

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 25th March 2021

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy & Dainis Ozols, John & Margaret Price, Cherry & Victor Williams, Sylvia Bigglestone, John & Sue Ievers, Jenny Francis, Eva Morgan, Olive Scurr, Jenny Smith, Cilla Morgan, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Marilyn Price, Helen Barnett, Gareth Jones, Grace Davies, Elizabeth Newman, Ann Tong, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Ruth Jones, Peter & Margaret Joyce, Diana Lloyd, Sylvia Illingsworth, Elizabeth Powell, Carol Milward, Richard Thomas, Caz Phillips.

Apologies: Margaret Evans, Ann & Howard Dean

ML welcomed everyone to the meeting and said a special thank you to Cherry Williams for kindly agreeing to give the evening's talk on **The History of Llandeilo Graban School, 1877 to 1954**.

In her introduction, Cherry thanked John Price for his help in showing her slides.

Cherry started her talk with a map to show the location of Llandeilo Graban (LG) School; the grid reference is SO 103443. It is now a private house. She then went on to tell us a little of the background history to the education of primary age children in the 19th century. Even though National Schools had existed in England and Wales since 1811, Llandeilo Graban had been devoid of any form of education for its children until the opening of the school on February 2nd, 1877. In the logbook of Aberedw School, which had opened in 1871, it is recorded that: "The opening of the new school at Llandeilo has reduced numbers here - the children from Erwood having had to walk over three miles to our school; it is more convenient for them to have a school so near them." Cherry said that she could not understand why children from Erwood were having to walk to Aberedw School when one had been open in close by Crickadarn in around 1875.

At the time when LG School opened, parents had to pay "school pence" for each child on a Monday morning. In 1880, the Education Act made school attendance compulsory for all children aged between five and ten years of age. From 1891 legislation resulted in education being free. Compulsory attendance age was increased gradually over the years. LG School remained a National School until the Butler Act of 1944, when it was absorbed into the State School system. By then, the school leaving age was 15, increasing to 16 in 1972.

Cherry's interest in the school arises from the fact that three generations of her family were teachers there. In her research for the talk, she has examined two of the school's log books, covering the time from 1893 to 1954 (the school's closure), as well as the Admission Book, which lists every child enrolled in the school between 1877 and 1954. The log books were a legal requirement in every Elementary School; they include entries made by the Head Teacher (or under their supervision) of what happened on a daily basis. The first entry in the Log Book in 1893 was the Diocesan Report Inspection – "School Examined March 11th 1893" - which reads as follows: "The work of the school has been seriously disrupted during the year owing to the change of teachers after the departure of the Master who had been here for many years. The school had been closed for five weeks in the Autumn. The present staff have only been in charge for a fortnight and during that time have done very good work and the school passed the whole examination."

The staff mentioned in this report were Cherry's Great Grandparents, James and Mary Ann Nunn, both certified teachers. Cherry showed us a wonderful photo of them. James was from Ashdon, near Saffron Walden in Essex, and Mary Ann was from Toddington in Gloucestershire. They had met when Mary Ann was teaching in Essex and, before coming to LG School, they had taught in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. Between 1875 and 1888, they had seven children but, with help from a

housekeeper, a maid and a nanny, Mary Ann was able to carry on teaching throughout. When the Nunns took over at LG School in 1893, there were 49 children on the school roll.



James and Mary Ann Nunn

The Log Books which Cherry has used for her talk are now kept in the County Archives. They include comments about attendance, HM inspections, activities, health, the weather, visitors and staff changes, amongst other things.

Attendance was all important as the school grant set out in the “Annual Code of Regulation” was dependent on the twice daily registration. Therefore, it is not surprising that a very prominent figure mentioned in the log books is the Attendance Officer. He was a Mr Williams who, in 1896, gave his address as Middlewood House, Clifford. Lists of children with irregular attendance would be sent to him and he would also call at the school to check the records. He was a powerful figure and would deliver final notices to irregular attendees. Cherry’s mother (the late Rosie Lloyd) told her that a few families in the parish were very poor indeed, probably caused by illness of parents or the large numbers of children to be fed and clothed. Llandeilo Graban Parish was a bit luckier than some of the neighbouring parishes in that a wealthy farmer had left his farm (Diana Lloyd said that this was Garth Farm) to the poor people and each year the rent paid by the new tenant was shared out between them by the Squire of the Parish. This sum would not have been a lot but would have helped a little. Headmaster James Nunn would do all he could to help these families in an attempt to maintain good attendance in the school as the school budget depended on this. He would visit families himself to discover the reasons for absence and try to avoid exclusion. He knew and understood that, in a farming

community, many children had to work outside school hours, their parents not being able to afford hired help. Cherry read us some of the entries from the log book to show examples of this, for example: "Nov 1893 - opened afternoon school earlier i.e. 1pm, in order to close a bit earlier so children could help their mothers without losing their mark." Many of the entries in the log book refer to activities which relate to the farming calendar. As an incentive for good attendance rewards, such as prizes, were awarded by local dignitaries.

There were regular inspections of the school, with standards of teaching and learning commented on, as well as equipment and supplies. Illness was quite frequently mentioned in the log books, especially infectious diseases such as mumps and measles. In December 1893, scarlet fever and influenza saw pupil numbers down to just 9. In April 1900, the school had notice from the Sanitary Authority to close for three weeks because of whooping cough. From the late 1920s, dental and medical examinations were carried out annually and the District Nurse would have been a regular visitor as nits were often a problem.

James Nunn remained at the school as Headmaster until his retirement (at 65 years of age) in 1909; Mary Ann took over from him as Head, with her daughter, Catherine, as Assistant Mistress. (Catherine Nunn was Cherry's Grandmother.) During their time at the school, both James and Mary Ann received very favourable comments from the Inspectorate.



Llandeilo Graban schoolchildren with Catherine Nunn pre-1909

The subjects taught at the school were very much as you would expect from the late 1800s/early 1900s. These included: reading, writing, arithmetic and mental arithmetic (the 3 Rs); handwriting; spelling and dictation; English history; freehand drawing; ruler and scale drawing; knitting and needlework; and, religious knowledge, which was all-important as this was a Church school.

Cherry said that it appeared that the Head had a good deal of discretion about when to open or close the school, who to employ on a temporary basis and what activities could be provided. She gave us some examples: "1893 - invited to tea and sports at Painscastle; 17th May 1894 - May Fair at Hay and so 21st May holiday given as the greater number of children go anyway; 1st August 1894 - Holiday, Musical Festival at Builth."

Cherry said that James seemed to draw on his own family when there was a staffing need. There were mentions of daughter Catherine frequently filling in and, on one occasion, another daughter, Margaret, did likewise. (Margaret/Maggie was an assistant teacher at Crickadarn.) Whether this was allowed remains uncertain as an entry in 1903 stated, "C.A. Nunn does not appear to be engaged under a written agreement - ref Article 71 of the Provisional Code 1903" and, on October 1st 1903, an entry in the log book revealed that Catherine Nunn had "been removed from the staff under Article 50 as not being required by the County Council". However, by November 24th, and for whatever reason, she was back teaching alongside her mother, Mary Ann.

Cherry has always known that Catherine had learned to teach via correspondence course and that she had spent some time teaching in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire whilst learning. In the Log Book it says that, in June 1910, Catherine applied to the Education Committee to sit for the Certificate of Education examinations in November and December. She then continued teaching with her mother until they resigned together on March 2nd, 1912. The reasons given in the log book were as follows: "Mary Ann Nunn - certificate expired" and "Mrs Gwillim - to go to her home". Cherry was surprised to find that Catherine was still in the school in 1912, as it was always said that she had had to finish teaching when she had married. However, Cherry now knows that Catherine Nunn had continued to teach after becoming Mrs Gwillim, and after her first child was born (at School House) in August 1911.

After Mary Ann and Catherine resigned, there were many staff changes. These were: from March to May 1912 - John H Rimmer, County Supply Teacher; from May to July 1912 - Sarah Chetwynd took temporary charge with a niece, Gladys Annie Chetwynd, as Supplementary Teacher; and, from July 8th 1912 - brother of Sarah Chetwynd, Edward J Chetwynd (1858-1953), took charge. (He also frequently took charge of Boughrood School; however, Inspectors' reports for him and his supplementary teacher were not always favourable, with comments about poor organisation and reliance on a very restricted and non-local History curriculum, amongst others.) Mr Chetwynd retired in 1922 after 10 years in the school. Between October 2nd and November 3rd, 1922, Gordon Taft, County Supply Teacher, took over at the school, with Dorothy Jarman as Supplementary Teacher. Then, between November 1922 and January 31st, 1933, W.B. Morgan was the Head Teacher; with him, from October 1923, was Miss A.M. Meredith. Then, from January 16th, 1933 to 1950, Mr R Dakin was the Head Teacher and Miss Doris Hughes was his Assistant Teacher, until July 1st, 1938. This is when Miss Florence Gwillim commenced duties as Uncertified Assistant Teacher. (Florence was granddaughter of James and Mary Ann Nunn and daughter of Catherine Gwillim, née Nunn; she was Cherry's mother's sister.) Florence had previously taught in Aberedw, Crickadarn, Talgarth and, for seven years, in Llyswen. She later resigned on February 29th, 1940 and was replaced by a Miss M Eddington, Uncertified Assistant Teacher.

Cherry then went on to tell us about her mother's attendance at the school. Katie Rosa (née Gwillim) Lloyd, then living at Penrhiw, attended the school between 1930 and 1937 (number 618 in the Admission Book). In the early/mid 1980s, Cherry's eldest daughter, Alison, was in the Middle Class of

Clyro School when the class undertook a project on "Life in the 1930s". Cherry's mother shared the following recollections with her granddaughter for this project (with Mr Dakin as Head for much of the time):

"School hours 9am – 4pm. The school had a coal fire with a big iron guard. The children took their own lunch, mainly sandwiches of homemade bread, butter and jam, carried in paper bags. In cold weather the teacher would make hot cocoa, if the children brought their own cocoa, sugar and milk. Water had to be carried from the well half a mile away from the school. Toilets were just a bucket under a wooden seat which was emptied each day. Water for hand washing was collected in a large tank with a tap at the bottom. The children washed their hands in small bowls in a washing shed made of zinc. The school cleaner was a very old lady who had once been the parish midwife. She walked to school with her pet ewe, called Daisy, and two lambs. She lit the fire, swept the floor and dusted the desks with a goose wing. She always wore a long black skirt, to her ankles, and an apron from waist to ankles. Boys wore long shorts, jackets and little poked caps. Girls generally had long hair and wore pinafores with petticoats made out of the best bits of the flannel shirts worn by their fathers. Both boys and girls wore boots. Children walked to school, getting together in little gangs, some walking many miles, and they knew every apple, plum and walnut tree along the way. Swede fields also provided a tasty snack and no one seemed to mind. On wet days the teacher would dry the children's clothes. At play time the girls would be skipping and chanting rhymes such as, "blue bells, cockle shells, easy ivy over," "teddy bear, teddy bear turn around," "salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper." Boys played horses, with one driving and two or three with string on their arms, sometimes capering around wildly. Some would sit astride a stick for a pretend horse and others would use a stick as motorbike handlebars, charging around making an awful noise. Another favourite boy's game was fox and hounds. Games for both boys and girls were, "What's the time Mr Wolf," "Please piggy can I cross the water" and "Nuts in May." School leaving age was 14 years. Very few children even tried the exam needed for the Grammar School. Most stayed on until 14 and left to work in the neighbourhood, many staying at home to work. The 3Rs were the most important subjects with history, geography, singing and needlework for girls. A visiting nurse would sometimes call because nits were very common. Sometimes a lady would call to give talks on the dreaded disease TB, telling children to sleep with windows open and boil all cows' milk. A teetotal lady would occasionally call to warn all children about alcohol. The Vicar and the Parish Squire would also interrupt lessons." Cherry showed us a lovely photo of the children at the school dating from this period, and she could tell us the name of every child. This was a fascinating insight into education in a rural primary school in the 1930s.

Cherry made one last mention of her family members. In 1949, Mr C.S. Nunn (son of James and Mary Ann Nunn) came to school to supervise the Entrance Examination, for two candidates, to Llandrindod Wells Grammar School. For many years, he was Headmaster at Boughrood School and in retirement he held evening classes at Gwernyfed School where he taught shorthand and typing.

Cherry went on to show us some photos which she had been sent by Diana Lloyd of The Skreen, whose husband attended the school in the 1940s. Margaret Evans (née Robinson) (later a teacher at Rhosgoch School) has also shared some memories with Cherry. Margaret started at the school in 1942 and was taught by Miss Eddington and Mr Dakin. Her memories are as follow:

"Everyone walked to school. In the beginning, slates and chalk were still being used, paper being in very short supply. Desks were joined together in pairs. The school was one big room with a partition which could be used to divide the space into two classrooms as and when needed. The "Turtle" cast iron stove with surrounding guard. Very large, old roll up maps which fascinated Margaret and led to her continued love of geography. Mr Dakin filling a large blackboard with sums and leaving them to

get on with it! Having extra tuition (with Cherry's great uncle Christopher Nunn) for a year before sitting the 11+ as so much of what was needed just wasn't being taught."

Further recollections were given to Cherry by Edwina Griffiths (née Robinson):

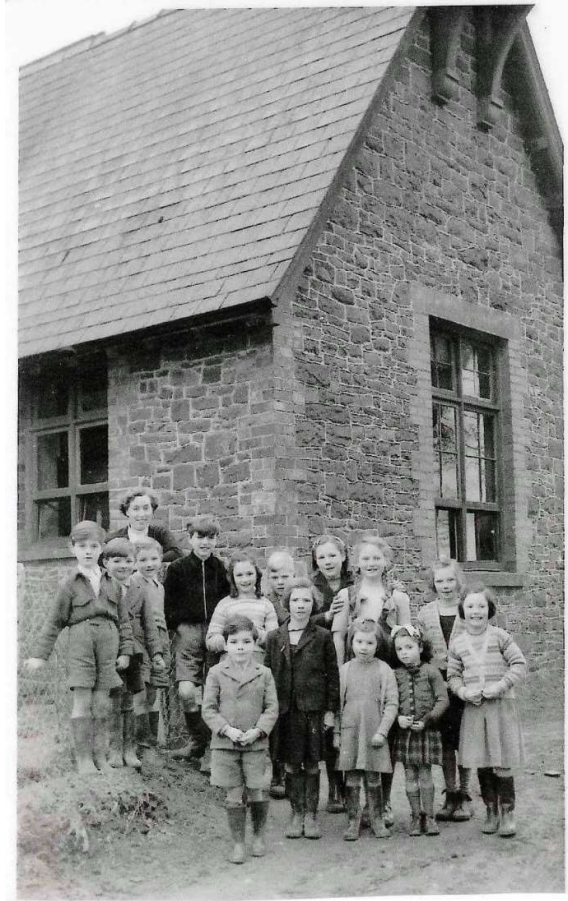
"The teachers were Mr Dakin and Miss Eddington. Edwina's brother, John, was in the same year as her as they are only 10 months apart so they were often mistaken for twins. Miss Eddington lodged at Great House where the parlour became her bedsit. At this time, she was unqualified but later she did become a Certified Teacher. She became Mrs Bevan and went on to teach at Llowes School in Cherry's husband, Victor's time there. Edwina and John went home for lunch each day as Penrhiw was literally just down the field but they would run back, jumping the stile, as Mrs Price, The Garth, who was both cleaner and cook would give 6d to any of the girls if they helped wash and dry up. Getting warm around the stove and memories of wet clothes drying on the fire guards. Digging around outside in the ashes from the stove to find treasure such as bits of a pencil and getting filthy dirty. Pugh's, the Tyisaf, bringing the milk and local farms supplying potatoes and other vegetables."

Edwina's sister, Jenny Smith (née Robinson), who was at the school from 1950 until its closure in 1954, shared the following memories with Cherry:

"The teacher was Miss V A Thompson, who was "lovely." Jenny started at the school at 3 years of age because she used to keep disappearing from home and just turning up. Rather than keep on taking her back home all the time, the school decided that she could stay. Jenny thought that although Mr Dakin had retired in 1950 he was still living in the School House. Like her sister before her, Jenny always went home for dinner. The outside toilets! Many a tale to be told, mostly about naughty boys and pranks with nettles! Children helping to pump water from the well. The well is still there and Jenny says it is in the actual garden. Having to run from school to The Garth gun and back for P.E. The school bell is still there today."

By May 1951, Llandeilo Graban School was a one teacher school with just 20 children on roll and, a few years later, on April 13th, 1954, the school was closed, by which time there were even fewer children. The following day was given as an occasional holiday, after which all of the children were transferred to the new school in Rhosgoch. This saw the end of duties for the then Head Teacher, Miss V.A Thompson. The school belonged to the Church and, after closure, the adjoining school house was let to tenants and the school hall was used for local events, such as meetings, whist drives, parties, dances, etc. By 1991, the upkeep got too expensive for the Church and so the two premises were auctioned in Swansea by the Church in Wales on September 3rd, 1991 and sold to the present owners. St Teilo's Church in Llandeilo Graban received a donation from the proceeds of the sale which helped in providing a meeting room and kitchen at the back of the Church.

Llandeilo Graban School was one of three schools closed in 1954, the others being Painscastle and Cwmgwillim, Newchurch. A new school had been built at Rhosgoch and the official opening took place on Friday May 14th, 1954. Cherry told us that she was chosen to sing a song and present the bouquet to Mrs Gibson Watt to mark the occasion. She went on to say that both she and Jenny Smith agreed that the most amazing things about moving to a new school were the miniature flushing toilets and electricity. They were small pleasures for little people. But a more lethal memory was the iron framed windows that opened outwards and caused many injuries to small heads when they were left open and the children ran into them!



Llandeilo Graban School at its closure in 1954

Cherry's talk had been illustrated with some wonderful old photos of classes at LG School, as well as later ones of Painscastle and Newchurch Schools, and people listening to her talk had great fun remembering some of the names as Cherry took us through her lists. She ended by thanking Margaret Evans, Diana Lloyd, Edwina Griffiths and Jenny Smith for sharing their photos and experiences with her. She also paid tribute to her relatives, James and Mary Ann Nunn, Catherine Nunn/Gwillim, Margaret Nunn, Florence Gwillim and Christopher S. Nunn, and their involvement as teachers at the school. It was also the school attended by Cherry's mother and her five siblings, who between them were there between the years 1916 and 1937. Further thanks were expressed to Cherry's many good friends of Newchurch/Colva for searching for a final photo of Cwmgwillim School, with special thanks to the Probert brothers of Cwmgwilym Farm and to Margaret and Peter Joyce for coming up trumps with two different photographs. Rosemary Grigg has also found another one. Finally, Cherry thanked Eric Jones, Lloyney, for thinking of names and reminding her of old stories about the early days in "The Custard School", (Rhosgoch School). Apparently, they had custard with everything!

Special thanks must go to Cherry for this most fascinating and interesting talk which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. The amount of research that had gone into its preparation was amazing and those in the audience who were local (and of a certain age) thoroughly enjoyed looking at the photos of themselves and their friends, as well as hearing the reminiscences of former pupils. This was an excellent evening's entertainment.