

Notes from Local Interest Group 26th May 2022

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy Ozols, John Price, Ann & Howard Dean, Joan Lloyd, Graham Croose, Joan Hughes, Margaret Morris, Dorothy Rogers, Bronwen Jenkins, Jan Cotterill, Geoff Steel, Jennifer Lewis, Barbara Gayther, Allison Joyce, Jenny Francis, Gaynor Price, Dennis & Joyce Moore, David & Anwyn Price, Helen Barnett, Roy & Celia Jones, Victoria Lykke-Dahn, Terry & Sue Croose, Deb Lloyd, Rachel & Glyn Jones, Jas Grassie, Maureen Davies, Malcolm Lloyd, Julie Davies, Ian Ball, Steve Halliwell, Janet Thomas, John & Anthea Madden, Andrew Moore, Diane Moore, Victor & Cherry Williams, Mark Thomas, Roy Lloyd.

Apologies: Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Richard Thomas, Avryl Lloyd, Evelyn Bally, Adrian Chambers

John Price filmed the evening and this is available on Youtube.

Visit to Newchurch

ML welcomed everyone and said how amazing it was to see such a large crowd on such a cool and dreary evening. Thank you to all for making the effort. She explained that the evening would consist of talks in the church and the chapel and also a tour of some of the interesting sites in the village.

She started by thanking a number of people for the help that they had given her in putting together the evening's visit to Newchurch. They were: Ian and Debbie, Dennis and Joyce Moore, Joan Hughes, Adrian Chambers (who sadly could not be at the meeting), Norman Lloyd, Ann Dean, Vicky Lykke-Dahn, Steve Halliwell, Rachel Jones, Gwyneth Guy and John Price.

St Mary's Church

The tour started in the church. ML explained that New Church often refers to a church established after the Norman Conquest. In 1497, there was a sequestration for the church in Newchurch-in-Elvel (Elfael), and so it has been here for a very long time. A report of 1733 says that the Rev Francis Wadely was rector, and also the vicar of Gladestry; there was a service every Sunday at Newchurch at 2pm and also at 10am whenever possible. In Jonathon Williams' "History of Radnorshire" in around 1801, the church was said to consist of a nave, a chancel (separated from the nave by a timber frame) a low tower containing three bells and a porch. On the tithe map the church appears to be situated in a different place in the churchyard, however, as it is extremely rare for a church not to be built on its predecessor's footprint, this may be an inaccuracy of the map. The Beavan family from Tyn-y-cwm were great benefactors and the last one, Major Samuel Beavan, who died in 1836, is remembered with a stone on the wall. At the bottom of his memorial it reads, "At his death Tyn-y-cwm passed to strangers", although members of the Beavan family lived at Pontvane into the twentieth century. There are several memorials to the Beavans, including Rev Samuel Beavan who was the rector of Newchurch and who died in 1820. The Beavan graves are in the graveyard, within iron railings adjoining the east wall.

In 1856, the parishioners raised a rate of nine pence in the pound to build a new church on the site of the old one, which had a clay floor and was said to be "mean and inconvenient inside". The first stone of the new church was laid on 25th September 1856 by the wife of Richard Goodwin, one of the respectable tenant farmers of the parish; the Goodwin family lived at Great House for many years. The architect and builder was William Ward of Kingston. Since Newchurch was a very small parish, the nine-penny rate only raised about £30; the church cost £500 to build but it is not recorded where the rest of the money came from. The vicar at this time was the Rev David Vaughan; he had been curate of Bryngwyn and Newchurch from 1853. The font in the church dates from the 10th or 11th century and so must have come from the original church. There are now only two bells, but they are amongst the oldest in Wales, dating from the 1300s.

Next to the church was the village hall, which was opened by Mrs Venables Llewellyn in January 1914. This hall (and the one at Bryngwyn) were brought in by dray in sections from Eardisley to be erected on site. Apparently, everyone was very impressed by the sprung floor, and it was said to be the best place for dancing for miles around. The hall was built on a piece of land which, according to the tithe map, was owned by Walter de Winton, but occupied at that time by William Watkins; it was part of a farm called Forest, a smallholding by the hill above Cwmgwillim. The field was labelled "Cottage by the Church". This was the site of a cottage in the 1841 census

called Four Ways; the cottage had disappeared by the census of 1851. The village hall is no longer standing, but the field where it stood is still obvious beside the church and often used for parking.

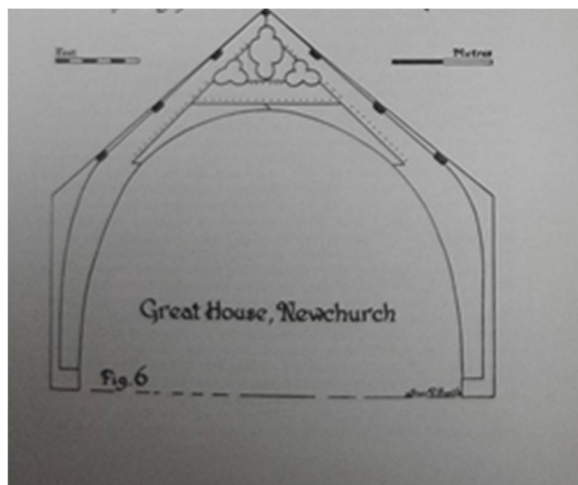


The old village hall, the last village celebration to be held at the hall was the Silver Jubilee in 1977. After a snow storm in the 1980s the roof caved in and the building was demolished.

Next, Ann Dean told us something about the Rev David Vaughan (1819-1903). Rev Vaughan was a great friend of Francis Kilvert's and the latter would often go to his house for meals. Vaughan was born in Nantmel and educated in Rhayader and St David's College in Lampeter. He was ordained in June 1851 and became the vicar at Glascwm. By 1870, he was the rector at Newchurch. His wife was Margaret Price and together they had twelve children, the last of whom was born when Margaret was 48 years old! One of their children was Emeline, a particular favourite of his friend Francis Kilvert; her grave is in the churchyard. Rev Vaughan was instrumental in having the church rebuilt. He also founded a little school at Cwmgwillim in 1880. In his obituary, he was described as being, "reserved, austere but humble and accessible". Rev Vaughan lived at Gilfach-yr-heol, a farm just outside the village, from the 1860s, leaving the Rectory uninhabited. However, by 1901 he had retired to the Vicarage. There was a private school in the Rectory at one time, before the school at Cwmgwillim opened in 1880. In the 1846 inquiry into the state of education there is a record of Mrs Page's school, established in Newchurch in 1846, with 15 scholars, 13 of whom lived within a mile and a half of the school. Was this school in Newchurch village? Perhaps it was at the Rectory; a school master, Mark Watkins, was lodging at the Rectory in 1851.

Great House

From the church, we walked down to Great House. This cruck hall was built in around the mid-15th century; the timbers in the house have been dated using dendrochronology and the trees they came from were felled in 1449. It was converted to a storeyed house in around 1661 (the date is carved on the doorway). A further wing on the north was built in 1790. There are four cruck tresses remaining, the three upper ones forming the framework of a two-bay hall. It is probable that the house had half-timbered walls which were replaced by stone. The hall was 32ft long, divided into two equal bays by a central cruck truss, spanning 26ft, one of the longest in Wales.



Norman Lloyd, who lives in Great House, told us a little of its more recent history. There does not seem to be any record of who built it or who occupied it until the Goodwin family lived there in the 19th century; in the 1840s they were tenants of William Moor. Some years ago, some people came from New Zealand looking for where their relatives had lived and they brought some old photos with them, which Norman had put out for us to see. Some other people, the Richards family, owned the house between the Goodwins and the Lloyds, but it was Norman and his family that gutted and refurbished the building from the 1980s. They got a grant from the Welsh Office, but this did not cover all of the cost. The family bought Great House and Llanyoyne farm in 1954, moving from the Parsonage in Eardisley. Norman's father built the new house, New House Farm, opposite Great House in the 1970s. He also built Sunnyside, a bungalow on the edge of the village, and a bungalow to replace the derelict house at Llanyoyne. Originally, Great House was a medieval cruck hall which was open from the floor to ceiling, with a fireplace, and there were two rooms on the upper side which led to the bedrooms and the two rooms on the bottom side were the buttery and the pantry. When the Lloyds first lived there, the bottom half was a granary with granary steps and a calves' cot at the bottom end; there was a kiln in there as well. A man called Jeff Smith, who had done up a similar house at Burfa, came over and helped Norman, together with Andrew Moore, who was a young lad at the time, and Betty's nephew helped too. At the top end, there was a very tall chimney on top of a three storey part of the structure which was probably the addition of the 18th and 19th centuries. They started by doing the two bottom bays and got the roof on that; then they did the middle bays and finally they did the top end where their daughter, Hannah, lives now. It is completely different from what it was. On the middle cruck, now in the lounge upstairs, there are two clover leaves and one four-leaf clover decoration. The upstairs lounge was two bedrooms, and an old rickety stairs leading into the three storey wing above, when the Lloyds came to the house. This was full of woodworm and not worth keeping. The roof is all oak and Norman's family also replaced all of the windows and doors in oak. They returned it to as near its original form as they could, leaving the main upstairs room open to the ceiling as it would originally have been. When Norman's father came to Great House in 1954, the barn had a stone tile roof and he reroofed it with sheets of asbestos. It is an interesting barn, not a threshing barn. The central doorway is very narrow with a step up into the structure and it is four bays in length. The farmyard has remained the same basic shape with new barns replacing older structures so that the courtyard appearance is maintained.

Rose Cottage

Our next stop was Rose Cottage, just a short distance from the church. Here, the owner, Victoria Lykke-Dahn, told us a little of its history. There is a record of the existence of the building in 1873 and also in the earliest conveyance, which is dated 1887. It used to be three properties, with a wheelwright and a carpenter's shop. The right hand side of the building is the oldest part and inside there are original doors and latch fittings. Sadly, the original beams had dry rot and so had to be replaced, but there are some of the original beams in the loft. There is a bread oven and an original fireplace. Up until the 1940s, the property had been rented out. One of the outbuildings was converted into a library by a previous occupant using yew from the churchyard, which blew down in a gale in the 1990s; the tree had been dated to around AD 890. Behind Rose Cottage is a derelict and very small cottage called Bank Cottage, and there is also an old piggery.

The Royal Oak and Changes to the Road

We next walked down to the bridge where Dennis Moore told us a little of the history of this part of the village. Dennis came to live at what is now called The Oak in 1963. It had formerly been the Royal Oak, but the pub had closed in 1924. When Dennis bought it, it was the home of Mrs Bowen; she had a shop at one end of the building. Up until the 1950s, there had also been a post office here. Mrs Bowen offered to sell the house to Dennis and his wife and, after some consideration, they decided to buy. Dennis pointed out the course of the old road which was right alongside the house. This had been altered because the road was very narrow, steep and there was poor visibility because of a tight bend. In April 1948 there was a fatal accident on the Blaencurdy pitch when a lorry ran out of control. The driver and his passenger jumped from the cab, but unfortunately the driver sustained head injuries and died later in Kington hospital. In fact, the course of the road has been changed twice, the first time in the 1960s, when it was moved further from the Oak. A new bridge was also built about 1977 when the second new road was constructed and the there had been a very bad flood in

Newchurch in 1887 & present day

pitch widened. Dennis told us that the house some years ago when a

sheet of water, following some extremely heavy rain, had flowed rapidly down the steep slope behind the house, flooding it to a level of about 1m. There was a mark on the door showing the level to which the water came. Joan Hughes said that her father had told her the story of his brother, Stanley Croose, who was a young man at the time. He had just gone up the pitch with his horse and cart when suddenly there was what was known locally as a cloud burst. The water came flooding down the pitch and flooded the pub so that the lady inside had to be rescued. There was some concern for Stanley, but he had reached the top of the pitch and was completely dry. This happened sometime between 1910 and 1920 and was the only time the property has ever been flooded. The road through the village remained narrow until Mrs Lloyd, the late blacksmith's widow, died and her house, which was on the corner opposite the chapel, was taken down thus allowing the road through the village to be widened.



The Quarry

We walked across the road to the property owned by Steve Halliwell. The house here was built in 1993, actually within the old quarry. Steve has worked hard in the garden over the few years he has been living here and has exposed the quarry face behind the house. He is pleased that it makes such a great feature within his garden. The stone in the quarry is a mudstone, deposited some 320 million years ago. It is not very resistant and fractures very easily so he does not believe that it would have made very good building stone. A footpath to the village well used to come right through the property. Up until the 1970s, everyone's water came from this well – there was no piped water in the village until this date. Steve showed us where the well is located, now a little overgrown, but a concrete structure still exists. Beyond the well, the footpath continues into a field which was used for the village sports after the annual Chapel Anniversary.

The Ebenezer Chapel

The name of the chapel comes from a line in the Bible, 1 Samuel 7:12 – “Then Samuel took a stone and set it between the cities of Mizeph and Shen and named it Ebenezer”. This literally means “stone of help”.

The Rev John Evans, Minister of Brilley Chapel, was instrumental in the building of the chapel in 1846. He had a great talent for raising money to build places of worship and many were constructed in the late 1840s in this area. Of those built at that time, only Newchurch and Yardro still hold regular services. The land on which the chapel was built was given by Richard Croose of New House, and many of those present on the evening were from the same family. The Croose family has been associated with Newchurch for many years. Four generations after the foundation of the chapel, the main people who now run it are Rachel Jones (née Croose) and Graham Croose.

The chapel still holds an Anniversary, always on the first Sunday in July. It is always popular, attracting a full congregation and many guest artists. The event ends with “Guide me O thou great Jehovah”, or Cwm Rhondda as it is often known. In the past the event was followed by the Anniversary Sports and Tea.

Whilst we were in the chapel, Joan Hughes read an excerpt from Mona Morgan's book, “Growing up in Kilvert Country”. She described how everyone looked forward to the Anniversary, always thinking of the sun shining, and it was attended by a very large congregation. Everyone dressed in their smartest clothes and one of the best

parts of the event, especially for the children, was the tea afterwards. There was also an annual photograph, taken in the quarry with people standing on ledges in the rock face. The sports followed this.

The chapel has a small annexe and a graveyard. In 1997, land adjoining the chapel was gifted in order to provide a car park. The land was part of the garden of The Forge on the opposite side of the road, and the last owners were Mr and Mrs Tom Lloyd and their daughter Kathleen. Tom Lloyd, who died in 1954, was the last blacksmith in the village. The Smithy or The Forge or Bridge House or Corner Cottage as it is sometimes known, opposite the chapel, was demolished in order to widen the road.

The chapel, in common with the church, gets many visitors as Newchurch is on the Offa's Dyke Path Long Distance Footpath.

Joan Hughes read another excerpt from Mona Morgan's book in which she described how the children often loitered in the village after returning from school to look in at the blacksmith's shop, where "Daddy Lloyd", who was very fond of children, would be working hard at the forge. Years later, in the early 1950s, the Clyro School children would call in at the smithy to see the same blacksmith, Tom Lloyd, before making their way over the bridge to the post office, then located in the Royal Oak, to see whether they could get hold of any sweets "off ration" from Hughie Lloyd.

Following Joan's reading, we heard an audio recording about the blacksmith before Tom Lloyd, Arthur Pritchard. He was a very good singer and was known as "The Nightingale of the Arrow". Arthur worked twelve hours a day shoeing horses and then he would walk six miles to sing, often with Dick of Colva. The title "Nightingale of the Arrow" was handed down from Arthur Pritchard to Robert Davies, Dick of Colva's son. He in turn handed it over to Michael Labett from Michaelchurch on Arrow.

To end the evening, we were shown a slide show of photos that had been taken by Audrey Ball, Ian Ball's mother. Ian talked us through what each photo showed and he told us bits about some of the characters and buildings in the village in days gone by; this is an incredibly important archive of material documenting life in Newchurch in the 1970s.

Ian started with some photos of Miss Edith Wilding outside Bank Cottage where she lived. It was an extremely small house – one up and one down, with a pantry, and very low ceilings. She was housekeeper to Mr Goodwin. She died in the early 1980s and the house was not lived in again. It is now derelict.

There followed a picture of the blacksmith's shop – already derelict in the 1970s. Ian also showed us photos of the house variously called Corner House, Bridge House or The Smithy, which was directly opposite the chapel. He told us that it had two staircases and that the upstairs was divided into two, so could it once have been two dwellings? This might explain the different names. This house was the one demolished when the road was widened in the late 1970s.

We also saw a photo of the church before the yew tree fell, and Great House taken soon after the Lloyds completed their renovations. The village hall was still standing in the late 1970s and it is probable that the last event to be held there was the Silver Jubilee celebration in 1977. There were also a number of photos showing the scene when a lorry crashed outside the chapel whilst trying to go around the tight bend outside. There were no casualties. Ian also showed a number of photos showing the old bridge, which was low with one very small arch which would regularly get blocked during flood events on the River Arrow. There were also photos showing the construction of the new bridge and the alterations to the course of the road. These took place in 1976/77.

One of the most interesting things we learned was that piped water only arrived in Newchurch in 1970. The subject of a reliable and piped water supply had first been raised by Arthur Pritchard, the blacksmith, at a parish meeting of 1905. When it did finally arrive 65 years later, it meant that people like the 78 year old Catherine Lloyd, who had been walking the quite long distance to the village well every day for 50 years, with her bucket, no longer had to do so.

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A toast to the realisation of a dream — villagers of Newchurch raise their glasses to the men who are making it possible to end the 65-year wait for a pure water supply to their homes.



The evening was rounded off with much needed hot drinks and cakes, kindly provided by Ian and Debbie, as well as Rachel Jones and members of the chapel. We are so grateful to them for their generosity. Their hospitality was most welcome after a cold and wet walk around the village. Many thanks to everyone concerned.