



## Roath Local History Society

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**Dear R.L.H.S. Members,**

The year turns and autumn beckons, with the promise of some lovely walks. This week I went to the **Howardian Local Nature Reserve**, to forage for blackberries to go with my garden apples. The wild berries, little and good, are packed with so much more flavour than some of the super-sized, super expensive, supermarket varieties.

**Yvonne and Robert Heynes** and the family would like to thank members of the Society for their kind messages of sympathy following the death of Yvonne's mother, **Dorothy French**. They were touched by Members recalling Dorothy's support for the Society and the pleasurable times spent in her company; and were pleased that **Malcolm Ranson** was able to attend the funeral.

This month sees the last instalment of **Shirley Newberry's** Memories of World War II, as interviewed by her great-niece **Catrin Griffiths**. We have all enjoyed the child's-eye perspective of war-torn Cardiff. For many of us, it has provoked recollections of our own family stories. For instance, my diminutive granny, who lived in Shirley Road, Roath Park, having to run back and forth with basins of water, jump on a chair and douse the incendiary bomb that had come through the roof. It had landed on top of her (thankfully sturdy) Victorian mahogany wardrobe. She saved the house, but never forgave Hitler for (amongst many other things), ruining her prized fur coat!

If you haven't already seen Ted's August Blogs *The Newport Road Skeleton and Captain George Auger, the Cardiff Giant, tallest man on Earth and the Jimi Hendrix connection*, they are well worth a read - Wales Online picked up on Ted's research to run an article entitled *The Greatest Showman: The story of Cardiff's giant*. All are available via [roathlocalhistorysociety.org](http://roathlocalhistorysociety.org)

R.L.H.S. receives many e-mail enquiries including this intriguing conundrum from **Terry Hughes**, that he hopes we can help corroborate - let me know if it rings a bell:

"When I was a child living in Bristol, I spent a great deal of time with my grandmother in Cardiff, just after the war and into the 1950s. We went to Roath Park quite often. I am sure that I remember various coin operated gas points near the lake area; where a penny bought you enough gas to boil a kettle of water. I was very young, but guess the support holding the gas ring would have been about three foot tall.

Nobody I have spoken to has any recollection of this facility, which is still very clear to me. I wonder if any R.L.H.S. members are able to put my mind at rest or have I just imagined this for the past seventy years?"

R.L.H.S. Member [Alun Salisbury](#) shares his discovery and research:

### **A fascinating find in the James Pulham and Son's Victorian period rock-work at Insole Court**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** I am grateful to Claude Hitching and Valerie Christman, descendants of James Pulham and Son, for sharing their expert knowledge of James Pulham and Son and Pulhamite with me. It has given me considerable insight into the creation of the hard landscaping at Insole Court.

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For a number of years I have been researching the work of James Pulham and Son and their garden rockery creations etc. in South Wales and Insole Court in particular. This followed my reading of an article in 2005 by Claude Hitching, a James Pulham and Son descendant and researcher into the company's lost records, the Pulham legacy.

I wrote to Claude and included photographs of what I believed was Pulham rock-work at Insole Court. Claude was interested and agreed to visit sometime in the future.

### **JAMES PULHAM AND SON**

James Pulham and Son was founded by James Pulham (1793–1838) of Woodbridge in Suffolk, who was succeeded by his eldest son James (1820 - 1898) followed by two further generations of eldest sons, both also named James. The firm went out of business in 1939.

They are best remembered for the picturesque rock gardens, ferneries, follies, grottoes and water gardens etc. they constructed during the Victorian and early 20th. century years. This was the time when tourists returning home from their 'Grand Tours' of Europe sought to create natural habitats in their gardens for the ferns and Alpine plants they had collected during their travels. If natural rocks were not economically available, the Pulham craftsmen would make the rock by building up heaps of rubble and old bricks, and coating them with their own proprietary brand of cement. This soon became known as Pulhamite. The craftsmanship of the 'rock builders' lay in their ability to sculpt the surfaces to simulate the colour and texture of natural rock.

They specialised in water gardens and rock gardens - building cliffs, ravines, waterways, ferneries and grottoes - as well as manufacturing vases, urns, sundials and many other garden ornaments and furniture. By the end of the 19th century, at the height of their reputation, they were also designing gardens in Japanese, Italian and Dutch styles.

## THE GARDENS AT INSOLE COURT

The layout for the major hard landscaping at Ely Court, currently known as Insole Court, would have been carried out by James Pulham and Son.

During the late 1870s, James Harvey Insole embarked upon an extensive expansion and refurbishment of the house and gardens. Although there is no documentary evidence to identify who actually designed and constructed the rock-work and other garden features, research suggests that this work was carried out by James Pulham and Son. Pulham's were working at St Fagans Castle in 1872 – 1876, and James Harvey Insole may have seen and liked their rock garden sufficiently well to invite James Pulham to do some work at Insole Court.

The work at Insole Court took place probably between 1878 and 1880, and included rock-work in both north and south gardens, each incorporating a grotto and collections of rock and alpine plants. The north rock-work is over 30ft (9m) high and designed with a peach house, to hide the blank wall leading to the stables. Most of the south garden, leat and rock-work, was dismantled in 1953 by Cardiff City Council on safety grounds.

### NORTH GARDEN AND PEACH HOUSE



Photograph shows James Harvey Insole, Mrs Insole and companion relaxing alongside their croquet lawn, whilst in the background is the glass covered peach house and rock-work.

Photograph courtesy Glamorgan Archives.

The Peach house is located north of the house, adjacent to the present lawn and north carriage drive which joins Fairwater Road. The entrance is to the left when approaching the Stable Block and Potting Shed Café from the house. The rockery is often used by TV companies for filming, probably due to the backdrop of huge blocks of stone used in its construction. On inspection one can be forgiven for thinking the rock-work is all natural stone, hewn from a quarry, but closer inspection reveals some have layers of what appears to be folded rock, which is so typical of James Pulham's manmade Pulhamite rock. The construction and layout of the rocks is typical of the many other rock gardens, created over the decades by James Pulham dynasty throughout the UK.



James Pullham and Son's Pulhamite artificial rock. Note layers of folded rock created to simulate natural rock.



Rock-work within the Peach House with the exit arrowed



Peach House entrance, viewed from the Stables approach road and Potting Shed Café

## WORLD WAR II

By the 1930s the Insole family's fortunes had declined. This, coupled with a notice of compulsory purchase of the estate, to drive an orbital road (Western Avenue) through the grounds; meant the family had left by January 1937. A new use was then sought for the house and gardens.

With increasing signs of the Nazi and Fascist parties dominating the European political scenes, it was becoming increasingly clear that war was looming and in September 1939, war was declared.

Malcolm Phillips a Cardiff City plumber, and a good friend, was instructed in 1939 to attend Insole Court to prepare the plumbing and heating systems in readiness for the Americans. I expect most will realise that the Americans did not enter WW2 until December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. With the UK standing alone against the Germans, President Roosevelt was justifiably sympathetic to calls for support from Winston Churchill, but the US citizens were not in favour of joining what essentially was a European war. Does Mal Phillips comment imply that Insole Court was being prepared for clandestine operations between the British and American Governments perhaps?

In my opinion it would be unfair to dismiss Mal's comment as a figment of his imagination, particularly when one examines his career. Initially, an apprentice plumber before rising through the ranks to become senior lecturer at Llandaf Technical College, President South Wales Branch of the Institute of Plumbers before finally becoming the National President for the Institute of Plumbers. So not the sort of chap to make a flippant remark as 'in readiness for the Americans.' Perhaps they were over here to survey, in advance, sites suitable to accommodate their troops if needed, e.g. Rhydlafer Hospital, Rookwood House, St Michael's College, Whitchurch Common, Maindy Barracks etc. From 1942 American troops occupied the above and other sites in Cardiff and the UK. In April 1940 the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) moved from their HQ at the Law Courts to Insole Court. Police officers were also guarding all entrances to the grounds of Insole Court. During the German air raid of January 1941 three landmines fell on Llandaf. One in the Cathedral cemetery, another on St Michaels College whilst the third landed at the top of Prospect drive, that initially failed to explode but detonated by Bomb Disposal the following day. In addition, bombs fell in the following roads: Lloyds Ave, Waungron Road both near the road junction with Western Ave (WA). A further three in WA and finally Bishops Walk close to WA. Central to all this was Insole Court. It begs the question, therefore, whether Insole Court was the intended target due perhaps to the clandestine activities that may have come to the attention of German intelligence?

In February 1942 the National Fire Service applied for permission to build garages which were built on the croquet lawn in front of the house. These garages were to accommodate the AFS Auxiliary Fire Service pumps etc. with the rear garage walls terminating close to, but hiding from view the rock-work that included a grotto entrance.



July 2015 garages demolished which had been hiding the sealed grotto entrance from view  
*see arrow*

There are no records to show when the grotto entrance was sealed-up, but I suspect it may have been when the Americans, that Mal' Phillips referred to, arrived perhaps in 1939/40. The Americans were not at war and therefore would be wearing civilian clothing, thus blending in with the populace.

The open grotto, so close to the mansion would have presented an ideal hiding place for someone with malevolent intent. I suspect therefore the reason for it to be sealed, including the integral loophole! Interestingly, I understand that the grotto in the lower garden, which had three entrances, was not sealed up.

I first became aware of the sealed up grotto entrance in 2010. It had been hidden from view, not only by the garages, but by well-established foliage as well as the careful blending of building materials, used to seal the entrance and loophole.

### **CLAUDE HITCHING AND VALERIE CHRISTMAN'S VISIT**

Over the years I had maintained contact with Claude and in September 2013 I received an email informing me of his intended visit, with Valerie Christman. As agreed we met on site, I was accompanied by fellow researcher, Nevil James.

However, probing into gaps in the mortar joints revealed all were sealed, that is, apart from one, which was well hidden from view by foliage. A small aperture accepted my stick without making contact with anything.  
*(see top arrow - 2nd. photograph)*



In the photo: L to R  
 Nevil James, Valerie Christman, Claude Hitching, Alun Salisbury and a female friend of Claude and Valerie, posing within the peach house and rock-work.

During the visit I drew Valerie's attention to a sealed up entrance, see *bottom arrow*, which we investigated.



Foliage removed to reveal sealed-up entrance and loophole with camera access.

Returning the following day, armed with a compact camera, which incorporated a flash and timer, I attached the camera to a length of plastic trunking and was thus able to insert the camera into the void (see top arrow in above photo). With this arrangement I was able to photograph the internal walls, floor, and ceiling of what turned out to be a grotto.

The internal dimension of the grotto are approximately 11ft W x 8ft L x 7ft H or 3m.40cm W x 2m.40cm L x 2m.14cm H.

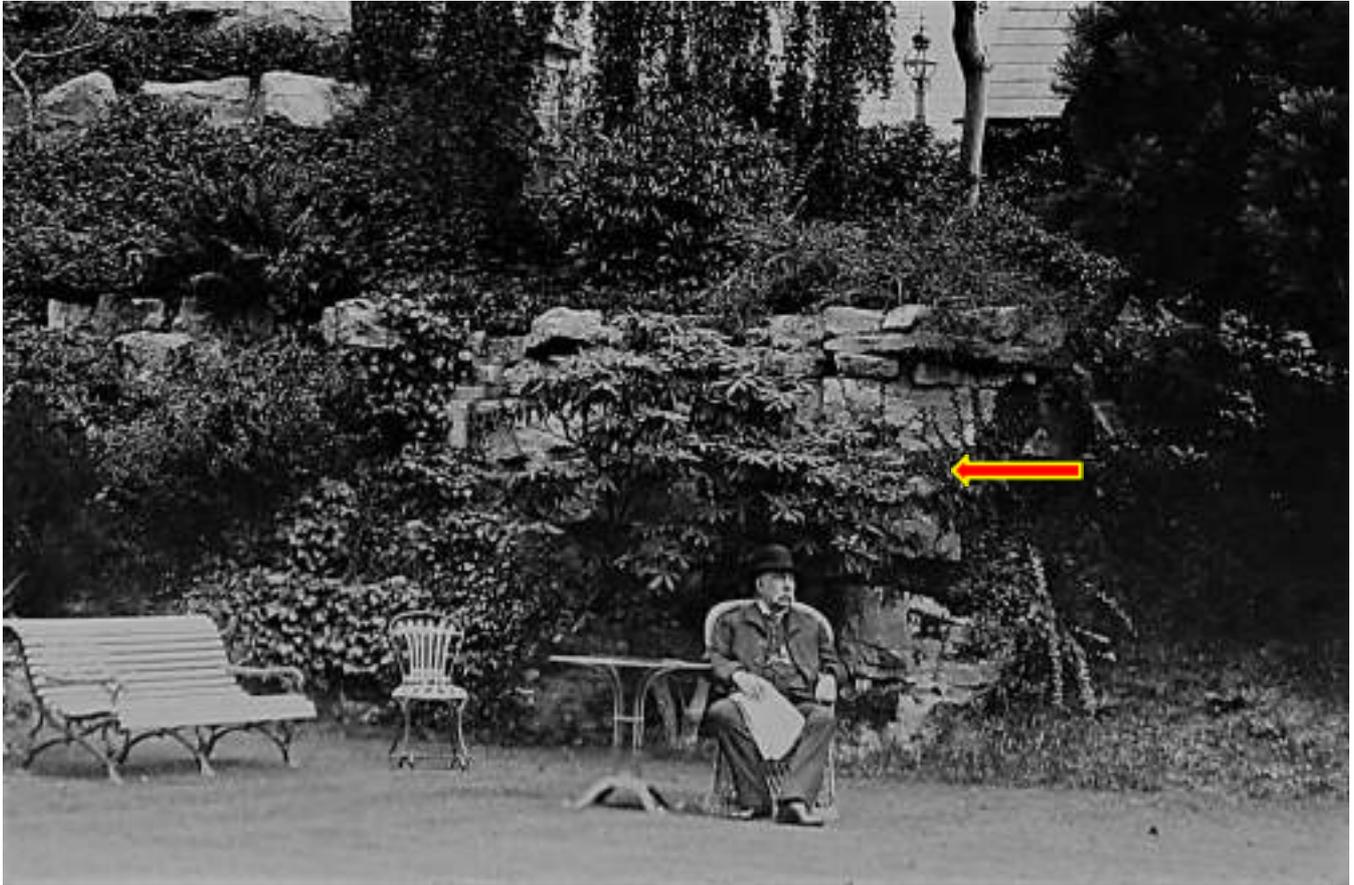
I was amazed what the photographs revealed; the internal walls were constructed of alternating layers of what appeared to be Pulhamite and Radyr stone. Repeating the above procedure produced a montage of photographs of the internal walls, floor and ceiling, but apart from what appeared to be a rusted plant holder, and perhaps coal dust / chippings on the floor, the grotto was empty 'apart from'; one very sinister Pulhamite creation, which appears to be the head of the grotto guardian!



Insole Coat of Arms  
 Compare the Griffin's head / face with what I consider is the grotto guardian →



Did James Harvey Insole instruct the Pulham craftsmen to create this griffin head to deter his grandchildren and friends from entering? It was at this time that Gaynor Howard, alerted me to an entry in the Insole Court, Archive Research Group family Time Line. The entry was dated 1900 and was for a loophole to be cut into the grotto rock-work. This was exciting, for I had used a small aperture in this loophole to gain entry with my camera. The loophole is on a south/east elevation, thus allowing morning and early afternoon sunlight to illuminate the internal walls of the grotto.



James Harvey Insole sitting directly in front of the open entrance to his well-hidden grotto. Arrow indicates position of the later south/east loophole, inserted in 1900. Photograph courtesy Glamorgan Archives



Rockery with foliage removed exposing loophole, with camera access, arrowed.



Camera access is greatly reduced in size. Maximum measurement: 3 x 2 inches (75 x 50mm).



Sealed-up 'V' shaped loophole-red lines inserted in 1900 to provide light into grotto.



Selfie, with camera secured to plastic trunking, showing internal loophole and access. By attaching a piece of string to the camera I was able to turn it to almost any position I wanted to photograph.



Wall opposite loophole constructed of Radyr and natural rock and Pulhamite man-made rock.



Top rock. Note folded layers of rock, arrowed. Typical Pulhamite.



Rusting remains of perhaps a plant holder.



Ceiling and wall opposite loophole.



Two internal views of sealed-up entrance.

It was very exciting discovering this grotto, for there are no records to show of its existence. It was even more exciting when I viewed my first internal photograph and saw the wonderful coloured rock-work, that was probably last seen almost 80 years ago. For a fleeting moment I felt what Lord Caernarfon must have experienced when he found the tomb of Tutankhamen, but then back to reality, I was at Insole Court.

At the outset of WW2 the mansion was occupied by various organisations. The authorities found it necessary, therefore, for police to be on duty at all entrances to the grounds of Insole Court at this time.

NB. I wish to stress that there are no records to show that the Americans were present at insole Court, but like any clandestine operation, they seldom if ever are. Given the facts, this is my interpretation of Malcolm Phillips comment.

It's seven years, September 2013, since I discovered the grotto, but in spite of drawing its presence to various organisations, with my Power Point presentation, it remains sealed-up. This is rather disappointing for I believe it has an interesting history and it would make a rather nice feature for visitors to see and enter.

# BEN CHILDS' ROATH CALENDAR 2021

FEATURING 12 OF HIS ORIGINAL ART PHOTOGRAPHY IMAGES ALL SHOT IN ROATH

*Roath 2021*



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February



March



April



May



June



July



August



September



October



November



December

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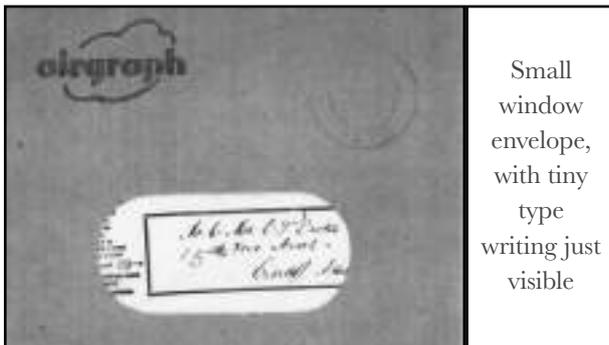
**(OR ARRANGE TO BRING CASH TO MY HOUSE) AND I'LL SORT IT OUT FOR YOU:**

**ELIZABETH MORGAN,  
FLORA CORNER, 1, COLCHESTER AVENUE,  
PEN-Y-LAN,  
CARDIFF. CF23 9BN**

## Shirley Newberry's Memories of World War II

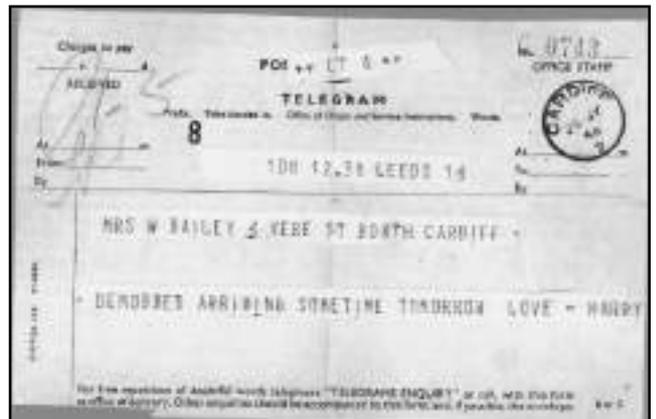
interviewed by her great-niece Catrin Griffiths

**Shirley:** There was a **postal service**, thanks to the **Royal Air Force**, between families at home and the forces. All you wanted to say had to fit on one small piece of paper, then it went into a really small envelope, with a window in it for the name and address.



Small window envelope, with tiny type writing just visible

The men were not allowed to seal the envelopes, a censor read everything, just in case there was any information that might give away our plans, if the Germans captured the sacks of mail.



The quickest form of postal delivery was a telegram, containing brief, essential information



A Christmas greeting to my friend and her sister from their cousin who was fighting in Egypt



Christmas Greeting from India, December 1945 and Victor still hasn't been demobbed

When we started this record of my WWII memories, I said I remembered the first day and the last - there were actually two last days! One in May, 1945 and one in August, 1945. In May, Hitler died and Germany surrendered, so there was great rejoicing and the church bells rang again. (They had been silent all through the war because they were to be a signal that the Germans had invaded. Many streets made bonfires in the road and instead of Guy Fawkes on top, they had Adolf Hitler.



Then the last, last day came when Japan surrendered. Time for a street party. Table and chairs were set up in the road, flags were hung out of windows, mothers each made a few sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, maybe a jelly as well, until a feast was spread. A piano appeared out of one house, a gramophone from another. There was music, party games, races and a Fancy Dress Parade. I'd just been Mustardseed in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in my last term in Junior School, so I wore my muslin fairy dress and wings.

So we had a grand celebration. The men who had survived the war came home over the next few months - bringing presents! I had a beautifully carved ivory necklace from Burma. (Now, we don't want elephants killed for their ivory tusks, but no one had thought it was wrong then). From Egypt I had a lovely shoulder bag with a picture of camels going past the pyramids on the front. From Holland there was a little wooden windmill with sails that went round. From Ireland, where a cousin had gone after coming back from Egypt, I had a pretty needle case with a little Irish cottage on it. My father had made lots of wooden toys that I'd had for various

birthdays and Christmases, then he made me a bookcase when he came home. I was pleased with all my presents, but not everyone was so lucky, there were so many children who had no presents and worse still - no father.

I was brought up knowing that people had died fighting our enemies so that I - and all my generation- could live in peace and carry on making the world a better place. I'm not sure that we have done that.

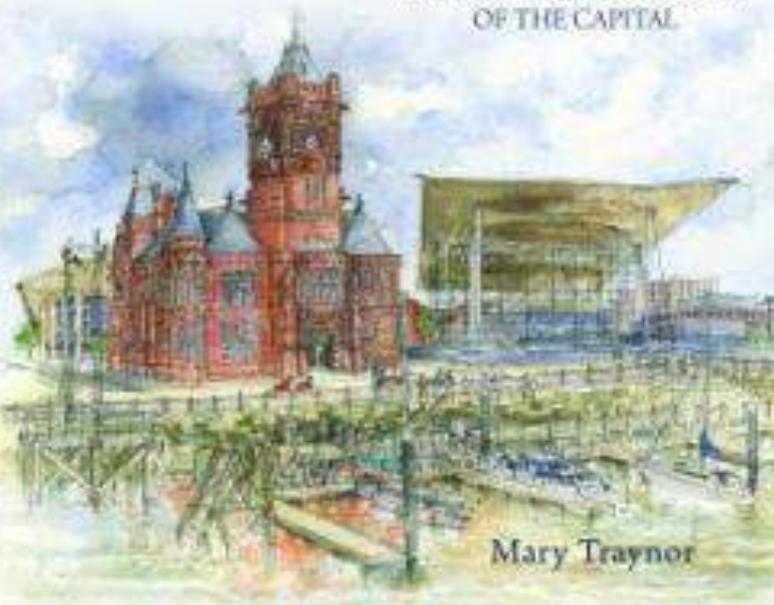
When I was older, I met people of my age group who had lived in occupied countries. They had all the rationing and the air raids plus having the German or Japanese army in their midst. Their fear was continuous. Even the ordinary Germans feared the Gestapo. My German friend lived on a farm near Cologne which became a battlefield as the Germans retreated. They hid in a ditch and saw their house shot to pieces. My French friend lived in a city. Their garden was turned over to vegetables and they kept rabbits on a grand scale for meat. Jean-Claud's mother used the rabbits skins to make warm jackets, hats and mittens. His father kept 7 guard dogs - each called Raq - to stop people stealing the fruit, vegetables and rabbits. Tomislav from Yugoslavia - now Croatia - also had Germans making life difficult and Kim Singapore was afraid of the Japanese soldiers. Their rationing was very tough. Even the water was rationed. It came on only irregularly and then not for very long. Think how much water we use each day - and they had seven children to feed and keep clean! My Austrian Jewish friend left Austria before Hitler started putting Jewish people into concentration camps, but many of her family were exterminated. It all made me think we had had a comparatively easy time of it.

I'm sure this must be enough of my memories. I hope Catrin, you will look after this and show it to your children and grandchildren. I also hope that none of them will ever come to you and ask, "What do you remember about World War III?".



# Creating Cardiff

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Cheques for **£8.95** should be made  
payable to **“Mary Traynor”**

Mary was most pleased with the interest shown in her work and new book and had the bonus of reconnecting with some old friends. It also tickled her to be told how copies were destined for expat family and friends - the world over!

Do please keep the E-Newsletter contributions flowing in - I have nothing up my sleeve for October and my Wales Official Tourist Guide, S.E. Wales Green Badge course is due to recommence in early September; with the four final exams before December - crikey! I need your help!

Wishing everyone well,

**Elizabeth Morgan.**

**R.L.H.S. Honorary Secretary.**

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