

Cowbridge History Society
AGM for 2017-18
Chairman's Report

Our constitution requires the officers of the Society to make a brief report at the AGM. As Chair I shall undertake that task.

Cowbridge is a fortunate country town in two respects. First, it seems to thrive economically and has managed to retain its longstanding retail function despite the turnover of shops. Secondly, it is fortunate to have such a successful educational structure ranging from nursery and infant schools through to its nationally famous comprehensive school, complemented by a very active community college. Thirdly, it maintains an active social life largely thanks to the large number of social and sporting clubs which, of course includes our very own History Society, a body with over 100 members. Small wonder, it has become a desirable place to live and work.

The Society is blessed with many volunteers who are prepared to give up so much of their time to its smooth running. The members of the committee, and in particular the officers, give us splendid support through their hard work. This year Dr Chris Turner has formally joined the committee, bringing with him new skills and wise counsel. Our programme organiser Dick Tonkin has once again given us a range of stimulating speakers. Noteworthy contributions have come from amongst our own number including talks about a war poet (Deborah Fisher) and Welsh nonconformity (Chris Turner); Don Gerrard concluded his trilogy on the Dissenters with a fascinating account of their academies. Beverly Tonkin and Keith Jones have ensured that our finances are in good order and you will see later that our financial balances remain favourable. In addition to producing our regular Newsletter, Deborah Fisher has overseen the publication of one of our most successful books, Betty Alden continues her sterling work in the Local History Study Room in Old Hall with assistance from a trio of volunteers. Beverly Tonkin organised the Charter Day visit to the splendid medieval house, Castle Farm at St. Georges, followed by a marvellous home-cooked lunch at The Sportsman's Rest in Peterson. Our two Life Presidents, Rev. Norman Williams and Brian Ll. James have given us guidance when needed with Brian also serving on our management committee. So, thanks to all members of the committee.

David Francis's book entitled *Llanharri, Llansannor and District: A Memoir* was the first of our new Occasional Publications series, edited by Deborah Fisher; it was published last May. A tremendous gathering for its launch in Llanhari Primary School was organised, resulting in a marvellous turnout of over 100 of David's friends, former colleagues and school children. As you will hear David very generously gave the all of the profits from the sale of the book to the Society.

Sadly, I have to record the death of two stalwart and longstanding members of the Society, Jo Rawlins and Yvonne Weeding. Each of them held office in the Society or one of its predecessors: Jo was secretary of the Cowbridge Record Society and Yvonne was Chair of the Local History Society. Both received fulsome obituaries in our Newsletter. We shall miss them both.

Betty Alden continues to manage the History Room in Old Hall dealing with an increasing number of enquiries, donations and visitors on Wednesday mornings, ably assisted by Jackie, Jo and Lisa.

And where would we be without Breda and her team who provide us with wonderful tea and cakes after each meeting?

A working party (WP) was established some two or three years ago to oversee the digitisation project which continues to make good progress with the vast majority of items now available in digital form. Like the Forth Bridge, however, work has to go on, entering and editing material for the archive. We continue to owe a considerable debt to John Sherwood and Betty Alden but soon it may be possible for them to recover the use of their dining room table!. Much of the WP's efforts this year have been devoted to finding ways of increasing public access to the archive. Our initial thoughts concentrated on improving access in the History Room in Old Hall but it soon became clear that a better long term solution would be to mount it on the Web. To this end a number of commercial organizations were approached to ascertain their technical competence and their likely costs to undertake this work. In addition we have given serious consideration to The Peoples Collection, Wales (PCW), a web-based organization funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and located within the National Library of Wales. The great advantage of this site would be its very low cost to the Society. Currently, we are assessing its technical specification to ensure that it meets our requirements. We invited Kay Hanson a senior technical officer of PCW to assist us in this task. Shortly, the WP will have to make a decision on which solution is best for the main committee's ratification.

Meanwhile, access in Old Hall is in need of new investment in information technology. I am pleased to announce that the Committee has recently agreed additional spending on such equipment. Attempts are being made to offset the cost through grant aid. An application has now been made to the Co-op Community Fund for financial support. This is in addition to the £1000 grant received from Creative Rural Communities but as yet this remains unused.

Finally, the Society has continued to respond, where appropriate, to planning matters that may affect the historic environment of Cowbridge. The so called Darren Farm development by Taylor Wimpey which, when complete, will add nearly 500 houses, over 1200 people and a new road to Cowbridge and Llanblethian's landscape. The only practical opposition to this scheme now lies with trying to mitigate its more extreme effects on our area particularly with reference to wildlife conservation, protection for Llanbrynach Church and the building materials to be used. To date only the road and the first phase of development of about 160 houses has received full planning permission. Meanwhile, your committee will continue to be vigilant on all planning matters relating to Cowbridge and district.

R J Buswell
Chair
Cowbridge History Society
May 4th 2018

