



# Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)

## Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog

### Newsletter 56 - July 2016

## World War I and the Belgian Refugee Crisis

During WWI Great Britain saw an influx of refugees from Belgium. After Germany invaded in 1914 the country was soon overrun and many towns and villages in the advance of the Germans were abandoned as their inhabitants sought refuge where they could. The exodus began in August 1914 and English ports soon found themselves accepting thousands of refugees a day. In all it is estimated that over 250,000 Belgian refugees came to the UK through such ports as Hull and Folkestone of which approximately 4,500 were settled in Wales. At the time this was the largest refugee movement in British history. No part of the country was immune although Wales, and in particular, Breconshire, does not seem to have received as many refugees as other parts, perhaps partly due to its largely rural landscape.

Despite the great numbers of refugees arriving the effect upon the country post-war does not seem to have registered much and this mass migration's place in the history of WWI seems to have been largely ignored. In 1920 a memorial to the refugees was built on the Victoria Embankment in London, opposite Cleopatra's Needle and dedicated by Princess Clementine of Belgium as a gift from her country in thanks for the assistance given by Great Britain during this time. By the end of the war 90% of the refugees had returned home and little remains to show that they were ever here. Their country needed its people to return and rebuild but the British government were also keen for them to return and encouraged this with a carrot and stick approach; free tickets home for a short while and the ending of employment contracts another.

I was only aware of this episode when reading a local newspaper of the period I came across a small piece in the Brecon & Radnor Express which announced the funeral of a Belgian refugee at Merthyr Cynog.

*"One of the Belgian refugees, an old lady of 84 years died on Friday at the Bungalow, Merthyr Cynog where Mr H E Gray, Peterston Court, is accommodating half a dozen..."*

*Brecon & Radnor Express 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct. 1914.*

## 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

Llandyfaelog Fach. [Completed 19 June 2016]

Llanfihangel Fechan. Includes supplementary pages (see Newsletter for fuller details)

[Completed 28 June 2016]

Llanelly. [Completed 14 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/index.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/index.htm)

Photo gallery of photographs taken in the parish of Llanelly. [Completed 18 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanelly/llanellyphotos.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanelly/llanellyphotos.htm)

### Transcription Project

Bethesda Chapel (Lower Chapel) Llanfihangel Fechan. [Updated 28 June 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanfihangel-fechan/index.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanfihangel-fechan/index.htm)

Siloam Independent Chapel, Clydach, Llanelly. [Updated 14 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanelly/index.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/llanelly/index.htm)

The list and map of transcribed parish records has also been updated. [Updated 8 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/transcripts-progress.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/transcripts-progress.htm)

### Monthly Meeting

Minutes of Committee Meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/docs/mins-2016-06-09.pdf](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/docs/mins-2016-06-09.pdf)

### Newsletter

Newsletter 56 (the one you are now reading)

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/newsletters.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/newsletters.htm)

### Members' News Pages

[Updated 18 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/members/news.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/news.htm)

### Public News Pages

[Updated 18 July 2016]

[www.blfhs.co.uk/news.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/news.htm)

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

Although she is not named in the piece a search of the burial register for Merthyr Cynog finds an entry for one Barbara Van de Venne Keisjer buried at the right time and living in the same place. There is a discrepancy in the age but it is surely the same person. No relatives are named and I could find out nothing about her prior to her arriving in the village but it was a sad reminder of the stresses of war.

When it was obvious that the Belgians needed help the War Refugees Committee was set up. This body coordinated the many voluntary organisations which helped manage and settle the refugees around the country.

Refugees were housed in houses, old schools, church halls and other similar buildings provided by local people. In Breconshire the local newspapers reported on many occasions that local people were helping to house and support Belgian families. There seems to have been a great deal of social cache in doing this and many reports suggest

that in the early days at least, they were treated rather like well-loved pets. One person whose name is mentioned often in the local newspaper reports is Mrs Gwynne Holford. She took in many refugees bringing them firstly to her home at Bucklands and then providing for them at Cilwych and Ffrwdgrech. She was noted as a great philanthropist contributing to many local causes as well as helping to establish the orthopaedic hospital at Roehampton which was providing many of the newest innovations for injured soldiers including the latest artificial limbs. Her husband, James Gwynne Holford was a prominent member of Breconshire society and held positions as magistrate and deputy lord lieutenant of Brecon as well as intermittently serving as an MP for Brecon.

Those refugees settled in Breconshire often arrived in small groups. Many were met by the local worthies of the time, another example of how they were often overwhelmingly welcomed. The Brecon County Times reports on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914 that the first contingent of refugees to be received by the Breconshire Relief Committee arrived at Brecon Station on the 14<sup>th</sup> October and were met by Mr T Griffith Jones, Honorary Secretary of the Committee. The group consisted of six adults who originated from Antwerp and Malines (Mechelin) and who had travelled from Chester. They were taken to a hostel in the Watton. On the following Saturday a second group arrived numbering twelve with ages ranging from eight months to eighty years old. These originated from Ostend and had travelled from Hereford.

Aside from these basic announcements the newspaper reports give us very little specific information about the individuals in each group and it is uncommon for any report to contain their names.

As the war dragged on many refugees were encouraged to take up employment or to offer help to the local people. In the beginning they were warmly welcomed. Most people expected the war to be over by Christmas and did not think that they would have to look after the refugees for more than a few months but as the months passed the cost of supporting them began to weigh heavily in some areas. The WRC was overwhelmed and by the end of 1914 the government had taken over responsibility for the refugees working through the Local Government Board which organised the dispersal of refugees around the country. To assist the Board encouraged the setting up of local Belgian Refugee Committees to work in their own areas to settle refugees and provide them with food and clothing. By 1916 there were nearly 2,500 of these committees across the country and local newspapers often contained notices and advertisements asking for offers of accommodation, money, food and clothing.

Monies raised could be considerable. The Brecon and Radnor Express reported in October 1914 that in one such collection £106.10s had been raised from a variety of contributors. Those who could not give money gave food or clothing. In January 1915 a British Company called the British Milk Products Co. Ltd began producing a product called Sanaphos, a nerve tonic similar to the German produced Senatogen which was difficult to come by during the

**N.B**

### **Red Cross First World War Volunteer records**

I noticed last month that at some point the site stopped working. I have checked again and all seems well with it now. Happy Hunting!

[www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/History-and-origin/First-World-War](http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/History-and-origin/First-World-War)

War (and being produced by a German Company was rather frowned upon). They announced that they would donate 6d out of every sale of a 5/- tin (and proportionate sums on smaller sizes) to a fund for the relief of Belgian refugee Doctors and Pharmacists. The offer was to commence in the January for a period of four weeks. They guaranteed to donate a sum of at least 150 guineas to the fund.

Information about the refugee crisis is patchy and any serious researcher must look to the primary resources as there is little digitised information on the Internet. Both the National Library of Wales and the National Archives hold information about this period of the First World War and there are many projects ongoing which seek to bring this subject to the notice of the general public.

With the hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War approaching in 2012 the Centre for Research on Belgian Refugees was set up. It was intended that it would become a place which would bring together researchers working in this area as well as becoming a “hub” for the collection of personal stories and archive material about the refugees. As the Centenary of WWI became closer it began collaborating with other organisations and other Centenary projects. Its Blog which can be found at <http://belgianrefugees.blogspot.co.uk/> contains a lot of interesting information about this subject.

The Institute of Social History at the University of Ghent is also currently preparing a virtual exhibition on the Belgian refugees called “Belgian refugees in Britain 1914-18” which will be launched in 2017 and which is aiming to collect stories of the Belgian men, women and children who lived in Great Britain during the War.

In the light of the present refugee situation in Europe this moment in British history becomes more relevant and although there are similarities between the two there are also many differences in the way in which the situations have been dealt with.

Sue Ashton



## Ministers did not always administer!

Transcriptions indexes come with a ‘health warning’ that, ideally, entries should be checked with the original record. Seeing the actual entry in the old register would give a feeling of being closer to the person researched, and a truth about them. But registers are not the gold standard of evidence: the original register entries can have their weaknesses too. For example it is not known when the record was made. Was the register to hand when the ceremony was performed? Were notebooks or slips of paper the first record? When were they copied into the register? Or were they mislaid and the minister was relying on his memory?

There are instances where it is obvious the minister, for some reason, has failed to record the information the same day. Examples that the transcription team have come across recently include the following:

### Aber Chapel (Talybont on Usk).

Below the entry for the baptism of Margaret Daughter of Howell Price on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1833 the minister has written “some other child at the same time”.

In Tredustan Chapel Births and Baptism Register the following entries appear:

*“The da[ugh]ters of Job Vaughan of Lanearth (near Pwllworach)*

*two or three Children of Lewis of Cwm.*

*two or three Children of John Pritchard’s – 1753*

*twins of Walter near the Dinas*

*a child of Job of Llanerch – 1753*

*a Child of Walter of Pwlykevin – 1753*

*a Child of Walter Gefore*

*a Child of John Watkins near the rhos – 1753”*

Following these entries the minister has written:

*“I W[illia]m W[illiam]s am very sorr[y] that I have neglected to Register Children Baptiz’d by me being sickly, indolent & forgetfull!”*

William Williams was honest and brave in owning up but he has left frustrating questions for anyone seeking evidence about particular families.

Mary Zorkoczy. Transcriptions Co-ordinator



## July Meeting Review: Visit to Talgarth Mill 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

On this pleasant July afternoon, eleven BLFHS members and friends gathered in the courtyard outside the restored flour mill, ready to be shown round. Our guide for the afternoon was BLFHS chairman Robert Eckley, who has been a volunteer at the mill since it opened five years ago. Rob told us about the history of the mill and demonstrated how the various mechanisms are used to produce flour, which is now marketed and sold both in this country and elsewhere. Several of the group had visited the mill in August 2011 soon after it opened. They were astonished to see how the adjoining gardens had grown and matured in the intervening five years and now provides a pleasant area for a stroll. Many of the group finished the day with afternoon tea at the on-site cafe and restaurant. Overall, the visit to the mill was a great success. We noted that a few days after our visit, Talgarth Mill received a royal visit by Prince Charles and his wife Camilla. There is lots more information about the mill on its website at <http://talgarthmill.com/>.



## Free Online Resources

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

### Royal Navy – First World War – Lives at Sea

Not specifically a Breconshire resource but if you had Breconshire ancestors who went to sea during WWI this website might provide useful information. Produced by the Royal Museums Greenwich it includes both Officers and Ratings.

[www.royalnavyrecordsww1.rmg.co.uk](http://www.royalnavyrecordsww1.rmg.co.uk)



## Parish Pages – this month on our website additional information

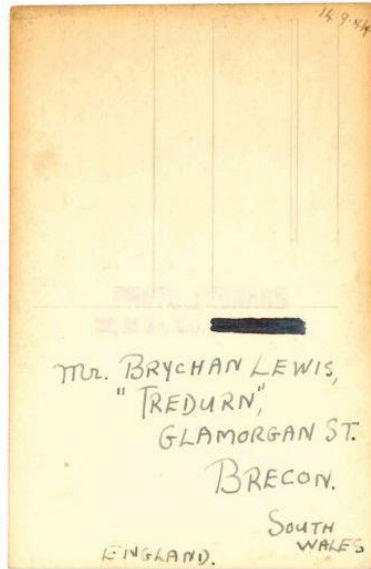
### Llanfihangel Fechan

John has added Supplementary pages to this Parish including a photo gallery of St Michael’s Church (thanks to Rob Eckley for these), a maps page, a book list and also a list of relevant websites.

## Llanelly

Supplementary pages now include images of Llanelly village including photographs of St Elli's Church, Bethlehem Baptist Chapel, Clydach village (including its chapels), Clydach Gorge and Ironworks, Gilwern and Brynmawr. (Don't forget that there was a useful website noted in our last Newsletter. Copy and paste the following into your browser.

<http://thomasgenweb.com/brynmawr.html>



## Recent requests for our Help.

A gentleman in Belgium is looking for the relatives of a soldier who lodged with his family in 1944 during the WWII. Luc Janssen has found a photograph of the soldier, Brychan LEWIS of Tredurn House, Glamorgan Street, Brecon, and would like to return it to his relatives if at all possible. Can we help?

John Ball remarks:

*The date 14-9-44 is written in pencil on the top corner of the back of the photograph. From the address given on the back of the photo it is clear that "Tredurn" is not Brychan LEWIS'S*

*name but that of the house in Glamorgan Street where his family lived. A search of the entries for Glamorgan Street in the 1939 Register (FindMyPast.co.uk) shows only one LEWIS family at No 4 Glamorgan Street, which bears the name "Tredurn House". The LEWIS household comprised Robert LEWIS (57), Supt. School Attendance Officer for Breconshire, his wife Margaret (45), their children Margaret (16), Mary (14), and possibly Robert's sister Annie (54), a National Health Insurance Clerk. This is almost certainly Brychan LEWIS'S family: his parents and siblings, and possibly his aunt. The record for one member of the family, perhaps Brychan himself, is closed.*

If you can provide any further information about Brychan Lewis, or any living members of his family, please respond by e-mailing the BLFHS at [enquiries@blfhs.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@blfhs.co.uk) and Luc Janssen at [luc@baensafw.be](mailto:luc@baensafw.be).



## Remember....

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

## Remember...

Comments on this Newsletter are very welcome. I would also be very pleased to receive articles or snippets of information for inclusion in the Newsletter. If you have anything please email it to me, Sue Ashton at [editorblfhs@outlook.com](mailto:editorblfhs@outlook.com)



---

## Website

Our website address is [www.blfhs.co.uk](http://www.blfhs.co.uk)



## Next Meeting

Date/Time: Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016. 2pm

Place: Crickhowell

Subject: A walk around Crickhowell led by Clive Ralph of the Crickhowell and District History Society.

Continuing our visits to nearby towns and villages, we have arranged a walk around Crickhowell with a local history expert. As always, there will be many hidden features to see and stories to learn about in this familiar town.

We will meet at 1.45pm at the The Crickhowell Resource and Information Centre (CRiC) situated on the main Beaufort Street for a **2.00pm start**. The town's "pay and display" carpark is situated behind the CRiC Centre. Your leaders on the day will be Committee members, Kathryn Kelly, Margaret Sommers and Glen Harris.

The Walk will take about 1 ¼ hours, and involves both flat and hilly sections.