

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May Painscastle Local Interest Group visited Glascwm.

Present: Maureen Lloyd, John Price, John Oliver, Robert Davies, Cynthia Bevan, Krystyna Zaremba, Suzanne & John Jessel, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Sylvia Bigglestone, Erika Cunningham, Cherry & Victor Williams, Jane Lloyd, Ralph Bradley, Sarah Cope, Marissa Pocock, John Oliver, Dawn Richards, Avryl & Roy Lloyd, Hughie & Margaret Price, Helen Barnett, Sylvia Illingsworth, John & Juliet Lewis, Celia Jones, Joan Hughes, Jacqui Simcock, Jenny Francis, Ann & Howard Dean, Evelyn Bally, Janet Russell, Grace Davies, Allison Joyce, David & Anwen Price, Paul & Sue Buckingham.

Apologies: Wendy & Dainis Ozols, Joan Lloyd, Ros Coles, Angela Swindell

The group met by Glascwm church and ML introduced our guides for the evening, Rt. Revd. John Oliver and Rob Davies, whilst Krystyna Zaremba would join us later. The group began by doing a walk 'around the block', going out of the churchyard by the west gate and walking down the lane alongside the orchard of the Yat, then following the Clas Brook through the village and back to the church.

John Oliver began by explaining about the Yat, an interesting house, part of which may be medieval, altered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and changed again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An interesting couple now live there; Krystyna is Polish and Derek is Scottish and they commute between Poland, where they have a house in Kraków, and Glascwm. The Lewis family lived in the Yat in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and they were Baptists and held Baptist meetings at the house. Because of the difficulties for non-conformists to be buried in the church yard, John Lewis gave a plot of land as a Baptist burial ground. This is adjacent to the house on the opposite side of the road from the church. He and his wife were the first burials there in 1708 and 1709. It was used for Baptist burials until 1878. The Baptist chapel at Franksbridge was built in 1835 so later burials took place there. In the early 1800s, Samuel Beavan married the Lewis heiress and so the Yat came into the Beavan family possession. It was then called Glascwm Court. The Old Vicarage is another interesting place; it was like an old farmhouse and was extended in 1838. Then, in the 1950s, the Church in Wales decided that no-one would want to live in such a big house, so they demolished a lot of the old house; now most of it is the 1838 addition. There is a photograph in the church of the house before the old part was demolished.

At the bottom of the lane there was a pleasure pool on the right hand side in the Yat orchard, probably a Victorian feature, which had in the past been used for boating. On the left hand side was the mill, dating from the seventeenth century, sometimes called Ty Gwyn Mill or Yat Mill. Part of the wheel pit is still visible and one of the grinding stones is still there. It was an overshot wheel, about 4 ft wide and 14ft in diameter. The water came from a pond on the other side of the road at the bottom of Tygwyn road, where a leet would have filled it up overnight, with the water being released during the day for milling. When the mill was first built is not known; the house was occupied up until the 1880s, but the mill probably stopped working sometime in the 1870s. The mill is on Gellidywyll land which used to have lots of rhododendrons, but they were cut down because they were poisonous.

Below: Mill wheel pit

Right: Clas brook and common



The walk continued on the road up what is called the common, alongside the Clas Brook. Here, there were large clumps of comfrey which was a medicinal plant used in the healing of broken bones and the leaves, when soaked in water, produce a good fertiliser.

At the bottom end of the village Rob Davies spoke about the house now called Brookside; this was once a blacksmith, the end shed was where the smithy was. The cottage is Grade II listed as an 18<sup>th</sup> century village house. Was this one of the four pubs in the village? It has similarities to the house opposite, Abertaddy, the name meaning the mouth of the Taddy as the stream from the top of the village joins the Clas Brook nearby. Rob told of one previous occupant who would shave in the Clas Brook every morning, whatever the weather! The house on the opposite side of the road is the Mason's Arms, certainly one of the four or five pubs that used to be in the village. John Oliver told us of the time of the drovers when there was a thriving village until the railway era, when the cattle were transported by train rather than being driven on the hoof from all parts of Wales to the Midlands and elsewhere in England. There were 500 people living in Glascwm in the 1840s and it would have been a very busy place on this important drovers' route into England.



Brookside



Mason's Arms

Further up the village is the Hall which was built in 1938 at a cost of £1,100. Some of the locals helped with the ground work and dances, whist-drives, parties, harvest suppers, etc were very popular. At the moment there is a scheme to renovate it, with help from Powys County Council and various charities, and it is hoped that it will be finished before too long. During the War it was a useful overflow for the school when a lot of evacuees were staying in Glascwm. Most of the evacuees came from the Liverpool area. Next door to the Hall is a new house built in 1975 by George and Ann West, who were from Chelsea in London. George was an architect and Ann, at one time, was Mayoress of Chelsea. They lived at Glascwm for a while. Ann, as churchwarden, did a lot of work to help restore the church. At the top of the village is the Post Office; it is still called that although it closed as a Post Office in the early 1990s. The Davies family lived at the Post Office; Phyllis married Stan Jones and she had a long service award for 50 years as Post Mistress. Her mother had kept the Post Office before her. It was at one time one of the pubs of the village, called the Beavan Arms after Squire Beavan from the Yat. At the top of the village was Pendre where Mrs Harley-Davies lived. She was a bit of a character. She used to write to the papers about things and she had a tuck shop which sold tobacco, sweets, etc. Next door was the cobblers which was open fronted. They would have had plenty of trade with all the drovers going through. There also seems to have been a smithy in this part of the village at one time.

The school was built in 1900. It was a primary school with children up to 14 years of age and it closed in 1946 when there were only about 16 pupils. Then, in 1947, it became a Youth Hostel for 50 years; this closed in 1997. The first warden was Mrs Harley-Davies but she gave it up when decimal currency came in [1971], and then Robert's mother, Ismay Davies, took it on. When it was a Youth Hostel, the girls' dormitory was in the main building, while the boys' one was in a shed to the east. The toilets were separate small buildings in between. Glascwm races were held on the hill above the village in the 1850s and 60s, and the area is still known as the racecourse. It is roughly between Cwmtwrch and Cwm Ceste.



The Old School

John Oliver pointed out the Baptist burial ground which is across the road from the churchyard. The churchyard is a two acre circular area very typical of Wales. It is a large area and most of it is unused. Robert had cut the grass around the graves but the rest is left as a flower meadow with buttercups, pignut, shepherds purse, etc. Robert cuts this area for hay at the end of the summer. Inside the church there is an old photo of the vicarage as it was before 1952 when one wing was demolished. Kilvert walked from Clyro and knocked on the front door of the vicarage in May 1871. The vicar came to the door and announced, " I am the bishop here, let me show you my cathedral!" It was whitewashed in Kilvert's time and has

been done again about 20 years ago. Inside the church John Jessel was playing the harmonium while people looked around at the photographs and architecture of the church.

John Oliver then explained that the church was like Cregrina and Rhulen, dedicated to St David; they have been in the same group for many years. Whether the patron saint had been here he was doubtful, but there is a leaflet about the three churches and the village communities which several people purchased. He went on to say that the church has had many changes. Glascwm means community valley, because it was a Celtic community in the 'Dark Ages', probably from about 800 or 900AD. The "community" was not as we think of monasteries these days, with celibate monks or nuns, but communities of married people who lived together and farmed the area and who took the gospel out to the surrounding countryside – a Celtic Christian Monastic community. The oldest parts of the church are the walls of the nave which were built in the 1400s, but it was rebuilt in the 1500s with Perpendicular windows in the chancel. It used to have north and south transepts of the cruciform style, but the Victorians got to work and the shape it has now dates from the 1890s. Ewan Christian was the architect who was responsible for the National Portrait Gallery in London and he took over as the architect at Glascwm. It was he who was responsible for the east window, but not the glass, which was inserted as a memorial window in the 1920s. There would have been a rood screen between the nave and the chancel. It is now a very simple church and the only one locally which has a Grade I listing, partly because of the fine roof of the Nave. The panelled roof was in a very bad condition about 20 years ago and it seemed as though it was so badly damaged it would have to be taken down. However, with steel tie beams it has been secured. The choir stalls were put there by Ewan Christian in the 1890s. There is not a lot left of the old church. The school originally met in the porch and then, when the church was re-ordered, the vestry became the school room, before the school in the village was built. About fifteen years ago a small kitchen and toilet were added to the building. The old records of the parish are kept at the Powys Archives. A lot of the memorials are mostly from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many made by stonemasons from Llanstephan, Hay or Peterchurch. There are two wooden crosses for German airmen who were shot down on 25th April 1942. Two of the four man crew bailed out, but the other two were killed when their plane crashed on Glascwm Hill. They were initially buried in Glascwm but, after the war, they were re-interred in the German cemetery in Cannock Chase in 1946. In an update to the story, the bodies were taken to the granary at Llanhailow before interment in Glascwm church and after many years some personal effects were discovered in the granary and have now been returned to the airmen's families. John Jessel continued to play music while people went to the vestry to collect cups of tea or coffee with biscuits and cake provided by the local people of Glascwm.

Krystyna Zaremba then told us something about the Yat and some interesting stories of local interest. The Yat is a Grade II listed building and she and her husband, Derek, have been looking after it for 37 years. It has a fascinating history. The house was owned by the Lewis family who were Baptists. They weren't allowed to be buried in the churchyard, so John Lewis gave a plot of land in the early eighteenth century as a Baptist burial ground. There is a story about a minister conducting a service from across the road because he did not want to set foot in unconsecrated ground. A few years ago, two ladies knocked on the Yat door and said to Krystyna, "Did you know there was a black man buried in your burial ground?" This

was not written down, because it was not recorded at that time. Maybe he was a slave, but the story had been passed on from generation to generation and these two ladies felt that Krystyna, as the current owner, should know about it. Squire Beavan, who lived at the end of the nineteenth century, married into the Lewis estate; he was called “the wicked squire”. The Yat was the manor house which belonged to the Cwmawr estate and, by marrying the heiress, he acquired the estate. When his wife died he married two further heiresses. He had many children, but he did not educate his daughters and one of them married a soldier against his wishes. Unfortunately, the soldier died and she was left with £400 which, because she had no idea how to manage her affairs, soon disappeared and she was desperate. So she went to the Yat and asked to come home, but her father said “No” so she became a pauper in the village. A family took her in thinking she could help teach the children but of course she could not as she had not had any education herself. She attended church every week and one day the family locked her out, so she became a pauper again. Eventually another family took her in and she never left the house again.

Krystyna told the story of the child who did not have any shoes to walk to school. The local people felt sorry for him but did not think they could buy a pair of shoes every six months. So they bought a donkey, on which he came to school at first, but soon he was back walking again and when they asked what had happened to the donkey he said his parents could not afford to keep the donkey. The Yat has a lot of history. Revd. Roy Fenn was the vicar in the village and he spent a lot of time at Hergest Court writing about the local history of the area. His son came and stayed at the Yat once and he said that his father thought the Yat may have belonged to the early Monastery. No-one really knows when the Yat was built, probably sometime around the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Some of the beams are very old and the carpenters’ marks which were used during building can be seen. The Yat, like the church, has seen many changes. There was quite a lot of building work during Georgian times. A dovecot and a barn have been incorporated into the house, and when Krystyna and Derek bought it the first repairs were to the roof, as well as building buttresses to prevent the house moving. They have also had new ironwork entrance gates made to a seventeenth century design. Krystyna enjoys visitors and they have a guest house; she hopes they have exorcised the era of the wicked squire Beavan. She told us a few stories about previous owners of the Yat. She said that in the corner of their garden is the old baptistry where total immersion baptisms would have taken place. There was a story that a Baptist minister, when preaching from an upper window of the house, had a congregation of 100 on the lawn. At one time the Yat was an English Language School, with an Iranian princess in residence who required special security, not something the locals were used to. Krystyna concluded by saying that she feels that Glascwm is a very special place.

LIG is very grateful for help from Rt. Revd. John Oliver, Rob & Janet Davies, Krystyna Zaremba, Ralph Bradley, Sarah Cope, Hugh & Margaret Price, Cynthia Bevan, Phil & Amanda Jones (Early Birds and Boys in Blue). Also many thanks for the refreshments provided by local residents and thanks to John Price for recording another interesting evening. Donations were given for Glascwm Church and Hall.