#)
- [Confessions, Opinions and Autographs of my Friends: The Story of an Autograph Album owned by Alice Tovey](#)

Louvain Rees | [hellohistoria](#)

Louvain Rees's [Hellohistoria](#) blogposts are well worth a follow. She is a BBC Award-winning social historian, specialising in Bridgend and her primary research interests are paupers, poor law, lunacy, and poverty between 1790 and 1921. She confesses to a taste for death and graveyards.

Cardiff Naturalists' Society

Images taken in the early 20th century by Harry Morrey Salmon, Welsh naturalist and "the father of British bird photography", are now available online via the [National Museum's Collections online system](#)

At the time of writing this there are 818 images online of the target 1000, but that is more than enough to enjoy. If you click on an image you will be able to zoom in and also be able to see the negative format for those images that are negatives.



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GET IN TOUCH

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