

Notes from Local Interest Group Gladestry Visit 27th May 2021

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Ann (AD) & Howard Dean, Joan Hughes (JH), Shirley Meredith (SM), Wendy Ozols, Ken Lloyd, John & Margaret Price, Cherry & Victor Williams, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Jennifer Lewis, Lynda Aiano, Jenny Francis, Joan Lloyd, John & Juliet Lewis, Helen Barnett, Anwyn & David Price, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Grace Davies, Richard Thomas.

ML welcomed everyone to our first "field trip" of the year and commented on how lucky we were to have such a lovely evening for our visit to Gladestry. She explained that the tour would be led by Ann Dean, Joan Hughes and Shirley Meredith; Joan and Shirley are long-term residents of Gladestry and so have plenty to say about the village.

Tour of Gladestry Village

Ann welcomed everyone and explained that sadly, due to the Covid pandemic, we would not be able to visit the Church or to go inside the Dean's barn; she hoped that this would be possible on a return visit.

Our tour started at the village school. Ann explained that this had been opened in 1877 and by 1899 it had 53 children on the school roll. The Rev Charles Grey, rector of St Mary's Church from 1881, was responsible for the school becoming a Church School. This was contrary to the way in which it had been funded, ie by both Anglicans and Non-Conformists, and so some Non-Conformists boycotted the school when it became a Church School. They said that they did not want their children to "learn Church things" like the catechism. People are very proud of the school and the education that it provides for children from the village and surrounding area, but it is small, cramped and hard to extend. It has only three classrooms and so children of different ages are taught in the same room. There are currently around 50 children on the roll.

Ann read a piece from the book, "**Gladestry 1900-1999: A Century of Change**" by **Robert Hughes and Richard Hughes**. This book is a wonderful history of village life, thoroughly researched and wonderfully illustrated, with many photos and quotes from residents, both past and present. In this excerpt, Miss Mary Richards, a teacher at the school circa 1944, wrote about how they had arrived one winter morning to find the ink in the ink wells frozen. She went on to say that the ink had to be thawed before lessons could begin. On another occasion, they had arrived to find an owl perched on one of the roof beams, where it stayed for the whole day, even though they left the windows open for it to escape. On yet another day, Jim, the village donkey (more about him to come) was found in the boys' cloakroom.

Grace Davies told us that her father had attended the school in the early part of the 20th century. Shirley Meredith said that the school had taken evacuee children during the war. The school log book records that on January 14th, 1941, seventeen children evacuated from two districts in Liverpool had been admitted to the school, but they did not all stay for very long. Having come from Liverpool, arrival in Gladestry must have been quite a culture shock!

Opposite the school is the Non-Conformist graveyard. Joan Hughes explained that, prior to having the graveyard, Baptists used to be buried in the churchyard. However, in 1953 this plot of land was given to the Non-Conformists so that they could have their own burial ground. It is very small and there are not many graves. Joan told us that Jim Prothero (singer), Betty Prothero, Davey Prothero,

Annie Williams, and Mervyn Williams' parents are buried there, together with "Jim the Gobe" and his parents, Mr and Mrs Lewis.

From here, we walked on to the sharp bend in the road. This is where the sawmill was located; it was run by Bert Bowen and Harry Price. Joan told us that this was a very busy place in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The saw bench was driven by a steam engine. Bowen made coffins. The Bowen family owned a donkey called Jim. Jim pulled the cart which was used to deliver paraffin around the village. The children absolutely loved him and would often feed him titbits. He is buried in the village. Joan remembers the donkey very well. She and her sister-in-law, Megan Hughes, wrote the following poem about Jim, which Joan read to us.

Here lies the body of Jim the donkey
His loads were heavy and his cart was wonky
He served his master for many years
Midst timber and sawdust which was right here
'Twas a hive of activity fifty years ago
With men and saws, it was "all go"
Life on this patch has now slowed down
Little homes stand with flowers around
All this now on Jim's sacred acre
Only a donkey but a legend for ever.

From here, we walked along the main street and stopped outside the village pub, The Royal Oak. This is very popular in the village and now has a shop open for an hour each morning to provide a service for the villagers. Opposite the pub is the old School House where the teachers used to live. The house is lower than the road and so was regularly flooded out (in fact this does occasionally still happen). Next to this is the old Baptist Chapel. It was closed on 31st March 1996, having only three members left. It is now a private home.

Along the road we came to Gladestry Court (not to be confused with The Court of Gladestry, which is outside the village). This is where the well-known Gladestry Sheepdog Trials began in 1934, when some of the locals met on the yard to discuss its formation. The first few years it was held in a field belonging to Gladestry Court. Originally, this was just some local farmers having a bit of fun. Nowadays, this is a much more serious event and people come from all over the world to compete. The event is now held at The Court of Gladestry. (In 1988, Graham Powell from Foyce Farm was chosen to represent Wales at the BBC "One Man and his Dog Young Handler Competition". He was only 15 at the time and he went on to win the competition with his dog, Jill.)

Our next stop was the small village green near the church. Ann explained that this was the site of two houses in the past and this is where the post office was. (One of our number, David Price, said that he had lived in one of the houses with his parents when he was a baby. Joan Lloyd, also present, said that her parents-in-law had lived in the post office.) Ann went on to say that the post office had been the "hub" of the village and that Mrs Peggy Davies had been postmistress for over sixty years, until she retired in the 1950s. The post office and village shop amalgamated in the 1950s and moved to the shop's site along the main street, opposite the pub. Ann told us that the mail would be delivered from Hereford by post van and that the postman would join the family there for breakfast. Customers would come in for their daily paper and stay for ages talking with others and catching up on village gossip. One character, "Tom the Cross", never said a word when he came into the shop – they were expected to know that he wanted ten Woodbines and a box of matches! Another character would ask, "How much are those sweets up there, 11d a quarter?". The shop sold

everything as it was the main place for shopping for the villagers. Most purchases would be "put in the book" and then a monthly bill would be sent out.

Opposite the green is Church House. This is rumoured to have tunnels in its cellar. Ann pointed out the White Hart in the lane opposite the green. This used to be a pub but is now a private house. The well in the garden used to supply the village with fresh water. Since the meeting, Gaynor Price, née Hughes, has been in contact to let us know that the small building in front of the White Hart was a blacksmith shop. She remembers, when she was a little girl, going past with her father and seeing the bellows inside. There have been three blacksmiths in the village; one was next to Margaret Villa and there was one at The Cross - the house at the top of the pitch before descending into Gladestry from Newchurch. There was a cross roads at this location at one time. Near the green, Margaret Villa, used to be a private school. On the corner to the right of the green is Corner House. This used to be three dwellings and the Bowens from the sawmill lived here. Corner House was apparently a one-time hunting lodge, pub, boot repair shop and drapers and was once much larger than it is today.

From here we walked through the churchyard and along a green path to Gladestry Brook. We had a short but picturesque walk along the brook to a footbridge. Here Ann told us that the Gladestry Brook has many tributaries and eventually joins the Arrow. As it was starting to get a little dark, we stopped here and, before turning back, Ann read us an extract from Tennyson's poem, "The Brook", with its wonderful and repeated line, "For men may come and men may go, but I go on for ever."

We ended the evening in the garden of Ann and Howard's home, Church Barn. Ann had laid out a number of books, old photos, articles, etc for us to look at. Ann and Howard had very generously laid on some delicious refreshments for us to enjoy whilst sitting in their beautiful garden, and this gave people time to chat and catch up after a long period of lockdown.

Our thanks go to Ann, Joan and Shirley for telling us so much about the lovely village and for sharing memories of times past. We had all thoroughly enjoyed looking around part of the village and relish the notion of being able to return another time for the conclusion of the tour. Special thanks go to Ann and Howard for their most generous hospitality which rounded off a perfect evening. A wonderful time had been had by one and all.