

BRYNMAWR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWS UPDATE

May 2020

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**I hope this issue finds you all in good health and safe. 2020 has not started well for any of us with Covid 19 putting a stop to everything. But as we are all in a lock down situation it does mean plenty of time on my hands to get the News Update written and delivered and some snippets of information you may enjoy. One of the things I've been doing is culling some of my old photographs, mostly the ones taken during some of the Society's holidays abroad. I had a wonderful time remembering visits to the Mosel area in Germany, Reims and Dijon in France, an evening on the square at Brussels and a Sunday morning walk in Aachen. Sadly some photos are no longer relevant but I kept one or two just as reminders. If I had been prepared I could have bought some paint and given the whole house a new coat but at least the garden has had some T.L.C. though I am concerned I might not get seeds in time as most garden centres seem to be closed or at least the ones I've been phoning.**

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It's unlikely the society will re-convene before September which means we will have missed the March, April and May talks. I will of course try and re-book the speakers for 2021. Another loss will be our Annual Luncheon Club which this year was going to be a visit to the Nantgarw Pottery. The actual lunch was going to be at the Coleg y Cymoedd restaurant which comes highly recommended. We will try and re schedule the visit for another time though it probably won't be till 2021. As we miss the visit to Nantgarw here's some information to pick up your interest: They are also selling

some interesting jewellery using shards of old broken pottery.

Nantgarw China Works is the only surviving early 19th century porcelain works in the United Kingdom. In the years 1813-1814 and again in the period 1817-1820 the finest porcelain in the world was produced here in Wales by William Billingsley, one of the most remarkable porcelain painters and manufacturers of his time. Porcelain is a vitrified (glass-like) ceramic with a white, fine-grained body that is usually translucent, as distinguished from earthenware, which is porous, opaque, and coarser.

At Nantgarw William Billingsley perfected his porcelain recipe with the addition of a variety of ingredients known only to him. He succeeded in producing the finest porcelain ever made. Nantgarw Porcelain is unique in that it is a bone ash/frit based soft-paste porcelain body which no other porcelain can come close to in translucency or whiteness. Furthermore, the glaze on Nantgarw porcelain is the perfect complement to enamelled decoration giving the colours true vibrancy and allowing the decoration to merge into the glaze.

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**Don't forget our annual Christmas Buffet following the December meeting. The talk is "In comes I... "A history of Mumming".**

Mumming is an ancient pagan custom that was an excuse for people to have a party at Christmas! It means 'making diversion in disguise'. The tradition was that men and women would swap clothes, put on masks and go visiting their neighbours, singing, dancing or putting on a play with a silly plot. The leader or narrator of the mummers was dressed as Father Christmas. The custom of Mumming

might go back to Roman times, when people used to dress up for parties at New Year. It is thought that, in Britain it was first done on St. Thomas's day or the shortest day of the year. Different types of entertainments were done in different parts of the UK, particularly in England. In parts of Durham, Yorkshire and Devon a special sword dance was performed. There were also different names for Mumming around the UK too. In Medieval times, it had turned into an excuse for people to go begging round the houses and committing crimes. It became so bad that Henry VIII made a law saying that anyone that caught Mumming wearing a mask would be put in prison for three months! You have been warned now that so many are wearing face coverings for shopping, it's just as well Henry VIII isn't still around.

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We may have missed our Annual Luncheon Club but there's no reason as yet why our Annual Lunch cannot go ahead. We have booked the Hall Inn at Gwehelog yet again, as the saying goes "if it ain't broke..." names will be taken from our September meeting onwards and the date is October 28<sup>th</sup>. Those of you who intend driving to the venue please let our treasurer know when you give your names please. The coach as usual will be paid for by the society, the menu will be available ASAP and your choices will be expected by October 1<sup>st</sup> so the Hall Inn can be informed. Of course this all depends on the situation with travelling restrictions and gatherings because of Covid 19.

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On a personal note and some of you already know this but I have a new puppy, he's a Heinz 57 variety, some dachshund possibly, some terrier and maybe a whippet. Goodness knows what his mother was up to! His name is Twm Sion (as in Twm Sion Cati) and he and I are getting along just fine though sometimes his name is: "You flipping \*#\*#\*#\*#\*#".

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Some weeks ago those on the committee who had access to a lap top or table top computer held a virtual committee meeting instigated and led by our Chairman. It was a try out to see if we could possibly hold a committee meeting

under the current lockdown circumstances, something that could be useful especially if anything important turned up that needed to be discussed and a decision had to be made. It worked and was a success.

As our May committee meeting will not go ahead and there's a good chance the September one will also be cancelled, if the need does arise then we need to know if you are happy with us holding a virtual committee meeting. Don't worry, we do not intend holding our monthly meetings in this way.

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Lately, in case you weren't aware they have been busy demolishing the old clinic on Lower Bailey Street. This was the site of the original Drill Hall in Brynmawr before they moved to King Edward Road. The Lower Bailey Street Drill Hall hosted quite a few important events, many Jewish Wedding breakfasts were held there. According to my source, the old clinic is owned by one of the social landlords and they are planning to replace it with sheltered accommodation. One of our members posted the following: "Sad to see it go really. Some good memories and some not so good related to the building.....dentist not such a good time had there and I remember having the polio sugar lump there after waiting a long time in the queue. Also as a baby centre where lots of advice was given and gratefully received".

I expect many others have lots of memories too

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#### **Proposed visit to Scotland for a week away.**

Ann and Merryl had been busy planning and plotting the week's holiday and I'm sure those who put in their names to go are looking forward to the visit. There's still uncertainty over whether this will go ahead in September, it will depend on the situation then and restrictions (if any) on travelling. We will of course keep you up-dated.

And finally: Some of you will be interested in the following Facebook page: There are some really good photos and information so if you haven't visited then have a go.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/brynmawrnantyglo/>

My thanks to committee members who contributed to this issue. © May 2020.