

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 27th February 2025

Present (in Hall): John Price, Maureen Lloyd (ML), Allison Joyce, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Barry Searle, Rob & Helen Duggan, Cherry & Victor Williams, Dawn Richards, Jane Lloyd, Jackie Mills, Joan Hughes, Jenny Francis, Elsa Harflett, Gaynor Price, Robert Davies, Gina Goodge, Richard Harris, Grace Davies, Joan Lloyd, Adela Campbell, Anne-Marie Campbell, Allan & Ruth Griffiths, Paul & Sue Buckingham,

On Zoom: Wendy Ozols, Mike & Val Head, Sue Lawler, Bronwen Jenkins, Diana Lloyd, Helen Barnett, Richard Thomas

Apologies: Dainis Ozols

ML welcomed everyone, both in the Hall and on Zoom. She went on to introduce the speaker for the evening, Allison Joyce.

Beth and Stephen Joyce: An Everyday Story

Allison explained that tonight's presentation was based on her own and others' memories of her grandparents; she is the eldest of their grandchildren and has extremely fond memories of them both. Her research for tonight's talk has been aided by the work some of her cousins (Matt, William and Jess) have done on the family tree and history. Many of the photos included in the talk come from Stephen and Beth's albums, scanned some time ago by cousin Jess. Allison also thanked Grace Davies for letting her use videos and a photo.



Beth and Stephen

Allison started by telling us about her grandfather. Stephen Michael Joyce was born in Whitney, Oxfordshire, in 1916. He was the son of a clergyman and a very "straight-laced" gentlewoman. As a child, Stephen lived near Tenbury Wells and then at Boraston when his father became rector of Boraston and Nash parish. It was here where his love of the countryside was nurtured; he also developed an interest in trains and the railway. After school and college, and given his interest in the railway, he accepted an apprenticeship in the locomotive works in Derby. However, his love of the countryside was so strong that he decided to move into Land Agency work and he went on to work on estates in Dorset, Suffolk, Herefordshire and Devon. Whilst he was in Devon he received his call up papers and he joined the Devon Yeomanry. His unit was at one time camped in Newhaven in Sussex and it was here that he met Beth, a clergyman's daughter, in 1942.

Beth was born in Pudsey, Leeds, in 1923. When she was only six months old, the family moved to British Columbia in Canada where they lived for four years. When they returned to the UK, they lived

firstly in Mosley, Birmingham, and then they moved to Newhaven, where her father had secured a parish. Beth attended Seaford College. When WW2 broke out, her family was living (quite literally) on the front line of the UK's defences and Beth remembered being able to watch wave after wave of German bombers flying over the Channel.

Stephen and Beth met when Stephen (also a vicar's son) was invited to dine at the vicarage in Newhaven. Beth was only 16 at the time and was enrolled on a secretarial course which helped her to secure a job with the BBC in London. Her unit was evacuated to the BBC's outpost in Evesham, but she and Stephen stayed in touch and eventually they married a week after her 19th birthday in 1942.

Because of his qualifications, Stephen was invited to join the Royal Signals Regiment and towards the end of the war he was stationed in Germany, where he was billeted on a farm. It was here that he learned to speak German well enough to "get by".

Stephen had a friend called Frank Beddoes, who was a farmer's son from near Shrewsbury. When Stephen was demobbed, Frank's father offered him a job at Eyton-on-Severn, and so he became a farm worker. From here, he moved to the Agricultural Institute, near Newtown, to study agriculture. With much help from his family, he and Beth were able to acquire Little Penlan, and they moved to Apostles Lane, Brilley, in 1948. Stephen made the farm into a mixed farm, like the ones he had experienced when he lived near Tenbury Wells. He and Beth kept beef cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry (for both eggs and capons at Christmas) and they grew corn, silage, potatoes, fodder beet and mangolds. They also had orchards, fields of clover, blackcurrants and bees. As well as a beautiful garden, they also had a tennis court.

At this point, Allison read an extract from a poem, "A Border Lane", written by Stephen, that was about the farm. (Stephen was a talented poet.)

And now along the lane are left four farms,
Penlan, Penllan, Apostles and The Cross.
We farmed Penlan, and reared our young
And calves and lambs and crops:
We used and loved this quiet lane
On which still pass the ghosts of Border
history.

Stephen was a pioneer in farming and Allison showed us an extract from a short film made at Penlan by the Ministry of Agriculture. This focused on beef farming, specifically store cattle rearing. The calves on the farm were mainly Hereford x Shorthorn as these were considered the best for store cattle. Penlan had eight nurse cows and these would suckle about three calves at a time for around 18 weeks. The calves were then weaned and a further one or two calves would be put on the nurse cows. After weaning, the calves would be fed silage and hay and then later home grown concentrate, four parts oats to one part beans. The film described what was grown on the farm, mainly fodder crops for the cattle and pasture, both temporary and permanent. Stephen was particularly proud of his work with seed production and he was the first farmer in the area to make silage.

Allison showed us some extracts from "Brilley Voices" (2010) where people had shared their memories of Stephen and his farm. He had a corn grinder and local farmers would take their corn to

Penlan to be ground. Because there was no electricity in Brilley until 1961, the farm also had its own generator.

Stephen and Beth had five children: David born in 1943; Ricky born in 1944; Peter born in 1948; Steph born in 1949; and, Shan born in 1958. Even though she had no experience of agriculture, Beth became a real role model as a farmer's wife and also as a mother. She and Stephen not only created a pioneering farm at Penlan, they also provided a spiritual home and rural haven for their wider family and their employees and students. Beth would help by driving the tractor, and she also took urns of cocoa and tea to the potato pickers at harvest time. She would turn the clover hay by hand with a pikel and help to deliver loads of blackcurrant bushes to East Anglia, as well as feeding large numbers of harvest workers actually in the fields. Furthermore, her domestic routine was unrelenting with specific jobs allocated to each day of the week. On top of all of this, she worked part-time as a secretary at Lady Hawkin's School in Kington.

Beth and Stephen also enjoyed a rich social life with hunt balls, dinners and numerous committee meetings. She was a member of the WI and would hold cookery demonstrations in her kitchen.

Allison showed us some photos of work being done on the farm. There was potato planting, using a mooter (an implement for making furrows), potato harvesting, piling wheat into ricks, binding wheat (tying it into stems), clover hulling (clover was tricky to harvest), threshing, etc.

When they had some leisure time, the family would take their Bedford van (and later a caravan) and go away for a few days, often to somewhere reasonably local, for example Aberedw. For Stephen, there were also trips abroad with Kington YFC in order to learn more about farming, for example to Germany and Denmark.

In 1965, Stephen took on the tenancy of Cwmmau, a farm adjacent to Penlan. Cwmmau had been bequeathed to the National Trust by George Menges. Cwmmau was built in 1602 by Philip Holman of Northamptonshire as a hunting lodge (for wild boar). In 1934, it was bought by George Menges, a Lloyds underwriter. He and his wife, Ianthe Jerrold, restored the house to its former glory. Many of the wall decorations done by Ianthe's sister, Phyllis Jerrold, are still in evidence in the house today. When George bequeathed the house to the NT, he stated that his wife should be allowed to live there until her death, and so that is why Stephen and Beth did not move into the house until 1971.

Beth decided to open the house to visitors on bank holiday weekends in order to share its interesting history and contents. She also recorded a tour of the house onto cassettes to be sent to care homes or to enable blind people to enjoy the house's story.

At the same time, Stephen was continuing with his pioneering work and he planted blackcurrant bushes for "pick your own". The plants grew so well that he was encouraged to buy even more plants for sale. This was the start of his work as a soft fruit production specialist. He even tried growing strawberry plants in Brilley. Although they grew well, they were very difficult to harvest in such wet conditions.

Stephen's and Beth's involvement in the local community continued. Stephen was on the parish council, he was a school governor and he was a church warden. When local government was being reorganised in the early 1970s, Stephen was one of many who tried to get Brilley incorporated into Radnorshire, and he helped to organise a referendum on this subject. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful.

Cwmmau was used as a film set for the TV adaptation of "The Diary of a Farmer's Wife, 1796-1797" and the family even appeared in the production, which was shown on Christmas Day in 1978. (More

recently, Cwmmau was used during the filming of “Hamnet”, based on Maggie O’Farrell’s novel, which is yet to be released.)

Sadly, whilst they were living at Cwmmau, Beth began to suffer from rheumatoid arthritis and this severely limited her movement. It was becoming harder to keep up the work at Cwmmau and Allison’s family started to help out more. Stephen decided to sell Penlan to the National Trust and he started house hunting. His main requirement for a home was that it should be seven gates from a main road, and he found what he was looking for in The Grug which they bought in 1978. David went into partnership with his father and sold his optician’s practice in Kington. David moved into Cwmmau and Beth spent the winters in a bungalow in Rhosgoch that had been bought by Allison’s father and Stephen. Summers were spent at The Grug. Stephen grew strawberries, quite a remarkable achievement at 1200ft in the Radnorshire Hills. The plants did well and he concentrated on “pick your own”. He still concentrated on his beef and sheep, and the beef enterprise became even more important with the Welsh Black x Hereford cattle that he was rearing. However, the development of soft fruit propagation became bigger and bigger. During the spring, strawberries grown at The Grug were brought to Cwmmau for sorting. A shed was built at The Grug so that all of the work could be done in one place. Allison’s father, David, took on the tenancy of Cwmmau and her parents converted a barn into a bedroom and took in people on a B&B basis. They also wrote a guide book to the house and extended the opening hours.

Beth and Stephen slowly “retired” and their youngest daughter, Shan, and her husband, Nigel Fromant, took over at The Grug and created Welsh Fruit Stocks. Stephen and Beth enjoyed delivering the plants and cuttings all over the UK, and Beth organised the beef side of the business.



Stephen had always loved poetry and choral music. He wrote many poems and his poem “The Radnor Shepherd” is on his gravestone. His greatest joy was being crowned with the Bardic Chair at Painscastle Eisteddfod twice. He and Beth attended the Llangollen International Eisteddfod every

year for more than 50 years! He was also a great rugby fan and when attending matches at Cardiff Arms Park became too difficult for Beth they would park at the top of the nearby multi-storey car park and listen to the commentary on the radio and hear the roar of the crowds from outside the car.

In 1997, Stephen had both his hips replaced and when he came home from hospital he found that he had grown by two inches! After this, he found great pleasure in walking parts of the Offa's Dyke and Glyndwr Way.

Allison finished this fascinating and illuminating talk about her grandparents by showing a short video compilation of the two of them at The Grug.

ML thanked Allison for a wonderful talk, so brilliantly illustrated. There is no doubt that many in the audience would have wonderful memories of her grandparents and would also recognise the rural way of life that Allison had described. The Joyces were obviously a remarkable couple whose contributions to the local and wider farming communities were many and varied. Allison's talk provided us with a wonderful insight into rural life in the second half of the 20th century.

At the end, refreshments were served as usual. This gave those in the hall an opportunity to see the book of poetry written by Stephen, as well as other items that Allison had brought along with her. Many thanks to the ladies who served the refreshments, and also to John Price who, as ever, made it possible for those unable to get to the hall to enjoy this fascinating talk on Zoom.