

Ceredigion Archives Newsletter

Winter 2001

I would like to begin with an apology. We started the Archives Newsletter in 1998 because we knew that people who used the office were interested in learning more about our collections and our methods. We have not so far managed to produce a single newsletter in 2001, and therefore “owe” at least two further copies to everyone who has paid the £4.00 annual fee. We are very sorry that we have failed to produce the spring and autumn newsletter, not least because we enjoy writing them.

A quick synopsis 2001 reveals that the three staff have been busier than ever. The year did not have a very auspicious start – Helen was ill, and had a week off work – during which time she should have been delivering three talks. Richard Ireland of the Law Department at the University kindly stepped in and gave a paper on nineteenth century criminality to Waun Fawr Women’s Institute, whilst the other two talks were given later in the year. Since that time we have all been reasonably healthy and working hard to stay that way : swimming, yoga, fresh vegetables, vitamins – you name it !

During the late summer we were given permission to employ an archivist for a few weeks to help clear the back-log in listing collections. Day- to-day administration of the office has meant that this important task often remains undone. Judith Stephenson, one of the newly- qualified archivists from the Archives Administration MSc course at Aberystwyth University was with us for eight weeks, working on a part-time basis (whilst simultaneously trying to complete her thesis !), and managed to catalogue 33 deposits. We are grateful to Judith for her splendid work, and grateful to the County Council for allowing us to employ her. Since Judith’s departure we have had several important deposits including the Hafod Collection ; we hope something may be done to facilitate the cataloguing of these deposits so that they can be made available to the public at the earliest possible opportunity.

We have been very pleased to welcome several volunteer workers to the office during the course of the year ; they have completed some very valuable work in preserving documents, using protective wrappers and polyester pockets to make document-handling safer, tidying up the searchroom, weeding duplicates from modern collections, and digitising images from the postcard collections. Further volunteers are always very welcome .

So far this year we have had an average of nearly 100 searchers per month visiting the office – low numbers in comparison with other record offices, but we have never found ourselves at a loss for work, as we also deal with enquiries from all over the world (many of which now arrive by e-mail), the administration of the modern records system, and the numerous tasks associated with preserving and documenting the archive collection. We have also tried to maintain a public profile through our talks and lectures, and the exhibitions shown in Swyddfa’r Sir and beyond. Glenys’ expertise in amassing exhibition material is impressive – and some fantastic bits of history have been displayed this year.

It is not always easy to appreciate the hard work that goes into preparing an exhibition ; when she prepared a display for Ysgol Mynach in November Glenys read her way through all the school log books, and lost herself in the history of the Pontarfynach community. So immersed was she that when she read the log book entry which marked the passing of an old friend and benefactor of the school about whom she had read so much, she let out a plaintive cry “ Oh no, Mr. Lightfoot’s dead!” The year was 1931.

In March we acquired the Old Lifeboat House in Queen’s Road, Aberystwyth for the storage of some of our modern records. These are the records that the Council is obliged to keep for a statutory period of time, after which many will be discarded. No archives will be kept in the Old Lifeboat House because the premises do not conform to the British Standard for archives repositories, but the modern records are kept in appropriate conditions and protected by fire and intruder alarms. We thought this very charming little building might take several years to fill : it seems more likely now that it will be full by next March. This year we have taken in over 530 cubic feet of modern records – in comparison with 30 cubic feet last year !

We need to think seriously about new premises for the Archives Service as we are rapidly outgrowing Swyddfa’r Sir – something which was highlighted by the report produced by the Historic Manuscripts Commission following their inspection of the office in 1999. Whilst we try to do everything possible to make the archives service as good as any other in the country, there are problems with the situation and nature of the building that cannot be overcome. Suggestions of possible new premises are welcome !

In September Aberystwyth became the venue for the Society of Archivist’s Annual Conference, and town was suddenly filled with *an awful lot* of archival people. Ceredigion Archives put on guided tours (other archivists found our premises *interesting*) and Helen led a tour round the town walls in the rain, in the dark. “What town walls ?” many of you will be thinking. Exactly.

Selected new accessions for the year are listed below – in addition we have many other new small items amounting in total to 69 deposits. Readers may be interested to learn that we now hold the Cardiganshire Family History Society’s Burial Index for Cardiganshire 1813 – 1837, which is on microfiche, and the CD-Rom which contains the first version of the National Burial Index. This latter covers England and Wales between the years 1538 and 2000. Whilst it is by no means exhaustive (later editions will include more entries) there are an impressive 5 million (+) burials indexed. I must also mention the excellent volumes of monumental inscriptions prepared by E.L. and M.A. James ; there are now fourteen volumes of inscriptions gleaned from churches, chapels and war memorials, which provide a wonderful sources for family and local historians alike. The areas covered are the southern half of the county, including Llandysul, Llandygydd and Aberporth, Aberaeron, Llanfihangel Ystrad and Llannarth, and in the northern part of the county, the top half of the parish of Llanbadarn Fawr. We find these volumes absolutely invaluable in our research work.

1901 census

We would like to remind readers that the 1901 census for Cardiganshire will be available at the record office on microfilm and microfiche from 2nd January 2002. We welcome all enquiries and personal visits !

Staff 2001

Helen Palmer	County Archivist	
Glenys McBurnie	Archives Assistant	
Gwyneth Roberts	Archives Assistant	
Judith Stephenson	Archivist (temporary)	August – October 2001

We would also like to acknowledge the help of the caretakers at Swyddfa'r Sir, Ray and Paul, who move Very Heavy Things (like map-cabinets !) for us, and our cleaners who keep the search-room free from the Dust of Ages !

Selected Accessions to the office 2001

During the year we have received 69 accessions to the office. Some consisted of just one or two small items, others were substantial collections. All are important to us. I would like to thank everyone who has made a deposit or a donation to Ceredigion Archives this year.

- Acc. 1249 Museum Collection : additional items including two volumes "Rural Lore, Capel Seion c. 1921-5"
- Acc. 1250 Files from RAE Aberporth, mostly concerned with land and properties in the Aberporth area
- Acc. 1251 Brynherbert School Log Book 1944-1979
- Acc. 1252 Visitor' Book for the Tea Rooms at Devil's Bridge Post Office 1894-8
- Acc. 1253 Llandyfriog Community Council Records 1974-1997
- Acc.1257 Volume of photographs taken at the opening of the new Penweddig School in December 2000
- Acc. 1261 Items including three letters in Welsh from Tasmania 1878
- Acc.1267 Diaries of J.P. Rees, Llandisilio 1904 - 1958
- Acc.1268 Records of Llanllwchaearn Community Council
- Acc.1275 Welsh version "Health and Safety at Work" under the Factories and Workshops Act 1901 from Dyffryn Mill, Llanilar
- Acc. 1281 Diaries of J.Edwards, Ruel Uchaf, Bow Street 1912 – 1940
- Acc.1292 Plans and artist's impression of Aberystwyth Town Hall c. 1960 with photographs of the old Town Hall.
- Acc.1298 Letters sent to Talybont W.I. from members of the armed forces during the second world war.
- Acc.1301 Deeds and documents for the Hafod Estate 18th – 20th century
- Acc.1303 Records of CPRW, Ceredigion
- Acc.1304 Further records of the Ceredigion Girl Guides Association

Talks to societies and organisations given in 2001

Waun Fawr W.I. (RWI in place of HP)
Mynach Merched y Wawr (GMcB)

Newcastle Emlyn Family History Class visit to archives (HP)
 Cymdeithas Llanon (GMcB)
 Coleg Ceredigion access students visit to archives (HP)
 Llanafan History Group visit to archives (HP)
 Cymdeithas Pont Sion Cwilt (HP)
 History Group, DILS visit to archives (HP)
 Capel Bangor W.I.(HP)
 New Quay W.I. (HP)
 Waun Fawr W.I. visit to the archives (HP)
 Heritage Management students UCW visit to archives (HP)
 Rhyd Lewis W.I. (HP)
 Mydroilyn W.I. (HP)
 Cardiganshire Family History Society visit to the archives (HP & GMcB)
 Llandysul Local History Society visit to the archives (HP)
 Aberporth W.I. (HP)
 Family History Class visit to archives (HP)
 Waun Fawr Welsh Society (HP)
 Llanarch W.I. visit to archives (HP)
 Friend of Carmarthen Record Office visit to archives (HP, GR & GMcB)
 Llanon Society (GmcB)
 Borth Senior Citizens (HP)
 Visually Handicapped Club (HP)
 Society of Archivists Annual Conference : 2 tours of archives (GR, GMcB, HP)
 Thursday Club (HP)
 Friends of Carmarthen Record Office (HP)
 Cwm Rheidol Ladies Guild (HP)
 Llanafan Merched Y Wawr (GMcB)
 Hanes Emlyn (HP)
 Cymdeithas yr Hebog visit to archives (GMcB)
 Manuscript Heritage group, UCW, visit to archives (HP)
 Talybont W.I. (HP)
 A.R.P. 050 (HP)
 UCW Library Staff visit to archives (GR)
 Family History Class visit to archives (GMcB)
 National Trust volunteers (HP)
 Historical Research Group, University of Lampeter – 2 groups (HP)
 UCW Library staff visit to archives (GR)

A total of 39 talks

Displays and Exhibitions during 2001

“The Death of Queen Victoria” (Swyddfa’r Sir, Aberystwyth)

“Hafod, Devil’s Bridge and area” (Hafod Arms Hotel, Pontarfynach)
This display was part of a day school on Hafod and the surrounding area

“200 years of the census”

We produced seven copies of this display which were displayed simultaneously in different venues throughout the county to tell people about the history of the census and to remind them to participate in the 2001 census held in April.

(Aberystwyth, Swyddfa'r Sir & Town Hall, Aberystwyth Library
Cardigan Library, Aberaeron Town Hall,
Llandysul Library, Lampeter Library)

"Elections in Ceredigion" (Swyddfa'r Sir, Aberystwyth)
A small exhibition to coincide with the election on 7th June 2001

"Gwlad y Menyg Gwynion ? (Land of White Gloves?) Crime and punishment in Ceredigion" (Swyddfa'r Sir, Aberystwyth)
This very popular display was designed to complement the simultaneous exhibition at the National Library of Wales "Blood on their Hands". Both exhibitions were launched to coincide with the Annual British Legal History Conference, held this year in Aberystwyth.

Mynach School (Ysgol Mynach, Pontarfynach)
The school celebrated a significant anniversary this year (opinions differ as to which significant anniversary it was !). In conjunction with the school's own exhibition Glenys prepared a history of the school using extracts from the logbooks. This was displayed at a special celebratory open-day at the school in November.

"Wild Winter Weather" (Swyddfa'r Sir, Aberystwyth)
The current exhibition is concerned with the exciting weather to which Ceredigion is prone. Using newspaper reports, photographs, school log books and other documents we have drawn together dramatic accounts of the weather over the past two centuries.

The article below is by Gwyneth Roberts. We commemorated the centenary of Queen Victoria's death in an exhibition early in the year. Perhaps it was because our premises are still known as "The Queen's Hotel", and because so many of the records we use every day are Victorian in origin, that we felt it important to mark the end of the "Victorians". We began our new century by bidding farewell to the age in which our grandparents were born, and to which, therefore, we felt connected, in a way future generations will not.

The Death of Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria breathed her last at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 22 January 1901 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. The speed with which the news spread is illustrated by the fact that the Mayor and Corporation of both Aberystwyth and Cardigan received the news by telegrams issued 6.45 pm followed by the official bulletin at 7.08pm. Although we marvel at the speed of the Internet the communications revolution which took place in the 19th century was just as significant. The death of her predecessor William IV in 1837 might have taken weeks to penetrate to some of the more remote communities in Cardiganshire. Even then its impact would have been minimal compared to the shock felt at the death of a woman who had reigned for longer than any other monarch and whose photographic image was entirely familiar to everyone.

The immediate response to the sad news was to fly all flags at half-mast, whilst many private houses drew their blinds down as a mark of respect. Later all entertainments and public functions due to be held over the next fortnight were cancelled. The next day the Monthly Meeting of the Aberystwyth Borough council passed a resolution which attempted to express their ‘overwhelming sense of the loss sustained by our country by her majesty’s removal from her exalted position.’ A weighty phrase which makes it sound rather as if the late Queen had been the victim of a heavenly coup d’etat .

On the following Sunday preachers in churches and chapels related their chosen texts to the death of the old Queen. The Rev. T. Jones of Penbryn undoubtedly echoed the feelings of many congregations throughout the whole of Great Britain when he said

‘ There are very few present who remember Our Gracious Sovereign’s accession to the throne, and we have become so familiarized with her presence, as it were, that it is hard to realize that she has left us. The report of the service concludes ‘ it was astonishing to find the congregations in a remote parish like Penbryn listening with such emotion.’

Despite the fact that Queen Victoria’s death was relatively sudden and unexpected the response to it was impressively swift. By the evening of the 22 January The Great Western railway had already issued instructions to its uniformed staff which required them to wear a black cloth armband on the left arm, just above the elbow. Non-uniformed staff were requested to wear dark clothing or an armband with a mourning band upon the hat and all staff were to wear a black scarf or neck-tie.

Mr Evan Jones an ex Navy-man and now inmate of Aberaeron workhouse was one of the few local people to have actually laid eyes on the late Queen. She had inspected one of the vessels on which he was

serving and he described her as ' a stout lady with a bronze complexion and exceedingly active and amiable to the company of whom he was one' Mr Jones also submitted a poem to be read out at the next meeting of the Board of Guardians:

... She could not stay the mortal blow,
The rich and great likewise must go,
No one can hold the fleeting breath,
To all alike the goal is death.

In Cardigan the muffled mourning bells of St Mary's church tolled continually and *The Cardigan and Tivy-side Advertiser* was almost truculent in its anxiety to protest that the borough ceded to no-one in the depth of its grief:

'In Cardigan and district the grief is profound, as it is only natural it should be.

In many places perhaps the outward signs of mourning may be more marked, but nowhere, we venture to predict is the aged sovereigns loss more felt or her memory more cherished than in Cardigan'

The newspaper went on to assert a distinctively celtic note by reminding its readers of the well-known saying of the Druids that ' when a stone falls at Stonehenge so surely there dies a Monarch''. On Sunday 30th December two stones which formed the trilithons at Stonehenge had fallen . The Queen had also expressed a conviction that she would die in January. The writer then makes a brave attempt to prove that January was a month of ill-omen for the Royal family only to find the facts conspiring against him:

... January has been a very unfortunate month for the Royal family, although not as unfortunate as many people think. Prince Henry of Battenberg, it is true, died in January and so did the Duke of Clarence but the Prince Consort died in December and the Duke of Albany died in March. It was, however, in January that the Queen's father, the Duke of Kent died. Six days later his father George III., also went to his long rest. But these are the only examples which can be recorded.'

The mourning was not entirely unrelieved by controversy. In Aberystwyth the solemn mood was broken by the activities of the male college students during ceremony of proclaiming Edward VII king who ' far from being impressed by a sense of the solemnity of the occasion, appeared to regard it as a favourable opportunity for displaying their talents for buffoonery ... alternately cheering, booing, and singing some of the most senseless of their college catch-songs.'

Despite the antics of the students it is clear from the coverage in local newspapers that Cardiganshire, in common with the rest of Britain, was struggling to come to terms with not only a new century but also the loss of a Queen who had dominated public life for sixty-three years. As Mr T. Colby told the meeting of the Aberystwyth Board of Guardians, 'they would all feel a considerable blank by the change.'



Home Office.
Whitehall.
14th Feb. 1901.

Sir

I am commanded by the King to convey to you hereby His Majesty's thanks for the Loyal and Dutiful Address of the Mayor Aldermen Burgesses of the Borough of Cardigan expressing their sympathy with His Majesty and the Royal Family on the occasion of the lamented death of Her late Majesty Queen Victoria.

I am,
Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

The Mayor
of the Borough
of Cardigan.

Geo. S. Ritchie