



Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)

Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog

Newsletter 83– Spring 2019

Happy New Year! It does seem to come around so quickly – maybe it is an age thing! As mentioned in our last newsletter we are now going to a quarterly publication. It was been difficult to keep up with a monthly version so I hope everyone is happy with this change.

Brecon's Victorian state of sanitation

Website updates [members only]

Nothing to report

In 1849 a petition signed by many inhabitants of Brecon concerning the terrible state of sanitary arrangements resulted in the production of a preliminary enquiry into the sewerage system of Brecon including the drainage and supply of water.

The results were reported to the General Board of Health and laid out how things were; what they could do about it and the cost.

Dr Lucas, a GP in Brecon, wrote a report to the Inspectors pointing out that “epidemics” when they occurred, were usually confined to “those parts of the town in which cleanliness and efficient drainage had been least attended to...”

Communal diseases were fever or similar to typhoid type gastric and intestinal disorders. He included a breakdown of deaths within a five year period ending June 30 1848 which recorded a total of 850 deaths, 161 of them being of an epidemic or contagious nature. Only 25 were recorded as being of a dysentery/diarrhoea type affliction and 19 from cholera or typhus. His view seemed completely at odds with the views of other GP's. Mr North, Medical Officer of the District presented a much more “enlightened” opinion and berated those who blamed the poor of the district who he said were “compelled to live in the worst parts where there were no drains or proper sanitation. He also added that insanitary conditions were not the only reason for poor health citing other contributors such as lack of good food, poor clothing, lack of ventilation and overcrowded living conditions. Many houses did not have proper toilets and as a result the streets were often used as dumping ground resulting in fetid and odorous conditions. Where sewers existed they were often poorly built, poorly sited and badly maintained. Heavy rain which was common to Brecon often resulted in the flooding of the sewers washing the filth further down towards the town and into the source of the town's fresh water supply thus contaminating it. The Maddrell brook which was on the western side of the town was identified as a source of disease for this precise reason. Dr Lucas realised this during an outbreak of cholera in 1854 and campaigned for it to be redirected through a new culvert so that the sewage which was coming from upstream would no longer contaminate the drinking water well. In 1853¹ the Welshman reported that the Board of Health had already agreed to clean the streets and to clear the sewer in the Market Place at a cost of £140, a not inconsiderable amount for the times and perhaps a reason why so little had been done to date but a decision about spending the extra cost of covering up an open brook called Maddrel which ran through Bailey Gate and Mill Street (Brecon) and making new drains was put off for six months. Sadly this resulted in an outbreak of cholera but the brook was finally sent through a new culvert by the end of 1854 and the water supply was thus protected from more contamination. In 1855² the Health Board finally reported that alterations to the “Madril” [sic], had been completed to ensure that it flushed regularly and notices had been issued against those in the town who continued to create specific nuisances.

However, a Brecon Board of Health report in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* of September 1857³ again reported that the pump in Bailygate which provided drinking water drawn from an adjacent well was again in a perilous state and out of order. A local surgeon, Mr Armstrong, went as far as to say that the water was unfit for human consumption and that it was nothing more than “Maddrell water from a filthy brook.” Other members of the Board disagreed and denied that Maddrell water was going into the well. The report also pointed out that drains were not being flushed often enough and that once a week was insufficient. To flush two weekly needed extra manpower and the Board were reluctant to approve this.

Many of the problems identified in Brecon were considered to be the responsibility of the parish officers and a third report from a Mr James Williams, a surgeon from outside the parish, hi-lighted areas which he considered also their responsibility such as the “open gutter opposite the millpond”. He also pointed out that many tenants could not rely upon their landlords to maintain the properties they rented out and most did not have privies and were in a poor state of repair. They were dark and damp. His conclusion was that if the streets could be kept dry by constructing culverts to take the rainwater away and by building and maintaining better houses with proper ventilation, warmth and light, many of the problems could be overcome and disease could be largely prevented from happening.

By 1855⁴ the Sanitary Inspector was reporting that the lodging houses were in a much better state and were being whitewashed but that the gas lighting in the streets was not working consistently and many areas were without light during the hours of darkness. However, although sewers had been constructed; there was a large sewer in Silver Street which connected to the main sewer and also one in the upper part of the Street, there were still some owners reluctant to connect their properties. This lack of compliance led the Board to consider that if things did not change then connection might have to be made mandatory under the Public Health Act 1848. No-one should be allowed to decline even if in “hardship or inconvenience” as the needs of the town should outweigh those of the individual. This situation aside surface drains were working more effectively now that they were being flushed on a daily basis but there were still calls that this was not enough and that flushing should be carried out twice daily even though this would need extra manpower. A new water supply for Brecon was under consideration which would bring water from the Rhydgoch brook and by 1867 a new reservoir was under construction at Cilwhybert. The parish was at last taking responsibility for ensuring the health and well-being of its inhabitants.

References

1. *The Welshman*. 25.11.1853. p3
2. *The Welshman*. 20.7.1855. p6
3. *Monmouthshire Merlin* 26.9.1857. p.8
4. *The Welshman*. 26.10.1855. p6

[See pages 3-6 of this Newsletter for a reproduced article on the very insanitary state of Brecon originally published in *The Practitioner*, vol 208, May 1972. Pp700-703 and used as the basis for the preceding article]



Brecon Cathedral Christmas Trees 5th to 9th December

The Society celebrated another successful year with children filling in the “Family Tree” tree hangings.



Part 4

with comment
 Reprinted from 'THE PRACTITIONER'
 May 1972, Vol. 208, pp. 700-703

THE SANITARY STATE OF BRECON IN 1849

By DAVID KYLE, M.B., B.Ch., F.R.C.G.P.
Brecon

IN June, 1849, in response to a 'petition numerously signed' by many of the town's leading citizens, including two doctors, there began 'a preliminary inquiry into the sewerage, drainage and supply of water and the sanitary conditions of the municipal borough of Brecon'. This was carried out, in accordance with section 9 of the then Public Health Act, by a Superintendent Inspector whose findings were reported to the 'General Board of Health'. A copy of this report has by the merest chance fallen into my hands and it makes compulsive and fascinating reading.

In the words of the Inspector:

'My Report describes in the first place the existing state of things; secondly the remedies recommended; and, in the third place, it states the cost of these remedies'.

The second and third sections, though extremely interesting generally, have no special medical aspect. The first part, however, teems with facts and figures about the health and welfare, or rather the lack of both, in a small rural community in the mid-nineteenth century.

'NO SEWERS AT ALL'

Three doctors in the town wrote reports for the Inspector, the first coming from Dr. Lucas.

In his perhaps rather complacent view 'the general condition of Brecon might, on the whole, be considered healthy'. Epidemics were rare, and 'much confined to those parts of the town in which cleanliness and efficient drainage had been least attended to'.

In 'the low flat district of Llanfaes' there are practically no sewers at all, and here 'there is usually most disease, its rate of mortality amounting to 3.3 per cent.'. The average for the town as a whole 'is equal to that of Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham and other seats of considerable manufac-



FIG. 1.—Ship Street, Brecon (c. 1850).

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tures', which is unexpected in 'a town apparently so favourably situated for health'.

The common diseases in this area, he reports, are 'fever, of a low, typhoid type and sub-acute and chronic gastric and intestinal disorders'. These conditions, 'predisposing to the fatal termination of other diseases, do not tend much to swell the list as causes of death'.

In conclusion Dr. Lucas presented a 'classified abstract from the returns to the town-registrar of the cause of death during the 5 years ending June 30, 1848'. This is worth reproducing in full: it repays careful study and by inference supplies a great deal of information about the general health of this town and presumably of many other similar towns at that time.

Number of Deaths during the five years ending June 30, 1848.

From all causes	850
1. Zymotic: or epidemic, endemic, and contagious diseases	161
2. Dropsy, cause of uncertain seat	29
3. Brain, spinal marrow, nerves and senses	147
4. Lungs, and other organs of respiration	216
5. Heart and blood-vessels	21
6. Stomach, liver, and other organs of digestion	54
7. Diseases of kidneys, etc.	5
8. Child-birth—diseases of the uterus, etc.	11
9. Rheumatism, diseases of the bones, joints, etc.	8
10. Skin, cellular tissue, etc.	5
11. Old age	137
12. Violence, privation, cold and intemperance	26
13. Unspecified causes	30

I may also add the following selection of the numbers of deaths from the most important special causes'.

Small-pox	4	Apoplexy	9
Measles	8	Paralysis	6
Scarlatina	45	Convulsions	107
Whooping cough	24	Bronchitis	24
Dysentery	4	Pneumonia	29
Diarrhoea	21	Phthisis	145
Cholera	2	Disease of liver	15
Typhus	17	Dropsy	26
Hydrocephalus	12	Child-birth	10

SCOURING FLOOD AND RAIN

The second report comes from Mr. North, described as the medical officer of the district, who early shows his liberal and enlightened opinions.

'It is too much the custom to attach all the blame to the poor who are compelled to live in the worst parts where there are no drains and where scavengers are never employed. Many of the cottages have no privies, no outlet at the back, and filth of every kind is too often thrown before the doors'.

Mr. North goes on to point out that this lack of sanitation is not the only reason for ill health.

'A want of sufficient food, proper clothing, and ventilation, being crowded together in numbers too large to admit of breathing a pure air, are equally likely to cause disease'.

The condition of some of the streets is described in detail. In one 'much evil results from the want of privies, as I have often heard complaints of the stench arising from the filth thrown out before the houses'. In another

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'there is what is called a sewer; it is really a reservoir for filth'. Of another part he says:

'Here you find everything to render the place filthy; privies, stables, and slaughter-houses; there are no drains. There was an open privy within 2 yards of the entrance to the Market-Hall'.

Two streets are described as 'certainly the dirtiest parts of the town, which have not been thoroughly cleaned out for the last nine years'. That was in 1840, when the river Usk was in flood 'for many hours with a strong current' and 'completely swept away nuisances that had been accumulating for years'. Later in 1840 there was an epidemic of typhoid, and these two streets were 'far more healthy than other parts of the town, and I could attribute it to nothing but the timely occurrence of this very high flood'. In another context he writes:

'We are much indebted to the heavy showers and large quantities of rain that fall in the neighbourhood as a means of removing much of the dirt from our streets'.

Brecon (fig. 1, 2) still has a high annual rainfall, but no-one there now feels indebted to it.



FIG. 2.—St. Mary's Church, Brecon (c. 1850).

GREEN FROM AGE

Mr. James Williams, surgeon to another parish, also sent in a report, in which he showed his genuine humanity, 'on all such places as are dangerous to health'. He described first what he calls 'public nuisances, not ones to be remedied by the cottagers, but by the proper parish officers and the magistrates'. Amongst other nuisances he details:

'The open gutter opposite the mill-pond frequently green from age, generating gases highly injurious to the public health. I have had personal experiences of severe cases of low fever, undoubtedly emanating from that or some other source'.

Leaving the public streets and turning to the dwelling-houses he writes:

'There are not so many nuisances dependent upon the inhabitants as upon the owners . . . many scores of houses without a privy, many in a very bad state of

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repair excessively dark and wet. Sooner or later the constitution must give way: exposure to wet and cold and noxious gases undermine the stoutest constitution'.

He, like Dr. North, mentions the cleansing effect of Brecon's heavy rainfall. 'This has not been the winter for fevers, so much stormy weather and rain has done the part of public scavenger'. The prevalent diseases were those designated 'colds', caused in his opinion by the 'moist and cold air being drawn into the chest and getting into contact with the sensitive and highly vascular membrane lining the bronchia'. Finally he states:

'My object is to propose a remedy, by keeping the streets as dry as possible by having capacious culverts. With better sites and construction of houses, bearing in mind ventilation, moderate warmth and plenty of light, with quarterly white washings, I believe that fever and diseases of that sort would be as rare in our town as small pox after efficient vaccination'.

PUBLIC DUNG HEAPS

In the course of his own tour of the town the Superintendent Inspector picked out certain features for special comment. In one house the occupant 'complained of an oozing through the wall of his dwelling-room, from a privy built against it on the other side. The stench was very offensive'. In another street 'are filthy roads, corners piled up with rubbish, public dung heaps, open ditches and gutters, pigsties and pigs rambling about the streets and in many of the houses'. In another place 'close to the Brecon brewery, is a cluster of seven privies discharging into the river, 30 yards above the place from which people take water. A dirty manure yard, with pigsties, drains upon the same point'. In another street runs a stream 'its channel is used as a sewer, and its water for domestic uses'. And near to this is 'a privy with a cess-pool on the upper side of the public well'. Finally, a brief description of the Union House (now transmogrified into a bright and shining geriatric hospital):

'In an excellent position for air and drainage, cleanly kept, but some of its sewerage arrangements very faulty. At my visit a bad case of typhus was in a very small room, with a bank of earth in front of the window. In each of the six courts is a very large untrapped cess-pool, smelling most offensively and the whole discharging into the high road'.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

Throughout the poorer parts of the town these instances are multiplied many times over, presenting a picture of dirt, filth and squalor beyond imagining now, though very real 120 years ago. And yet 1849 is not so far away—there are many people still alive in Brecon today whose grandparents were living then. This brings the picture into clearer perspective, and shows how near it really is. It seems incredible that the state of affairs so vividly described should have been accepted as part of ordinary everyday life, especially at a time when reform was so much in the air. No distance, however great, can lend enchantment to such a view, and those of us who may be inclined to be scornful of the Welfare State would do well to reflect on what it has replaced.

The Beacon

This free A5 monthly glossy magazine distributed in Brecon and its surrounding villages contains a "Your History" column, contributed by the BLFHS, which often offers an interesting article about the area. This quarter: Doctor Thomas Crestwood Lucas & Mary Elizabeth Epynt Phillips.

Doctor Thomas Crestwood Lucas, a Benefactor of Brecon

In 1840, Dr Lucas succeeded to his father's Brecon medical practice and his position at the Watton Infirmary.

In 1854 there was a cholera outbreak in the Saint John's area of Brecon. Fifty-seven people died and Doctor Lucas was appointed Medical Superintendent to deal with the outbreak.

There were two theories regarding the spread of cholera – was it airborne or waterborne?

The Maddrell brook, flowed from the Maendu Wells through Baileyglas [Maendu Street] and into the Usk River. It was also an open sewer. Doctor Lucas discovered that the cholera outbreak occurred when the open sewer was being cleaned out during late summer and the contents were left on the road side.

Doctor Lucas arranged for a well, serving the local people, which was alongside the Maddrell, to be isolated from the contaminated brook. The sewage left on the bank was to be treated with disinfectant and covered with earth. Posters and leaflets were distributed so that the inhabitants would become aware of the dangers. These actions prevented further spread of the infection and any further loss of life.



Doctor Lucas died in 1859 and is buried in the new cemetery at Cradoc road.

Doctor Lucas's grave, Cradoc Road.

Copies are still available of the book produced on the life of Dr Mary Elizabeth Epynt Phillips

To find out more, contact Hilary Williams on 01874 624432



Dr Mary Elizabeth Epynt Phillips

In 2018 we marked the centenary of both the Representation of the People Act which granted some women the right to vote, and also the end of World War One.

A pioneering woman from Presbeli, Merthyr Cynog, Dr Mary Elizabeth Epynt Phillips, was involved with both of the above.

She was the first female to complete her medical qualifications in Cardiff University.

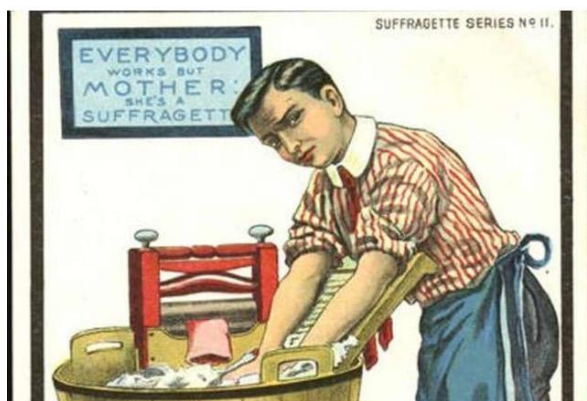
As a qualified doctor, she worked to improve the lives and health of poor pregnant women, mothers and children.

- She supported the Suffragist Movement to get the vote for women.
- She was a member of the “Scottish Women’s Hospital for Foreign Service” [SWHFS], a medical facility consisting almost entirely of female doctors and nurses.
- During World War One, as part of the SWHFS, she worked in allied countries, treating the sick and wounded soldiers and civilians.
- Following her demobilisation in 1919 she became a Medical Officer in Merthyr Tydfil, again working to improve the conditions for women and children.



I received an interesting few snippets on the issue of suffrage from one of our members. When we have been talking about the Representation of the People’s Act they present an interesting view!

Notes on suffragists: Brecon County Times, Neath Gazette and General Advertiser via *Cymru 1914* (available on the National Library of Wales website)



Llangynidr: ‘the Debating Society discussed the question “Should women have votes.” Miss Penny took the negative and Mr WH Watkins the affirmative. ...the anti-Suffragists won’ (13/2/1913)

Hay-on-Wye: The rowdy behaviour of some in the full Drill Hall audience stopped others listening to speeches from “the South Wales Federation of Women’s Suffrage Societies – a non-militant law-abiding body.” Miss Foxley MA responded to their discourtesy “in a confident and good-humoured manner” but was heckled even at the point

of her talking about premature child deaths resultant from poverty – ‘by singing, whistling, shouting and booing...(and eventually) with forms and chairs breaking down” Speakers talked about equality, and the outcomes when women are active in public life, giving an example of Brecon’s “lady Mayor...who all of them knew how well she had fulfilled her office” The women speakers distanced themselves from Mrs Pankhurst. After his continued failure to appeal to the ‘better nature’ of those causing disruption, eventually the Chair Mr TJ Stokoe JMP called the Police to attend, effectively breaking up the meeting. Though the disruption was allowed to continue outside. (30/4/14)

Talybont-on Usk: ‘...in the Bethania Chapel...“Should women have votes.” Miss K Griffiths in the affirmative. Mr T Maddy in the negative... the Suffragists to be in the minority of 12’ (29/2/1918)

Barbara Lloyd



Don’t forget – I am always looking for interesting article subjects so let me know if you have anything you would like to share!!!!

I am looking for interesting subjects on which to base the monthly article. If you are passionate about a subject which you think would be interesting to our members please let me know by sending me an email at the usual address editorblfhs@outlook.com

War Cake:

A report on the recipe reproduced in our last newsletter.

The War Cake was a great success – despite the downbeat name. It was very light and the fruit was moist. My ground cloves were so old and tasteless I used a mixed spice containing cloves instead but the cake was still lightly fragrant. There were many requests for the recipe and one member with a vegan daughter-in-law was particularly keen. Christmas 1918 was really a postscript to what we did last month but members found it interesting and took in the message that the armistice did not mean a return to normality on the home front.

Mary Zorkoczy

Free Online Resources

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

A website which can help you date old photographs

www.jayneshrimpton.co.uk/blog

A Street Near You has been created by James Morley, and shows over 500,000 of those who died during the 1st World War, plotted on a map by family addresses.

<https://astreetnearyou.org/>



Website Statistics

NON SSL Statistics 2018

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits
Jan-18	694	1,746	2,671	7,413
Feb-18	611	1,536	4,196	9,937
Mar-18	520	1,349	10,212	21,702
Apr-18	449	1,255	4,313	9,721
May-18	542	1,343	4,841	10,649
Jun-18	514	1,350	5,397	11,161
Jul-18	833	1,813	6,565	13,630
Aug-18	597	930	2,486	6,754
Sep-18	8	22	79	231
Oct-18	4	4	4	69
Nov-18	7	7	42	251
Dec-18	6	6	10	46
Total	4,785	11,361	40,816	91,564

SSL Statistics to end 16th January 2019

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits
Jan-19	560	657	2,228	5,453
Feb-19	0	0	0	0
Mar-19	0	0	0	0
Apr-19	0	0	0	0
May-19	0	0	0	0
Jun-19	0	0	0	0
Jul-19	0	0	0	0
Aug-19	0	0	0	0
Sep-19	0	0	0	0
Oct-19	0	0	0	0
Nov-19	0	0	0	0
Dec-19	0	0	0	0
Total	560	657	2,228	5,453

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May-19	0	0	0	0
Jun-19	0	0	0	0
Jul-19	0	0	0	0
Aug-19	0	0	0	0
Sep-19	0	0	0	0
Oct-19	0	0	0	0
Nov-19	0	0	0	0
Dec-19	0	0	0	0
Total	560	657	2,228	5,453



Breconshire Deeds: a project in progress

A large number of photographs of Breconshire deeds have kindly been offered to the Society by Alan Nichols so that we can extract information from them if wanted. We hope to be able to do this. Watch the newsletter for updates on this.



D L Wooding's Transcript of the Llanafan fawr Parish Records 1633-1694, at National Library of Wales.

David Lewis Wooding (1828 - 1891), genealogist, historian, bibliophile and shopkeeper, had access to these very early Parish Records for the Parish of Llanafan Fawr, Breconshire. He transcribed these and made notes in the margins to give further details on individuals mentioned there.

The late Peter Owen of Builth Wells, was able to access these transcriptions and allowed the National Library of Wales to make copies of them. The copies made by the NLW was not catalogued, but now thanks to the enquiries made by Peter Owen's son, the location of these papers is known.

- A microfilm copy of the transcripts is available in the South Reading Room, on the open access shelf mark: E7.
- A hard copy is available on special request.

For information about D L Wooding, see the following website:

<https://biography.wales/article/s3-WOOD-LEW-1828>



Website

Our website address is www.blfhs.co.uk

Facebook

The society now has a Facebook page. Check it out at www.facebook.com/breconblfhs

January Meeting Review: A Potpourri of Local Subjects

Short presentations about the "The Thomas Brothers, Brecon Sculptors", by Margaret Sommers and "Brecon Railways" by Glen Harris were thoroughly enjoyed by those who attended.



Next Meeting: 5th February 2019 2pm

A Guided Tour of the Guildhall in Brecon - With Cllr Ieuan Williams. This event will not be advertised outside the Society. Members will be asked to meet at 1.50pm at the front of the Guildhall.

Future Meetings: these will be held at "Y Gaer" which is the new name for the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery and incorporates the new Public Library. It is due to open on the 1st March 2019

March

Date/Time: Tuesday 5th March 2019. 2pm.

Place: "y Gaer" *, Glamorgan Street, Brecon (to be confirmed)

Subject Research and presentation: a family story.

Janet Robinson has researched her family history and has produced a book "Family Matters" on the subject of her family research. She will pass on tips regarding her research. *NEW VENUE? **

April

Date/Time: Tuesday 2nd April 2019. 2pm.
Place: “y Gaer”, Glamorgan Street, Brecon.
Subject: Letters from the Front – Boar War and World War One.

Ann Reese has a collection of these letters sent home by soldiers on the front line and she will share some of these with us.

May

Date/Time Tuesday 2nd May 2019. 2pm
Place: “y Gaer”, Glamorgan Street, Brecon
Subject: History of the Gurkhas in Brecon

Major (Retd) Guptaman Gurung will speak about the long and valued relationship between the Town and the Gurkas.

