

## Notes from Local Interest Group 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017

Apologies were received from Wendy & Den Ozols, Richard & Tracey Martin.

Present: Joan Lloyd, Judith Coles, Elaine Curtis, Helen Barnett, Jenny Francis, Heather Nicholls, Juliet Lewis, Peter & Pauline Spode, Margaret Warne, Val & Mike Head, John Meredith, Paul & Sue Buckingham, Carol & David Davies (Pontypool), Gillian & Barry Kirkland (Leicester), Sue & John Ievers, John & Lesley Cooper, Richard Baylis, Ruth & Allan Griffiths, Deri Jones, John Meredith, Richard & Sally Harris, Bill & Ruth Johnson, John & Margaret Price, Sue Farmer, Evelyn & John Bally, Mollie & Jeff Moore, Anne Young & Roland Grazebrook, Pauline & Richard Ball, Richard Thomas, Grace Davies, Roy & Avryl Lloyd.

The group met outside Rhosgoch Mill on a glorious summer's evening. Revd Janet Russell welcomed everyone to Rhosgoch Mill which was called Hothnant at one time. It seems there were two mills in Rhosgoch in the 1500s and there was a court case (Court of Augmentations) where the one mill (Hothnant) accused the other (Melyn Rhoose) of stealing their water. John Meredith has a theory that maybe there could have been another mill just above the school. He remembers the remains of walls there, so it could be a possibility which we should look at, it is in the field belonging to Margaret Warne. Latterly the Powell family have been the millers at Rhosgoch from about the 1830s and it is still owned by the family today. We read about the mill in Kilvert's diary when he met William Powell, the miller who also played an important part in Rhosgoch Chapel. Revd Janet Russell who is a niece for Tom Powell, as a child came to stay at the mill for holidays, so she remembers it well. Hothnant mill means split stream mill. Janet welcomed us to Rhosgoch Mill showing surprise that so many people had come. After many years of deterioration Janet has bought the property and it has been stripped down ready for renovation. The roof had collapsed and only the main beams remain, but a lot of the mill machinery is still there at the back of the building.

The group was divided into two with Janet taking her group into the mill and explaining her plans for the mill and showing the machinery that is still very impressive. Margaret Warne & Mo showed the other group the position of the leat, and the mill pond.

Janet explained that the picture we saw showed her grandmother alongside the mill, the picture was taken at the first floor level. The wheel is still there but the buckets have gone only the blades remain. To operate it you raise the level of the pond, you operate that from outside. As soon as you get the wheel turning it operates the inside grinding stones. The bottom stone is fixed and the top stone moves. You could lift the top stone to the vertical position. There is a hoist to raise the corn, the shoots where the ground corn came down has not survived very well having suffered from woodworm. There are two old grindstones on the floor. John Meredith described how as a young man they would take corn to be ground. He said they brought the bags in and then they would be hoisted up to the hopper, then a few days later they would come and pick them up but he never saw inside because of the different levels in the mill. Janet explained that you would either come into the mill at ground level or at pond level where it was much lighter as there were two windows, so upstairs was lighter than downstairs. John remembers bringing corn here in the 1960s but he said once the farms had electricity they started to grind their own corn. In the later years the mill was only used to grind corn for animal feed, as once corn was imported from Canada, the better quality wheat was used for bread making. There was a weighing machine. The house consisted of the parlour and a very wide corridor, and a dairy. Upstairs there were three bedrooms which were quite low. Janet remembers the mill working

but by then it wasn't working all the time, but when it was working it was so loud! At one time it was working all day and night starting on a Monday morning and continuing until Saturday. Janet hopes to live in the mill cottage, there are no plans to get the machinery working again, but it will be left in situ. There is a date on the outside of the top window of the mill of 1867 and it is felt that the mill was probably refurbished at that time. Archaeology experts have come and looked at it and they think that the original mill was probably in the same place, it would have been built of wood. The present building is eighteenth century, the fireplace is typical eighteenth century, so is the bread oven and there was a beehive oven in the back.

The other group walked up the road and stopped to look at the position of the leat which was a channel to bring water from the main Bachawy stream higher up the valley into the mill pond behind the mill. Nowadays the leat is dry, although it would not be too difficult to renew the sluice, when it would flow under the bridge once again. There are 1924 photographs of a car rally going through the ford over the leat before the present bridge was built. The line of the road has also changed, perhaps in the 1950s. It used to run alongside the mill and the Tump house next door, over the ford and then merged with the modern road. There is a path which continues alongside the pond towards the village, this was a long established track, preceding the triangle in the village. The water in the leat ran into the mill pond which is very large. It is now somewhat overgrown but the retaining walls are still visible, as is the overflow which bypasses the mill, and the large iron pipe which fed the overshot wheel. After driving the mill wheel the water returned to the stream via another leat. John Meredith remembered the pond full of water with ducks on it, he also said that it was often cleaned out to prevent it silting up. Janet hopes to reinstate the mill pond which will be a lovely feature.

After visiting Rhosgoch Mill we moved on to Ty Maesawyr at the invitation of John & Evelyn Bally. John showed us around the various aeroplanes which are housed in a large hangar. John explained it all started as a bit of farm diversification by accident. He has been flying for 50 odd years and when they bought the farm he really wanted a runway, it started with one plane. Then word got around and people asked if they could keep their aeroplanes here. So he gets a small payment from them to keep their planes here and use the runway. The planes usually do about 20 hours a year or so, some are kit planes, some haven't flown for a couple years! All planes have to have a sort of MOT, air-worthiness, to show they are fit to fly.

Then we moved into the house where Evelyn had laid out her collection of Victorian toys. These included a Kinora film machine, (an early motion picture device using flip books), a Punch & Judy set, a Zoetrope (a pre-film animation device and the type used by Kilvert in his lantern shows), an early musical gramophone (using metal records with punched holes), a skittles set (shaped like circus elephants) as well as other interesting objects for home entertainment a century or more ago. One of Evelyn's ancestors, her great grandfather, is the subject of a portrait on the wall dated 1835 in Greece. He was a young boy dressed in ceremonial clothes and these clothes were on display, wonderfully made and still in pristine condition nearly 200 years later.

The evening concluded with light refreshments provided by John & Evelyn. This was the last of our summer visits and the group was so grateful to all our hosts for providing such a wonderful evening.