

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 27th July 2023

Present: Maureen (Mo) Lloyd, Ros Tarrant, Jill Fieldhouse, Jasmine Grassie, Steve Dawson, Ann & Howard Dean, Jan Boydell, Marilyn & Mervyn Price, Diana Lloyd, Imogen Rogers, Emma Rogers, Mark Lloyd, Elsa Harflett, Pat Howard, Misha Pedersen, Bronwen Jenkins, Helen Barnett, Jane Bisby, David Warren, Evelyn Bally, Gina Goodge, Dawn Richardson, Gareth Jones, Anwen & David Price, Gill & Michael Lloyd, Jane Lloyd, Lynda Aliano, Jennifer Lewis, Jackie Mills, Joan Hughes, Grace Davies, Cherry & Victor Williams, Joan Lloyd, Dorothy Rogers, Pat Davies, Roy Lloyd, Wenda Mullis, Roger Dry, Pauline & Geoff Povey, Mary Rogers. Our three speakers were Ros Tarrant, Jasmine Grassie and Jill Fieldhouse.

Apologies: Wendy & Dainis Ozols, Richard Thomas.

The group assembled outside Colva Farm, originally The Sun Inn. Mo welcomed everyone to Colva and explained that Ros Tarrant, née Hobby, would talk about Colva Farm and a little about the area. We would then all move into the church and Jasmine Grassie would speak about the aeroplane landing in 1912, and then Jill Fieldhouse would talk about Colva church itself.

Ros Tarrant grew up at Colva Farm and so knows the area well. It had been part of the Ormathwaite estate which stretched from Gladestry to Penybont and beyond. Colva is chiefly made up of a scattering of farms and cottages. It is situated on two drovers' routes which either headed for Hereford via Huntington or Leominster via Gladestry and Kington. Pubs were an important stopping off place for the drovers and the Sun Inn provided much needed food and drink, as well as entertainment. Apparently they held cock fights in one of bedrooms. Ros pointed out the semicircular window above the porch, an appropriate reminder of a rising sun. Most villages along the drovers' routes would have had a pub for the drovers, and a blacksmith for shoeing the cattle. It is possible that Bryntegan, which adjoins the farm, could have been a blacksmith. The Sun Inn was occupied for many years by the Phillips family from the 1830s to the 1870s. By the 1880s the Davies family kept the pub and farmed. The Sun Inn closed in the early 1900s.



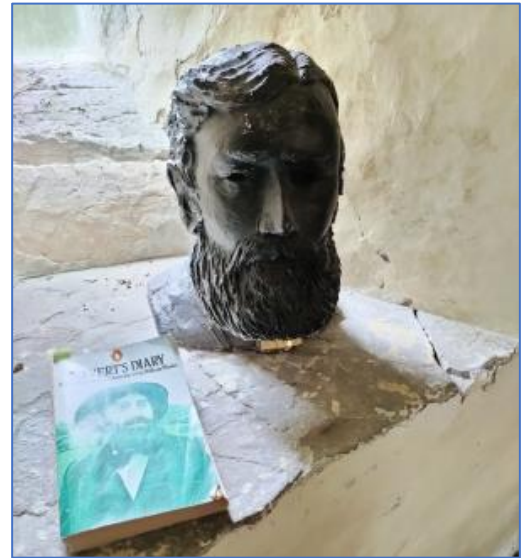
Elizabeth & John
Davies outside
the Sun Inn

The house was extended in 1980 when the west end, which had been a workshop, originally it had been used to store peat for fuel, and granary above, was incorporated into the house. Because of a lack of a male heir, the Ormathwaite estate was sold off on 11th December 1945 by auction at the

Burton Hotel, Kington; it was 4,344 acres. Robert Davies was renting Colva Farm at the time. He purchased the farm, as did a lot of the other tenants. Robert farmed the farm along with his brother Richard, who also ran the Post Office at Gladestry. Richard was known as 'Dick o' Colva'. He founded the Vale of Arrow Choir in 1927 and was its conductor. They won the Welsh National Eisteddfod twice. They often held practices at Colva Farm. Dick o' Colva made a broadcast in 1939, so he was a singer of renown and widely known.

Ros pointed out the field near Pentwyn, where the forced landing of the mono-plane took place in 1912. Another visitor to the area was Rev Francis Kilvert and Ros read out a piece from Kilvert's Diary about his visit to Colva in February 1870. He came through Newchurch and up the valley over the River Arrow to Colva. Kilvert tried the Colva echo which is in the field at the west of the church. He then made his way to the Sun Inn. Kilvert asked the landlady, Mrs Phillips, for the words of an old song. He enjoyed some beer, bread and cheese before moving on over the top and back to Newchurch to visit the blacksmith, Henry Pritchard, by the bridge in the village.

In 1977 the BBC produced a film called 'Two Sermons' which was based on Kilvert's Diary. Many locals acted as extras, dressed in Edwardian costume. Sadly the film was destroyed. A ceramic head of Rev Kilvert, made by a local potter, has been presented to the church.



We then crossed the field and went through the churchyard into the church where we were welcomed by Jill, who apologised for the absence of the vicar, Rev Rachel Storer, who was at another meeting in Radnor.



Jasmine then spoke about the aeroplane landing and the reconstruction of the plane for the centenary celebrations in 2012. She gave an in-depth description of events in 1912, as well as a description of the celebrations in the area in 2012. It was in 1912, George V was on the throne, Asquith was Prime Minister, Scott had just been to the South Pole and the Titanic had gone down a week before, so that news rather overshadowed anything that Corbett Wilson did. Two young men met at Hendon, flying their Bleriot aeroplanes. One of the pilots was Damer Leslie Allen, the other Denys Corbett Wilson. They decided to try to cross the Irish Sea by aeroplane, a feat not achieved before. They had a wager on who would be the first to succeed. The plan was to take off from Hendon, go to Chester, re-fuel, then fly to Holyhead and then across to Dublin. Allen took off and arrived in Chester and stayed the night, but later came down in the Irish Sea and was never seen again. Corbett Wilson took off from Hendon, lost his compass over-board and landed at New Church Farm between Kinnersley and Sarnesfield. He was offered overnight accommodation at Almeley. He then decided to go via Fishquard rather than the original North Wales route. After purchasing fuel and castor oil, but the wrong grade, he took off, but was forced to land due to engine trouble at Pentwyn, Colva. His engineer then had to completely clean out the engine in order for him to resume, so he was forced to stay for three days. When Corbett Wilson took off the local men were asked to hold the plane down while he was revving up; they then let go in order for the plane to take off. Joan Hughes' father was one of the young men. Cherry Williams has her great grand-mother's diary (she lived at nearby Danyfron) and she read from it - "quite a sensation - people from all parts came to see the air-ship". It was a sensation for the area as few people had seen a car let alone an aeroplane. Corbett Wilson then flew on and landed in a hedge at Goodwick, where there is a plaque to commemorate the flight. He then flew across the Irish Sea and crash landed in Enniscorthy in County Wexford. Corbett Wilson sadly was killed in WWI on 10th May 1915. For the centenary they built a full size mock-up of the Bleriot aeroplane. It was made out of willow and string and young ash saplings as it had a 25ft span. People came in Edwardian costume and they had a picnic and a great day out.



The Bleriot aeroplane at Colva in 1912

Jill then spoke about Colva church and its wall paintings, beginning by saying she was not an historian or an architect but loves old churches, especially churches that had not been 'got at' by the Victorians, which Colva has not. She began by saying she had gleaned information from various sources and especially from two boxes of interesting papers that were at the Rectory. The Church of

St David is Grade II* listed. According to CADW, 'Colva retains considerable unspoilt character from medieval and later periods'. There were information boards and other information on the central table.

The church, which is reputedly the highest church in Wales, was built in the 13th Century, but nothing is known of its early origins. It is thought that it was under the care of the Celtic monks at Glascwm, which could be why it is not mentioned in the 13th century tax records, which are in the National Archive (Taxatios – taxes imposed to support the local minister), or in the 16th Century 'Value of the Church' census commissioned by Henry VIII in 1534, when he appointed himself Head of the Church. It is possible there could have been a church here before the current building. The lower walls are thought to be 13th century original. The porch was added in the 15th century and the bellcote in the 18th century. The lepers' slit would have been built into the original church; from 1179 they were to be segregated by order of the Pope. The font is around 1200 and has notches in the top which would have been used to lock a cover over; this was compulsory from 1236. Holy water used for baptisms was often left there for some time; it is said that the lock was to prevent its being stolen by witches and sorcerers.



The Hanoverian Coat of Arms on the West wall is painted in oil on boards and signed Jeremiah Cartwright of Aberedw, 1733. Royal coats of arms were hung in churches from the reign of Henry VIII. The name of the churchwarden, Thomas Davies, was added in 1838. Thomas Davies had at least six children and lived at the Noyadd. James Clee of the Lloyney, who owned a lot of land around here at the time and whose memorial is on the wall, left money in his will for Thomas Davies to educate his children.

The Communion table is 18th century. Both the north and south walls have panelling which is probably the remains of box pews. The altar cloth is very fine and a photo was sent to the V & A in 1986. Their textile department thought it was likely to have been embroidered in around 1875. It seems that the altar frontal actually came from a church in Birmingham which had closed. The bellcote houses two bells but neither are hung because the rafters will not hold them.

The original church would have had plastered walls and in the 14th/15th century these would have had very colourful images as people were generally illiterate. You can see the remnants of these on the north and south walls. St Teilo's church at St Fagans National Museum of Wales shows how these might have looked. After the reformation these were painted over with religious texts. This could have been in the 1700s or earlier. A full survey of the paintings was carried out in 2003 by Paine & Stewart, art historians. They thought the paintings very significant and recommended that they should be cleaned. The paintings were probably painted over in the 1800s and then the walls were painted with snowcem in the 1970s. It was only by accident that they were discovered when, in 1981, Michael Garner noticed a tiny bit of flaking pigment on the wall near the door and he realised there were wall paintings underneath. The snowcem was picked off with scalpels and toothpicks. The wall paintings were uncovered and recorded by the Royal Commission (RCAHMW) and are included in their recent book, "Painted Temples and Rood Screens". The skull and

crossbones is quite unusual in a church and we are not sure how old that would be, but it could be medieval or maybe 18th century.



Jill moved on to talk about the churchyard which was one of her interests. She decided to put together a plan of the churchyard and who was buried there. It is not a very big churchyard so she thought it would not be too big a task, however it turned out to be harder than anticipated as the inscriptions on many of the graves were unreadable. So they went to the parish records in Powys Archives at Llandrindod and thought that would be easy, the records would all be there. The records go back to 1666 and that is because Elizabeth I said that the records of baptisms, marriages and burials had to be written down and put into bound books and sent to the Bishop so they should all be there. You cannot see the original records as they are very precious, but they are available on microfiche. This proved to be more or less impossible as baptisms, marriages and deaths were all mixed up together. However, there was a list of monumental inscriptions compiled by Jean Oldham and John Southwood in 1982. Vera Brown transcribed the parish records, which were printed in a small booklet produced by Powys Family History Society; this must have taken her months. As a result, Jill has been able to put together a chronological list of burials from 1666 to present. There are some 500 souls who have been buried in Colva churchyard since 1666 and, as the church was founded long before then, there must be many more.

Between 2008 and 2010, the north slope of the roof was repaired thanks to Duncan Noble and Vicky Bernays, both of whom are buried in the churchyard. They were instrumental in raising funds for the re-roofing and stabilising the west end with buttresses. For the last two years, the south slope has been leaking and they are working towards obtaining grants and funds to replace the cedar shingles and to put in guttering and drainage. Grants have already been pledged by four organisations and they hope CADW will provide the remaining monies. If so, they hope to start work in October. Jill ended by inviting everyone to look at the boards with information on the church and the aeroplane, as well as writings by Rev Francis Kilvert. People then had an opportunity to look at various books, records and other items of interest, as well as a close up study of the church building.

The group then enjoyed some very fine hospitality, with drinks and refreshments provided by the local Colva community. Donations to help with the roof repairs amounted to £188.50 which was an appropriate outcome after the wonderful, informative and entertaining evening that everyone enjoyed. Many thanks to Ros, Jasmine, Jill and others who helped to make it a lovely visit.