



# Breconshire Local & Family History Society (BLFHS)

## Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol a Theuluoedd Brycheiniog

### Newsletter 57- August 2016

No formal article this month but a member has sent me the following which is very interesting.

## Merthyr Cynog's Noteworthy Citizen, Reformer and Registrar

In May 1878 there was a general gloom thrown over this parish when it became known that one of the oldest and most respected inhabitants had passed away, Mr John Prosser of Bwylch-y-ddwy-allt: although he had attained the great age of 86 years, it is but very recently that his active habits failed him. He was native of this parish, born in Colmouth farm near the village, and all his life displayed a very active and fearless disposition in expressing abuses and reforming antiquated customs. When about 50 years of age, he was appointed registrar of births and deaths, which office he held until three years ago, when the appointment transferred with complete unanimity by the Board of Guardians (as a compliment to their excellent old officer) to his son, Mr William Prosser, who succeeds him at Bwlch-y-ddwy-allt. He has seven children left to mourn a good and pious father. He was a consistent member of the Calvinistic Methodists, worshipping at Tydu Chapel near his residence, and there on Thursday last his body was solemnly borne by sorrowing relatives and large multitudes of friends, to his resting place. On his tomb may be fittingly inscribed "Here lies a[n] honest, upright, worthy man."

Mr Prosser's other claim to fame was that he was the maternal grandfather of Dr Mary Epynt Phillips who was amongst the first women in the United Kingdom to qualify as a Doctor of Medicine.

The marriage details of Dr Phillips' parents wedding at Merthyr Cynog Church on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1873 are given below.

*William Phillips, Widower and farmer of Presbely (son of William Phillips, farmer) married Elizabeth Prosser, a spinster the daughter of John Prosser of Bwlch-y-ddwyallt.*

[Background. The Office of Registrar General was established in 1837 to ensure that all births, marriages and deaths were properly registered. Below the position of Registrar General were 619 districts based loosely on the poor law unions supervised by a Superintendent Registrar. The districts were further sub-divided into districts which were in charge of a

## 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

Redesigned parish records pages for Brecon St John. New introductory pages with access to Brecon St John BT's and Struet Chapel records. [www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/index.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/index.htm)

### Transcription Project

Struet Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel Births & Baptisms 1810-1837 [updated 26 July 2016] [www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/bre-stjohn.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/parishes/bre-stjohn.htm)  
The list and map of transcribed parish records has also been updated. [Updated 26 July 2016] [www.blfhs.co.uk/transcripts-progress.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/transcripts-progress.htm)

### Monthly Meeting

Minutes of Committee Meeting held 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016 [updated] [www.blfhs.co.uk/members/docs/mins-2016-07-14.pdf](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/docs/mins-2016-07-14.pdf)

### Newsletter

Newsletter 57 (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 21 August 2016] [www.blfhs.co.uk/members/news.htm](http://www.blfhs.co.uk/members/news.htm)

### Public News Pages

[Updated 21 August 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.

Registrar who was appointed locally. Whilst the establishment of the Office of Register General did help to establish a formal record of many births it has been estimated only roughly 85% of births were in fact registered and that in rural areas this figure drops to some 50-60%. As a result it was decided in 1875 that registration would become compulsory and that in respect of births the onus would be put upon the parents to register any birth within a defined period of time. John Prosser may well have been the first Registrar for this area and on his death the position passed to his son, William. After William's resignation in 1875 we find one John Williams applying for the post. It is possible that this John Williams was the brother of Dr James Williams who was the Medical Officer for Brecon Rural Sanitary Board (which included Merthyr Cynog Parish). Dr Williams was responsible for installing a proper water supply to the villages of Merthyr Cynog, Pontfaen and Upper Chapel. He was also Mayor of Brecon during Queen Victoria's Jubilee. He died in 1896.]

To the Ex-officio and elected Guardians of the Brecknock Union

Gentlemen,

The Registrarship for the district of Merthyr Cynog having now become vacant by the resignation of Mr. William Prosser, I trust I may not be considered to have acted too dilatory *in not having canvassed you before the vacancy occurred.*

I am a native of the district, and conversant with the English and Welsh languages, and known to every resident within it.

My pursuits as a farmer I relinquished a few years ago to my son, and now have ample time on my hands to fulfil efficiently the duties of the office. If you consider me worthy to receive such a proof of your confidence, you may rely on my not abusing it.

Soliciting your vote, your interest, and your influence on my behalf,

I remain,  
Your obedient Servant,  
JOHN WILLIAMS

*Nantygwreiddyn, Merthyr Cynog  
October 18<sup>th</sup>. 1875.*

On the 14<sup>th</sup>. July 1877

Bwlchydwyallt again appears in The Brecon County Times:-

*SAD ACCIDENT – The other evening, whilst W. Summers, farm bailiff to Mr. Roger Prosser, of Bromsgrove, Worcester, but who farms Bwlchydwyallt, was returning home from Brecon in a market cart, when near Tydu chapel, the horse suddenly turned into a bye-lane, and this caused a sack of flour to fall upon Mr. Summers, thereby breaking both bones in his right leg. Dr. James Williams of Brecon was soon in prompt attendance, but the bailiff is, we hear, in a very critical condition.*



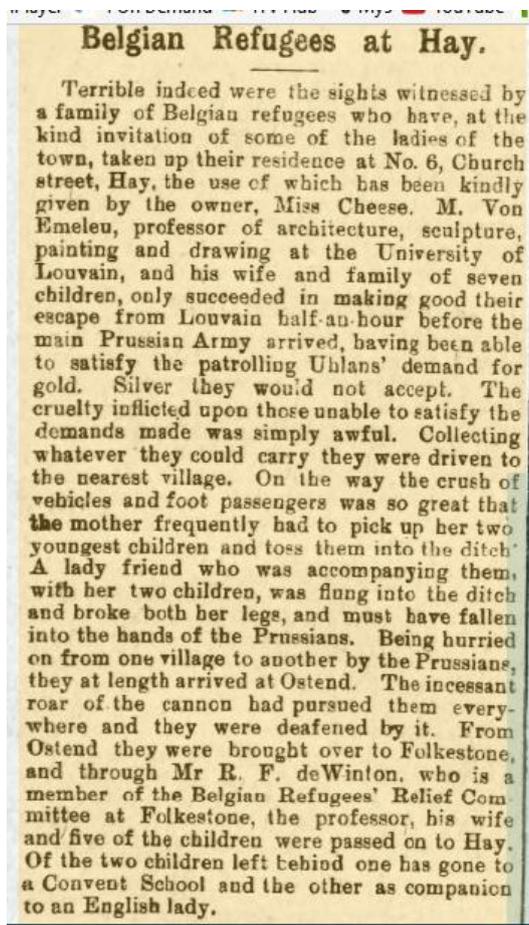
## Belgian Refugees

The article in our last newsletter produced some interesting responses from members. One, Gaynor Davies, has a postcard sent by her Great Aunt to her Aunt Eliza who was recuperating from a long illness. After enquiring about her health, the Great Aunt writes;

*"we are very busy making garments for the War. I have just finished a dozen [?]. There is a family of Belgium refugees coming to Hay this evening. They are going to live in our Street [Church Street]."*

Looking through the newspapers on the National Library of Wales site enabled us to tie the family into the following report.

The Brecon County Times Neath Gazette and General Advertiser for the Counties of Brecon Carmarthen Radnor Monmouth Glamorgan Cardigan Montgomery Hereford  
1st October 1914, page 4



Another member contacted me to tell me a little more about the elderly lady buried at Merthyr Cynog. The bungalow where she lived was apparently known at "Grey's Bungalow" and was situated a few hundred yards inside the MOD artillery range in the Yscirfechan valley west of Yscirfechan House. He recalls that when she died there was some discussion about her burial at Merthyr Cynog as, like so many of the refugees, she was a Catholic. He believes that because of this she was buried either at night time or in the early evening. It would be interesting to find out more about this.

### Remember...

Comments on this Newsletter are very welcome. These items were sent in by members. I would love to receive more and also would be very pleased to interesting 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)

### Brychan Lewis: Update on the request for help in our last newsletter

After the article in our last newsletter we were contacted by a number of relatives including the daughter of Brychan's sister who explained that after Brychan's death the family had lost touch with each-other and no-one had any knowledge of what happened to his wife and children. However she was very pleased to have the chance to receive the photograph of her uncle from Mr Luc Janssen. Mr Janssen also offered more information about Brychan telling how he became a part of their family, albeit for a short time. He tells us that his mother

*"spoke of Brychan as a quite handsome, very nice, honest and caring person. He gave them hope and helped them with practical and essential things like food (which was rationed but anyway not available), cigarettes (they were important in those days), medical supplies, he arranged a transport for my grandfather, etc. He never asked anything in return, he was happy with the shelter and warmth he got from the family. He made them feel safe and was also seen as a hero and liberator (he brought hope after 5 years of fear and hell). Keep in mind that during winter 1944 this was still a very dangerous region; Battle of the Bulge was about to start and we live at a 30 minutes drive from the German border. Although there were British soldiers in the region, War was far from over. They risked their lives on a daily basis."*

Luc goes on to comment that *"Mister Brychan Lewis was a very respected man in the family, proof is that my mother has kept his picture on a safe place for the rest of her life."*

## Free Online Resources

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

### “Blaenau Tywi: Names in the Landscape”

A bilingual pdf of over 300 pages. It contains a great deal of historical material and tithe map images. There is overlap between north Breconshire and Cardiganshire but despite this there is much of interest.

<http://cilycwm.com/historygroup/downloads/book.pdf>

### Crossing the border: cymru | 900wales



After almost three years, and having accumulated over 290,000 transcriptions [cymru | 900wales.org](http://cymru1900wales.org), the crowdsourcing website developed by the National Library of Wales, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, University of Wales and the People's Collection Wales, is growing. The success of this project, which sees online volunteers transcribing the names of places and features from historic Ordnance Survey maps, has inspired an even more ambitious venture, involving a

wider range of partner organisations. We are pleased to announce that [GB1900.org](http://GB1900.org) **will go live soon**. As the project has been so successful it is intended to expand its scope to include all place names and features from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey County Series maps to the whole of Great Britain. Users will then be able to view the landscape of Great Britain with much more clarity. The website will be tri-lingual in Welsh, English and Gaelic.

### Shipping Records

The National Library of Wales have made available transcriptions of shipping records 1856-1914. These have been transcribed by volunteers as part of the National Library of Wales volunteering programme.

At present these cover Crew accounts and Agreements (generally known as crew lists), 1856-1914, for vessels registered at the port of Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire, Wales, UK. They usually contain the full names of the crew, including apprentices, age and place of birth, previous vessel, dates of joining and leaving, in what capacity employed, together with a list of voyages with dates and sometimes details of cargoes carried. The transcriptions in the form of Excel documents can be downloaded from the site at <https://www.llgc.org.uk/index.php?id=6670>



### August Meeting Review: Guided tour of Crickhowell. 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016

Our group numbering fourteen, (which included two people not known to us, who latched on to the Tour) met at the rear of the CRiC Centre to be greeted by our guide, Clive Ralph and his assistant.

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We walked past the Clarence Hall on Beaufort Street crossed the road at the Fire Station and proceeded to the Tump, which is the Motte of Crickhowell castle. After a stiff climb to the top it gave us a superb view of the whole town and our guides pointed out the various buildings and their past uses and how the commercial centre of the town had moved over the years. After passing on to Castle Street and down Bridge Street to the Bridge itself, we walked up the New Road and entered St Edmunds Church and had a good look around. We then walked back to Beaufort Street and finally to High Street and the Market Hall where Clive answered questions from the group. After thanking Clive and fellow guide, most of us retired to a cafe for coffee and a cake, or two.

The tour lasted about one and a half hours and was enjoyed by everyone. I also made a contact because I am researching the history of Crickhowell Gas Company (as an old gas man myself) and Clive gave me some advice that has helped.

All in all a good afternoon.”

Glen Harris



## Brecknock History Week

This takes place between September 9<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> 2016 and has been organised by the Brecknock History Forum. The subject this year is *Traditions, Myths and Legends*. The opening will be at Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon, on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Events are being held across Breconshire. For more information contact Elaine Starling at 01874 711484 or [evstarling@lineone.net](mailto:evstarling@lineone.net)

## BEACON.

A new cultural hub for Breconshire which includes Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery, a new Area Library and a Tourist Information & Community facility.

This new exciting venture was launched on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at Brecon Guildhall.

The launch event was presented by Powys County Council and co-hosted with valued partners the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends and the Brecknock Art Trust in collaboration with the Brecon Town Council.

The public launch event marked the start of the Brecon Cultural Hub project in Brecon. Work starts on site in the summer of 2016 and, together with the project partners the event introduced the contractors to the community and helped to celebrate the beginning of an exciting regeneration opportunity for the town of Brecon and the surrounding community. The launch event was presented by Powys County Council.



### 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)

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## Website

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

## Next Meeting

Date/Time: Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2016. 2pm

Place: Brecon Library

Subject: Wells and Holy Water

Richard Phipps will tell us about *Keep Wales Tidy*'s new research project to record Wales's wells and holy water sources. The project is being piloted in the Brecon area. Richard Phipps welcomes local input, so come along and contribute to the research