

Notes from Local Interest Group 25th April 2019

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Avryl and Roy Lloyd, Lisa Lloyd, Wendy and Dainis Ozols, John and Margaret Price, Cherry and Victor Williams, Mervyn and Dorothy Price, Neville Harley, Iris Lloyd, Richard Martin, Judith Coles, Elaine Curtis, Joan Lloyd, Lorraine and Martin Wibberley, Sue Farmer, Edwina Griffiths, Jenny Weatherburn, Caroline Hafner, John and Juliet Lewis, Helen Barnett, Peter and Pauline Spode, Sylvia Illingsworth, Erica and Michael Cunningham, Heather and Colin Pink, Dave Turner, Wendy Cadwallender, Glen Morris, Roger Capps, Penny Williams, Grace Davies, John and Lesley Cooper, Chris and Jeremy Rose, Catherine Hughes, Tom Hatherill, Haydn Jones, Carole Gibbs, Evelyn Bally, Tim Francis, Geoff and Mollie Moore, Richard Harris, Richard Thomas and our guests, Bruce Smith and Chris McCann.

Apologies: Emma Beynon, Howard & Ann Dean, Jenny Francis.

ML welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that it was wonderful to see so many present. She started with two reminders:

WI Open Meeting on Tuesday 7th May at 7.30 pm – The Cavalry of Heroes. Entry £2, to include refreshments, and everyone welcome at what should be a most interesting talk. This will take place in Painscastle Village Hall.

May's LIG Meeting will be on **Thursday 9th May** and will be a visit to the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust's reserve, Cwm Byddog, above Clyro, led by Stephen and Judy Mullard. Meet at the Village Hall at 7pm. We will need to car share as parking will be extremely limited.

ML went on to introduce the speaker for the evening, Bruce Smith. His talk would be about the drovers and was entitled **The Welsh Cattle and Sheep Trade into England**.

Bruce started by telling us that there is very little written down about the droving trade and so much of what is known is based on conjecture. However, in the course of his research, he has talked to many farmers and found them to be helpful with both facts and anecdotes, many of which he included in his talk.

Bruce continued by saying that the droving trade was both ancient and huge. Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) mentioned the droving of geese from Belgium to Rome in his writings, evidence of just how old a trade it was. The geese were probably moved for their quills rather than their meat. In order to illustrate the scale of the trade, Bruce told us that, in 1800, 200 000 cattle, 1.25 million sheep and 150 000 donkeys went through Smithfield market in London. It was also an extremely important enterprise. Before the advent of nitrate fertilisers, cattle manure was a valuable source of nutrients for the soil and so innkeepers were very happy to have the drovers visiting their establishments along their routes. Not only did they get the fertiliser, they also charged the drovers rent for keeping the animals in their fields over night and so this was even more profitable. However, droving was an extremely smelly job and so the drovers themselves were best avoided!

Bruce explained that he had divided his talk into sections, starting by answering a number of questions: Why? What? Where? When? Who? How? He would then go on to talk about the routes the drovers used, and how they could be recognised "in the field", with special reference to routes in our local area. Finally, he would look at the influence of the Welsh drovers at the English end of their journeys.

Why?

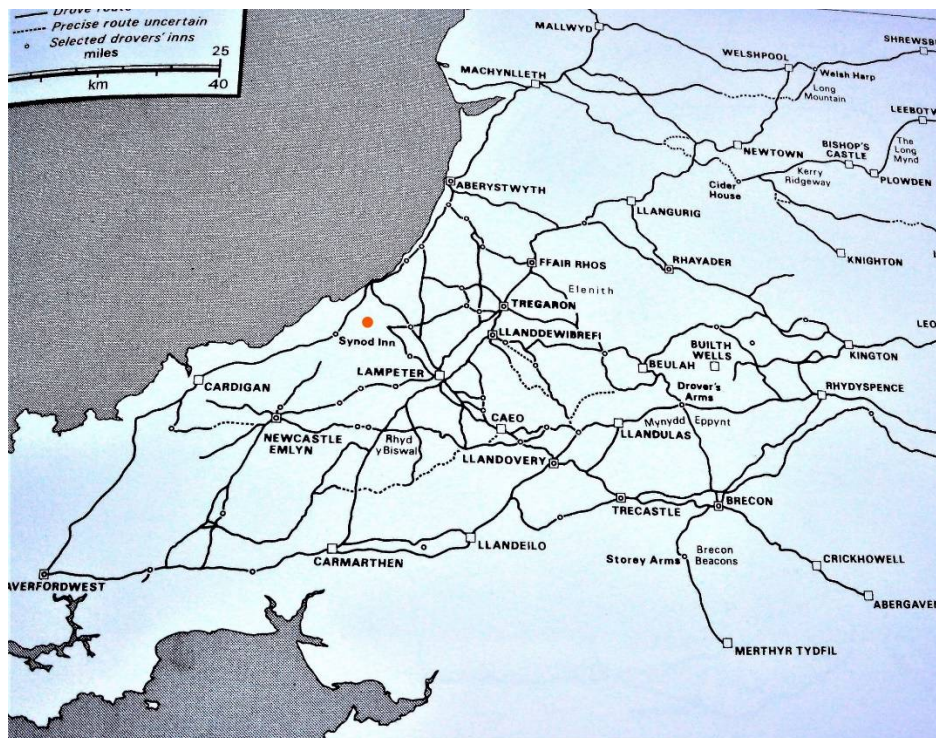
Welsh hillside pasture was often too “thin” for anything more than raising the stock, whereas the pastures in England were good for “finishing”, ie fattening the beasts up. So, the main markets were in England and the English were the main customers.

What?

The main type of cattle moved by the drovers were the Welsh Black. These were important because they were good “milch” or dairy cows; milk and cheese were very important sources of protein to poorer people in the past. They can live on poor quality grass, and this was found all over Wales. They are strong beasts and could be used to plough the uplands in Wales. Finally, they were “tractable beasts”, easy to control. The breed is still found all over the world. Obviously, it was not just cattle that were taken to the English markets, sheep and geese were also driven.

Where?

The map below shows some of the main droving routes within Wales. The network of drovers’ roads was pretty dense. The map also shows that some places became major starting-points for the droves, such as Tregaron.



The dense network continued into England where other towns, such as Buckingham and Northampton, became important nodal points.

When?

Pre 1600, the stock was sold to wealthy people who could afford to eat meat, such as the King and his armies, rich noblemen and abbeys. Between about 1600 and 1840, the SE of England became a wealthier region; demand for meat increased and London became the main centre for the droving routes. The city was surrounded by animal fairs. However, there was also a large demand from the navy (to keep the sailors well fed) and so Portsmouth and Southampton also became very important markets.

Then came the railways and these had a significant impact on droving. This impact was not as rapid as you might imagine. The cost of the rail transport had to be paid up front and not many drovers had the resources to do this. Also, the animals were not given water and food as often as they would get both if they were driven and so they did not always arrive in better condition. However, the cost of a cattle truck with 38 beasts from Aberystwyth to Rugby in 1860 cost 6s/head by rail, but over 7s 6d/head by foot, so change was inevitable. Between 1840 and 1920, more and more of the stock were being moved by rail truck and so droving was becoming less and less common. By the 1920s, lorries took over and road transport is still the most important means by which stock is moved today.

In terms of seasons, in spring and early summer the cattle were moved to pastures in the Midlands. In autumn, they were taken to London and the Home Counties and, in November, they were moved to East Anglia to be fed on the root crops grown there. In the case of sheep, the wethers were moved in June and July and the ewes were driven later, up until September. No "meat" went straight from the drove to the table; there were three months of fattening to be done on the Essex marshes, etc., before re-sale.

Who?

Bruce showed us a photo of a young boy drover. He told us that the poor lads in the country would often view droving as a means of improving their lives. They would often start working with an older relative or friend of the family and, in this way, they would slowly learn the routes and "move up the ladder". Another photograph showed two adult drovers, both of whom carried a gun. This was common practice; the drovers needed to protect their stock and themselves from thieves along the way. Droving was hard work and it was also seasonal. Each drover might complete three droves per year and this would earn them enough to live a reasonably satisfactory life.

How?

In order to help control the stock, the drovers used dogs. The dog of choice was the Welsh Corgi. (Haydn Jones, in the audience, told us that corgi means dwarf dog – cor coming from the Welsh word *corrach* for dwarf and gi from *ci*, the Welsh for dog.) The corgis would snap at the heels of the cattle to keep them going at a steady pace.

The lead drover was called the *porthmon*, who was either the dealer himself or employed by the dealer. The main dealer had agents who were sent around the farms to choose the animals to be taken to market. These were acquired on credit – the farmer had to trust the dealer and his drovers to return from market with the agreed price, in cash. The farmer would bring his stock to a central point where all of the animals were collected, prior to the three-week trek to market. However, it would often take up to two months for the drovers to return with the farmers' cash. It should also be noted that some animals would die or "disappear" along the way and so the sellers did not always get the amount that they were expecting.

There was the added problem of keeping money safe from thieves on the journey, both to and from market. This was resolved when a man called David Jones set up the Bank of the Black Ox, in 1799, using a system of trust. He asked two people that he trusted completely to be his first customers. Then he asked them to each pick two more they trusted, and so on. All of the clients were to be stockmen and only they were allowed to handle the Black Ox banknotes. Because the banknotes belonged only to the Black Ox Bank, they were completely worthless to thieves. This meant that money could be lent to clients and beasts bought more cheaply. It also meant that the farmers had a guarantee of payment. Eventually, there were three Black Ox Banks – Llandovery, Llandeilo and

Lampeter. David Jones and his family became very rich as a result and acquired a very fancy family crest (which included a black ox covered with gold coins). The bank continued to trade until 1909 when it was bought by Lloyds Bank.

It was a difficult job getting the animals to market. Whilst they were still in Wales and walking on relatively soft ground, their hooves would have been protected from too much damage. However, the roads in England were metalled and so it was necessary to shoe the stock. Because cattle have cloven hooves, two shoes were necessary. Cattle do not stand quietly like most horses whilst a blacksmith fits a shoe and so the animals had to be "wrestled to the ground". The feet had to be tied together and one of the drovers had to sit on the beast's neck in order to stop it from getting up. The blacksmith had to be very careful and accurate because (unlike a horse) the hoof is nearly all quick. It took four men to shoe each beast; no wonder it cost 10d per animal. One would be holding the animal down, one holding a frame to steady everything for the smith, another twisting a tourniquet to hold the hooves absolutely tight and finally the blacksmith putting on the shoe. The shoes themselves (*ciws*) were sickle-shaped and were very thin and so wore out easily; they were designed to last for only one journey. This means that they are rare, but Bruce was given one which he passed around for us all to see. The front of the shoe sometimes had a small "grip" which helped it to stay on as the cattle were taken over rough ground. It was a fairly rough job; protruding nails were not filed down but hammered flat. Nearly all of the drovers' inns would have a blacksmith shop, or one very close by.

Recognising the Routes

Even today, it is possible to recognise the routes used by the drovers. The drovers' inns had very big yards and land beside where the cattle would have been kept, under the watchful of eye of the younger lads, overnight. The landlord of the inns might have tried to keep the drovers at his establishment for as long as he could so that he would procure even more manure on his land. He would certainly be making a good deal of money from the trade by selling food and beer and also by charging the drovers to put their beasts in his field. The cost of pasture overnight was usually a farthing/head for sheep and a halfpenny/head for cattle. Pub and place names are often evidence of drove roads, eg The Drover's Arms, The Black Ox and Halfpenny Field (like the one in Painscastle, opposite the Roast Ox – which was called the Drovers Arms in 1841). There is a Smithfield Road in Builth Wells, referring to Smithfield Market in London where many of the animals were taken.

Along the main drove roads, there were usually wide grass verges; the animals had to eat constantly whilst on the move. Another piece of evidence is the existence of small groups of pine trees. These tend to be found near inns which had a good reputation. Pines grow quickly and keep their dark foliage all the year round so they would have stood out clearly in the landscape. Bruce says that he has examined a number of accounts books kept by drovers and these list where the drovers stayed and how much they paid for accommodation, refreshment, shoeing, pasture and tolls, so it is often possible to tell how many animals were on each drove.

Bruce went on to describe some of the main routes in our local area, beginning with the one from Tregaron to Erwood and then on to the Rhydspence Inn; he called this the Wild Route. From Tregaron, the drovers would over the hills to Abergwesyn and thence to the Glanbran Arms on the Eppynt, now no longer an inn. From here it was on across the Eppynt to The Drovers Arms (now owned by the MOD), the Griffin and Cwm Gwenddwr, then along tracks that are very obvious in the bracken on the hills above the Wye Valley and down to the Wheelwright's Arms in Erwood. He illustrated this route with some wonderful photos which showed how remote and lonely this route must have been. Bruce did say that the drovers preferred high and remote routes because this

enabled them to see any potential rustlers along the way and they could also be on the look out for watering points. At Erwood, it was necessary to cross the Wye. The house now known as Glanyrafon used to be The Boat Inn. Before the first bridge was built in 1861, the animals had to be walked across the river if it was low enough. If the flow was a bit higher, then the animals would swim across. However, in times of really high flow, the drovers would use the ferry which was operated by Twm Bach. (In actuality, this was unlikely to be a boat; rather it would probably have been a heavy wooden box on a rope loop.) Bruce told us the sad tale of how Twm Bach is said to have drowned crossing during one particularly high flood event, whilst ferrying animals and their drovers across the swollen river.

Another local route which Bruce described was the one from Rhulen to Newchurch, coming over Aberedw Hill. This route involved crossing the Wye at Builtth Wells. There was yet another route across Llanbedr Hill, past Twm Tobacco's grave and then down the road past the Lundy to Painscastle (The Drover's Arms and Halfpenny Field; in fact, at one time, there were six pubs in Painscastle) and then on to The Rhydspence. There was another drover's inn very close to the Rhydspence, The Sun. Bruce wondered why and ML pointed out that, because The Rhydpsence is in England, it would have been open on a Sunday; The Sun, in Wales, would have been closed. The Rhydspence was where the animals were shod prior to their journey through England, on metalled roads.

The Welsh Influence in England

The Welsh had a big influence in England in the 19th century. It was noted, by D J Williams, in *The Old Farmhouse* in 1885, that "It used to be said that as much Welsh could be heard on Rugby's High Street on market day as in Llandeilo". A road from Perrotts Brook to Fairford in Gloucestershire is actually called Welsh Way. A route linking Anglesey to Birmingham, Kenilworth, Aylesbury and Barnet is referred to as The Welsh Lane/Road. In one village in England, Priors Marston, the pond is referred to as the pool, which derives from the Welsh, *pwll*.

Northampton was the largest and most important market for Welsh livestock in the Midlands. In the market square in the centre of the town is the Welsh House; it is the finest building in the square and has on it an inscription in Welsh, *Heb Dyw Heb Dym Dyw a Digon*, "Without God Nothing, With God Enough". This building was built by Welshmen for Welshmen.

At the end of his talk, Bruce said that he has a website, www.localdroveroads.co.uk, that people might like to look at. He also invited questions from the audience.

In answer to a question from Roger Capps about when droving started in the UK he told us that there is evidence of a man taking animals to London as early as the 1340s, but this would have been on a small scale and only to feed the wealthy. Another account from Shrewsbury is dated 1610, but it was not really until the 1700s that droving really took off.

Geoff Moore asked what distance would have been travelled each day. Bruce said that cattle could walk for 12-15 miles/day (this is the distance that they might quite naturally wander in any case), sheep could go for 17 miles and pigs for about 8 miles, although they would be extremely difficult to drive. There would be no driving on a Sunday.

John Price asked whether the animals would have been shod in Painscastle. Bruce said that, whilst the Rhydspence was the biggest local shoeing centre, the blacksmiths in the village would definitely have been called upon. (ML said that there were 2/3 blacksmiths in the village, together with six pubs.) Chris McCann added that there was another shoeing centre in Cregina. Sue Farmer said that

there was also a pub at the top of Cold Blow, but that she does not know what it was called. ML added that there was also a pub at Pig Tail and both of these would have been used by the drovers.

Roger Capps asked whether the drovers used high level routes to avoid tolls. Bruce answered that tolls would only have been paid on roads owned by the Turnpike Trusts and so using the higher moorland routes would have allowed them to avoid payment and keep their costs down. The road from Erwood to Painscastle was a toll road and it is probable that the beasts would not have been shod by that stage, and so this route was definitely avoided and the drovers used the Llanbedr Hill track. From Rhydspence to Hereford, tolls would have had to have been paid at a number of points along the way. Bruce added that the drovers had a choice. They could use the toll roads and incur extra cost, or take the higher and often longer toll-free routes, but they ran the risk of their animals arriving at market in a poorer condition or being stolen.

Helen Barnett asked whether the farmers minded the drovers' stock eating their grass. Bruce said that this was unlikely because the grass was on the verges and so the animals did not need to go onto farmers' land. Furthermore, there would have been the additional advantage of being able to collect and use the manure that was left on the roads.

At the end of the evening, ML thanked Bruce for his most interesting and well-illustrated talk. We had all learned a great deal about the drovers and could now relate this knowledge to our local area. She thanked him and Chris for giving so generously of their time to come to speak to us, especially since they had travelled so far to be here.

The evening was rounded off, as always, with refreshments kindly made by Avryl Lloyd, Edwina Griffiths and Iris Lloyd and people had the opportunity to talk to Bruce and Chris further about their travels in pursuit of the drove routes of Britain.