



Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)

Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog

Newsletter 58- September 2016

Strange but true Welsh customs

Wales is full of interesting and strange customs some of which remain to this day and others which with the passage of time have disappeared into the annals of history.

I was recently sent some snippets of information relating to a few of these customs, none of which I had heard of before. Whilst they may not strictly speaking only be found in Wales they do seem to fit well with the mysterious history of the Celtic world.

The Dog Whipper and his Dog Tongs

This item originates from an article in Breconshire Notes and Queries of September 1925 but the subject is discussed in other publications of the period.

In the early 19th century it was apparent that the shepherds of the district, when they went to church, would often be accompanied by their dogs who faithfully followed their masters wherever they went. Unfortunately with the number of shepherds being more than a few it was not uncommon for some of the dogs to fight and cause a ruckus during the service. At Llandewi Abergwessin church they had recourse to an object called “*gefail gwn*” or dog tongs. This particular set were made of wood but others have been known to be made of iron although their purpose was the same; to enable the sexton or churchwarden to separate the fighting animals. The tongs were long enough to protect the person using them from the sharp teeth of the animals and were so efficient that once the offending animal was caught in their grip they would be unable to escape and could be willingly or unwillingly ejected. So successful were they nearly every church, particularly those in rural areas, were afforded a pair. The nominated handler would arm himself with the tongs and, seizing the nearest dog by the scruff, would deposit it outside the door and in the churchyard whereupon calm would once be restored. This done – not forgetting to shut the door – the ‘keeper of the peace’ would re-seat himself, but taking care to have the tongs beside him in case the previous execution of the law might not prove a sufficient object lesson for other possible offenders. Whilst the custom appears 19th century, and it was often the sexton or churchwarden who was tasked with the job, archive documents show that the position of someone known as the “*dog whipper*” was very old one and dated from at least the 16th century where records show that

This month on our website

As well as the regular maintenance tasks to keep our website running smoothly, John has added several new items since the last Newsletter.

Parish Pages

A new link is to the Facebook page of the Crickhowell District Archives Centre. On the “Parishes” button select Crickhowell and then click on the Websites button. [updated 1 Sept. 2016]

www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/index.htm

Monthly Meeting

Minutes of Committee Meeting held 18th Aug 2016 [updated 21 Sept 2016]

www.blfhs.co.uk/members/docs/minutes.htm

Report, audio-recordings and slide-show from the September monthly meeting *Well Being Brecon – the conservation of sacred springs, holy wells and medicinal spas*. [updated 21 Sept 2016]

www.blfhs.co.uk/members/meetings/160906.htm

Newsletter

Newsletter 58 (the one you are now reading)

www.blfhs.co.uk/members/newsletters.htm

Members' News Pages

[updated 10 Sept 2016]

www.blfhs.co.uk/members/news.htm

Public News Pages

[updated 10 Sept 2016]

www.blfhs.co.uk/news.htm

Noticeboard

updated 11 Sep 2016 with details of the launch of the Brecon 1901 Project

www.blfhs.co.uk/noticeboard.htm

Don't forget! Check the News Pages every few days and the Noticeboard at least weekly.

Archbishop Holgate of York issued an order that the “*vergers do attend quire in Divine service time for the expulsion of beggars or light persons, and dogs forth from the church*”. The appointment seems to have been one regularly found in cathedrals and churches of the post Middle Age period including many outside Wales such as Durham and Ripon.



Attrib: Alan Fryer

Old church accounts often have entries recording sums paid for “*whip-ping dogs out of church*” but the amounts paid for this task varied enormously from just pence to as much as shillings, as can be found in the accounts for Llanbryn-mair (Montgomeryshire) where one entry in the church accounts reads “*Edward Evans, for keeping the dogs off Divine service, 10s*”. The money to pay such a sum often came from money or land left to the church to endow the position of dog whipper. Apparently, exasperated with the problem of these dogs the church sometimes went much further and ordered that not only should unruly dogs be expelled but that if brought to church they should be seized and executed immediately by

the appointed person. This was decreed at Llanfair Talhaïam, Denbighshire in 1747 but later records show that a dog whipper was still being used suggesting that this was a step too far and did nothing to encourage the piety of the local people!

Look out in a future newsletter for the custom of the Parish Coffin.



1901 Brecon – a new initiative for the Society

The first meeting in September marked the launch of a new year-long PROJECT for the BLFHS. Alison Noble and Helen Ball met several times through the summer working out the details and the shape of the project and 1901 Brecon was born.

It is, we think, a major initiative. It ought to infuse everything that the society does during the coming year. 1901 provides the anchor tying all the local events, subjects, and townspeople to 1901—schools, the military, the

newspaper, the council, the churches and chapels, house histories, weather, shops and businesses.

Remember...

Comments on this Newsletter are very welcome. I would love to receive more and also would be very pleased to receive interesting snippets of information for inclusion in the Newsletter. If you have anything specific to the **1901 Project** please do let me know. You can email it me, Sue Ashton at editorblfhs@outlook.com

An important aspect is *family history*. What were our families doing in 1901? Were there births, marriages or deaths in *your* family history that year? Were there celebrations? Are there 1901 photos? We already know the people as they all were listed in the Census. Now we can tell their story.

All of Brecon’s social history is interesting in that year.

There are so many subjects that each of us can choose and research in our own way—sports, the railway, the town council, health care, poverty, the workhouse, wealth, the town estates. But where is this 1901 Project going to lead? It could be two new publications: “1901 Shops and Businesses” and “Brecon in 1901”; it could be an exhibit; it could be a video presentation – whatever it is will give us something to share when HISTORY WEEK comes around next year in September. Your ideas will be what make this project successful. There is an important part to play for every member of the Society.



Free Online Resources

There are lots of free resources out there on the Internet. Copy and paste the web addresses into your browser.

Hugh Wallis's Genealogical websites

This website has been around for some time and has proved useful for those seeking to search particular churches for specific families on the Latter Day Saints Family Search site. It has not been updated since 2002 due to Hugh's death and the link between this site and the LDS site no longer works. However, it is still possible to take the batch numbers for particular churches and use them to do a direct search on the LDS Family Search site.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/>

Other items of interest on this site with relevance to Breconshire are:-

VAUGHAN wills proved in the Archdeaconry of Brecon 1575-1858. Indexes and Abstracts.

These are taken from the Latter Day Saints indexes of original and copied probate indexes and have been sorted into useable sections. Searching is possible by Date of Probate. Testator, Parish of residence and also includes an index of other names appearing in the wills.

To some extent this list has been superseded by the ability to search the National Library of Wales site for Wills and to see many of them online without charge (although sometimes it can be a visual challenge!). However, a brief search has shown that not all the VAUGHAN entries in Hugh's list are listed on the NLW site so perhaps by using both a fuller picture emerges.

If you have VAUGHAN ancestors this might prove a useful free tool.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/Wills/VaughanWills.htm>

BRECONSHIRE STRAYS

Burials

Holy Trinity, Christchurch, Newport

William Fothergill, Talgarth

Buried 22 March 1828

Aged 54

Family Search: a guide to the British batches.

This site supersedes the Hugh Wallis site and appears to be updated reasonably regularly. If you want to search particular churches then searching using these batch numbers is much easier than a general search on the LDS Family Search site.

<http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/index.htm>



Remember....

If you can contribute any photographs or textual material relating to any of the Breconshire parishes, or if you wish to report any problems with the website, email our webmaster John Ball at john@jlb2011.co.uk

September Meeting Review: "Well Being Brecon" – The conservation of Sacred Springs, Holy Wells and Medicinal Spas. 6th September 2016

A disappointingly small audience of Society members and friends attended this month's talk in the meeting room at Brecon Library. Chairperson Robert Eckley welcomed the audience, gave dates for our diaries and then invited Helen Ball to give a short but important presentation to launch the Brecon 1901 Project. The project will provide a focus for BLFHS members for the next twelve months. Helen then handed over to Alison Noble who explained how this would complement and renew interest in the ongoing Shops and Businesses project.

Rob Eckley then introduced the main speaker Richard Phipps, Keep Wales Tidy's South Wales Regional Manager (Central East). Richard gave an illustrated presentation on "*Well Being Brecon*" – *The conservation of Sacred Springs, Holy Wells and Medicinal Spas*. After explaining the main purpose of the project Richard went on to discuss some of the key wells in the Brecon Beacons and surrounding area and their myths and legends. The audience raised questions and contributed comments both during and after the talk.

Sound recordings of both talks, plus Richard Phipps' slide show, are available in the members' section of our website.

<http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/meetings/160906.htm>



Website

Our website address is www.blfhs.co.uk

Next Meeting

Date/Time: Tuesday 4th October 2016. 2pm

Place: Brecon Library

Subject: 1st World War Royal Flying Corp: Brecon Ace Pilot

Jo Copping will talk about her Brecon-born great uncle, Richard Aveline Maybery, an ace pilot in WWI.

N.B. This is a change from the originally advertised topic.