



Roath Local History Society

Bringing History to Your Doorstep - since 1978

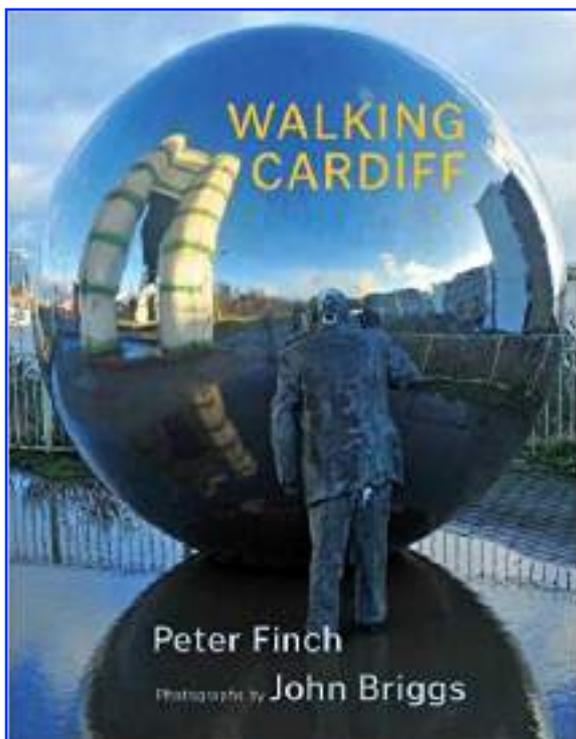


August, 2021

Dear R.L.H.S. Members,

Here we are at the start of the silly season, a time for putting our cares aside, having some holiday fun and looking forward to new routines starting in September. While this remains the aim of R.L.H.S., this year things aren't quite so straightforward. By now, I have usually designed next season's programme, had it printed, and with the help of a dedicated band of Committee *posties*, am busy distributing it. This time, everything is on hold, whilst simultaneously being subject to negotiation. The Speakers and content has been arranged by **Alan Knight** and ensures that should it remain impractical to return to meeting in person, the lectures can be delivered by Zoom. However, there is further doubt around the availability of venues, dates and times. Until the situation becomes clear, we cannot go to the expense of publishing a programme, that may prove impossible to deliver. Therefore, bear with us, your **Membership Renewal Form** and exciting new **Lecture Programme**, will be coming, but is likely to arrive, after the August Bank Holiday.

Our July **Programme of Historic Walks & Visits** has proved extremely popular; with our desire for sunny, summery afternoons actually coinciding with a period of amber weather warnings, of extreme heat. I believe *be careful for what you wish, lest it comes true*, originated in a collection of morality tales, known as Aesop's Fables!



Our programme got off to a great start with **Peter Finch's** *Walk in the Park*. It was great to meet up in person with old friends, and also welcome some of the 16 new members who have joined us during this year of Lockdown. Peter not only informs, but entertains, with his unique spin as a Cardiff commentator. His stories range through personal memories, history, personalities and quirky facts. Of course, Peter is a writer and poet and at some stops regaled us with both poetry and prose. Notably, when we passed Ty-Draw Place, he mused on the house he had known so well, growing up. The front door, painted in the same familiar green, now opening onto other lives.

At the end of our leisurely walk, he drew our attention to his latest book, *Walking Cardiff*, a collaboration with photographer, **John Briggs**, from which some of the things he had been pondering and reflecting upon, were drawn.



At **Insole Court**, we were lucky to have the services of **Alun Salisbury**, a long-standing, enthusiastic supporter of the project. Inside the house, Alun was able to bring specialist insight to the house structure, development and workings, such as the gas lighting.

Outside, Alun again proved a font of knowledge. Using his engineering background, to carry out archeological detective work; he has uncovered how the estate, grounds, garden and lily pond were laid out and irrigated.

Another fashionable feature was the substantial use of man-made, *Pulhamite* anthropic rock, invented by **James Pulham** (1820 - 1898). Many examples of which are to found around the garden. These are clearly appreciated today, judging by the many young children clambering over them! Little do they suspect, that the rocks and caves they are climbing, are artificial constructions, containing a secret grotto! The gardens are included on the Welsh Register of Historic Gardens as Grade 2*

Pulham also patented a formula for cement, which could be moulded and worked, to imitate the colour and texture of natural materials, such as sandstone. These were used for decorative garden features, such as statues and also, the hunting plaques on the outside of the house.



One of the medieval-style hunting scenes that carry the theme from the inside, to the outside of the house. This one depicts a pair of otters, about to enjoy freshly caught salmon.

We also experienced **This House is a Stage**. A walk-through audio drama bringing the history of Insole Court to life. It creatively tells the story of successive generations of the Insole family, in the place they lived, in the very rooms various characters inhabited, when the events of their life unfurled. The rise and the fall of the Insole family, intrinsically mirrors the industrial history of South Wales. If you weren't able to join us this time, I strongly advise you make a private visit. It is £5.00 well and enjoyably spent and the ticket price helps fund the upkeep and future restoration of an important local asset.



Cathays Cemetery opened in **1859**, laid out as a pleasant place for recreation, quiet reflection and self-improvement. Our visit coincided with the first of the really hot days; undeterred, **R.L.H.S Members** turned out in force. We were welcomed and looked after by three guides, **Carmel Thomas** from **Bereavement Services**, with **John Farnhill** and **Gordon Hindess**, from the **Friends of Cathays Cemetery**.

To ensure all could hear, while gathering socially distanced; our party was divided into two, with the tour conducted from opposite ends. We were told about the Chapels and their ongoing restoration. As you look at them, the left chapel served the **Nonconformist** community, and the right, the **Episcopalians**; with the burials grounds similarly defined. Sadly, the **Roman Catholic** Chapel, became ruinous and was demolished in 1980's.



We noted the variety of monuments, their symbolism and even changing fashions. In the 1960's *Lawn Cemeteries* became popular. Many statues and kerbs were cleared away, with headstones arranged in easy to mow, regimented, back-to-back rows. Unbelievably, no photographic record was made of either the appearance or inscriptions. One advantage we benefit from today, are the specially chosen trees and shrubs that were planted.

On the day, because of on-going covid restrictions, the decision was taken not to open up the chapel complex. This left many of you disappointed at not being able to browse and purchase publications. Please look at the Friends website, where you will find everything is available to be purchased online:

<http://cathayscemetery.coffeecup.com/index.html>

Also, look out for the **Heritage Open Doors** event in September, when it is hoped the Chapels will again be accessible.



Gathering outside Cardiff Castle

Initially, **Geraint Denison-Kurg's** walk *Plus ça change: Traces of Old Cardiff*, attracted over 40 subscribers; but as the intense heatwave wore on, understandably, almost half the number had to withdraw. Nonetheless, 25 of us, slathered in suncream and wearing silly hats, enjoyed an intriguing stroll around the boundary of Cardiff's old walled town; as shown in **John Speed's** famous map of **1610**. In advance of the walk, Geraint circulated a booklet containing images of what might have been, or once had stood.

Geraint's students on St. Mary's Street, socially distanced and attentively following his commentary, while looking at the visuals.

In the background, is a rare survivor - one of the grand town houses belonging to the gentry. Now home to Greggs and a Tattoo Parlour, this house once belonged to the **Mathew** family, of **Radyr Court**.



Jones Court, Womanby Street, the only courtyard still in existence. Built in the 1830's, by the **2nd Marquis of Bute** to house the Irish labourers he employed for the construction of **Bute West Dock**. Originally, one-up-one-down, with no water supply or drainage. As Cardiff boomed, they soon became vastly over used; with the whole area subsequently becoming a breeding ground for cholera.

GREAT NEWS! Geraint has kindly agreed to re-run the walk at a cooler time:

Thursday, 2nd September

meeting outside the main entrance to **Cardiff Castle** at **2.30**

If you wish to attend, please register by

 E-mail: roathhistory@gmail.com or  Ring: **029 2048 2658**



Roll call outside the south porch of **St. Margaret's Parish Church**, prior to being warmly welcomed by **Revd Canon Stewart Lisk**. **Jean Rose** then ably guided us in a clockwise direction around the outside of the church - *never withershins!*

The **3rd Marquess of Bute** commissioned Llandaf architect, **John Prichard** to take over the design of the church (1870), from his estate architect, **Alexander Roos**. Later, Prichard also redesigned the **Bute mausoleum** (Grade I listed).



Originally, the church was intended to have a crossing tower with a spire and to facilitate this, four massive internal columns were constructed.

Eventually, in 1927, the church was completed by the addition of a War Memorial tower, designed by **John Coates Carter**



There has been a place of worship on this site since the Norman Lord **Robert Fitzhamon** (conquering **Lord of Glamorgan**), founded '**the Chapel of Raht**' around **1100**. The wider window, along with some stonework and memorials, was salvaged from the ancient church.

Recently, the original Prichard reredos has been returned to St. Margaret's. It had been taken down in 1925 to be re-erected at the daughter **Church of St Anne**, Roath, which has now sadly closed.



I was recently contacted by **Jon Roberts**, who wondered if R.L.H.S. would be interested in reading an article he'd researched, which I gladly accepted. I also took the opportunity to ask Jon what his motivation had been in researching this interesting subject, here is his reply:

*I've been interested in the history of our road, so I've researched quite a few people who have lived here, and contributed to **Ted Richard's Virtual War Memorial**. We've had several well-known people living in **Roath Court Road**, but I didn't know much about **Llewellyn Soulsby**, and could only find a few scraps of information on the web, so I thought I'd delve a bit deeper, finding bits and pieces along the way to paint a fuller picture.*

A Geordie Knight in Roath

– a profile of Sir Llewellyn Thomas Gordon Soulsby (1885 – 1966)

Despite the very Welsh-sounding first name and being born in Swansea, Llewellyn's origins were very much Geordie. He lived in Roath for a large part of his life, and from 1937 until his death in 1966 he lived at 77 Roath Court Road.



77 Roath Court Road today

But both of his parents were from the North-East, his dad, James Charlton Soulsby, a marine surveyor, being from Horsley, just outside Newcastle, and his mother, Isabella, was from Jarrow. Both of Llewellyn's older brothers were born in Jarrow, and the sojourn in Swansea, from 1885-1887 was a brief one. In 1887, when living at 2 Stacey Road, Llewellyn's mother died, when he was just 2. By 1891 the family had moved to 14 Ruthin Gardens in Cathays, and also in that year his father was reported to be gravely ill in Swansea. He clearly recovered, for in 1893 he was appointed as general manager of the Windsor Dry Dock in Cardiff.

However, just 3 years later he was to die at the Durham County Lunatic Asylum, when Llewellyn was 11 years old. Around this time Llewellyn was sent back to Jarrow to live with his aunt and uncle, and he attended school there.

By the age of 16, Llewellyn was apprenticed as a marine engineer to Palmers Shipbuilding and Iron Company in Jarrow. He worked for a while with John I Thornycroft and Co., a firm specialising in naval destroyer construction at Southampton, before returning to Jarrow for a further five years. Around this time he also spent a period working in a shipyard on the Clyde.

In 1911, in South Shields, he married Margaret Moore Dickinson, daughter of a Jarrow Alderman, butcher, farmer and shipowner. It was reported that the bride and bridegroom were ardent supporters of the suffragists and that red, green and white, the colours of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, were much in evidence at the wedding. Incidentally, Mrs Soulsby continued to work for women's rights, becoming Secretary of the Cardiff Women's Citizens Association in 1928.

In 1912, Soulsby returned to Cardiff to start his long career in the ship-repair industry, initially with Cardiff Channel Dry Docks and Pontoon Company, and in 1914 he lived at 135 Westville Road. In 1919 he went to Newport as manager of C.H. Bailey Ltd., during which time he lived at Hilltop, Fields Park Road in Newport. He returned in 1928 to Cardiff as general manager of all the works of the Channel Co. operating in Cardiff, Newport, Barry and Avonmouth, until it was amalgamated with the Mountstuart Company 3 years later.

For a while in the 1930s he lived at Highmead in St Mellons, but returned to Roath in 1937 to a recently-built house at 77 Roath Court Road. He then became general manager and eventually chairman (in 1947) of the combined enterprise, Mountstuart Dry Docks Ltd., retiring in 1961. He was also chairman of Stothert and Pitt of Bath, "cranemakers to the world", from 1946-59 (a company which met its demise at the hands of Robert Maxwell, in 1966). In 1954 he was reported as showing Emperor Haile Sellasie of Ethiopia around the Stothert and Pitt works in Bath.

Although several knighthoods were bestowed on shipping and coal barons of Cardiff, Llewellyn earned his knighthood for his work during the Second World War. In 1941, Soulsby was appointed by the Admiralty as Regional Director for merchant shipbuilding and repairs in the Bristol Channel and the north-west of England, and in recognition of his services he was knighted in 1944.

Soulsby was a member of the Silurian Masonic Lodge in Newport, a magistrate and a President of the Glamorgan Beekeeping Association. He was also an amateur sculptor and exhibited several works at exhibitions of the South Wales Arts Society from 1946 to 1950. His wife pre-deceased him in 1961. The couple had no children.

You may remember a request for information about the **Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club**, that appeared in the April E-Newsletter? I'm happy to say, **Michael Clemitson**, who lives in Brynderwen Close, and who has since joined the Society, has been researching the Club, as it was located there before the war. He has kindly agreed to share his findings with us.

Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club

Michael Clemitson

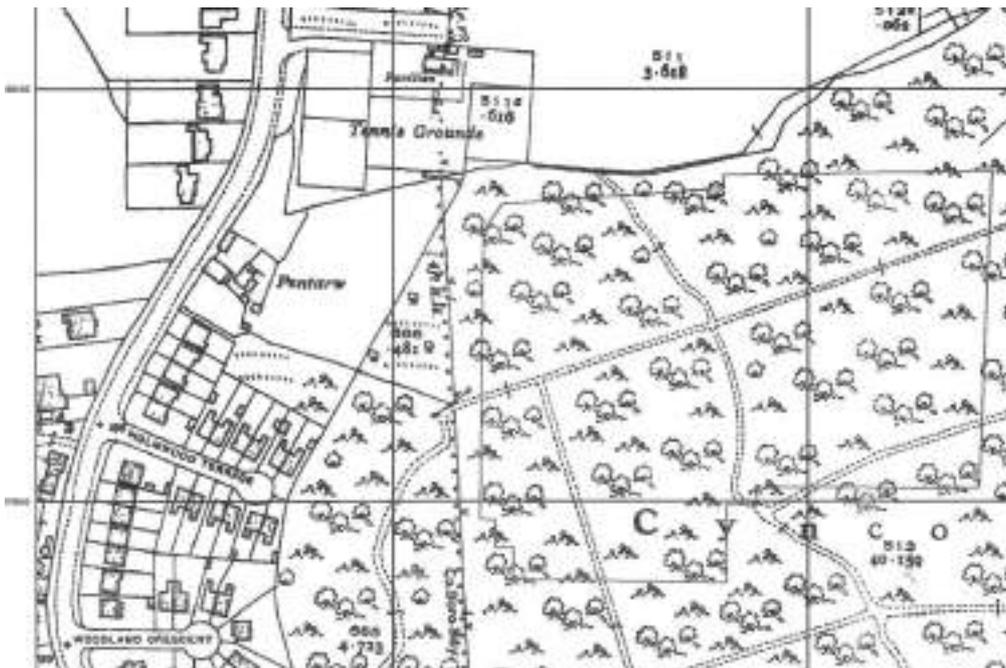
The game of tennis as we know it dates from the late 1870's¹

By the end of the 19th Century a number of private Lawn Tennis clubs were already in existence in Cardiff, followed some years later by several public courts. Pettigrew's Parks Guide² reports that public tennis courts had been opened in 1906 in Grange Gardens, Roath Park, and Victoria Park. Some of these were grass court, and some were asphalt and/or griselda³ courts.



Early beginnings After the 1st World War interest in tennis continued to grow, and an early meeting in June 1921 in Roath Church House in Waterloo Road, Penylan, resulted in the setting up of Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club.

The Western Mail of the day reported that a suitable site had been offered, and that negotiations were in progress. In October of that year, plans were submitted for a pavilion, and by 1923, Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club had been registered as a private company with a capital of £100 in £1 shares, which by 1924 had increased to £1750 in debentures.



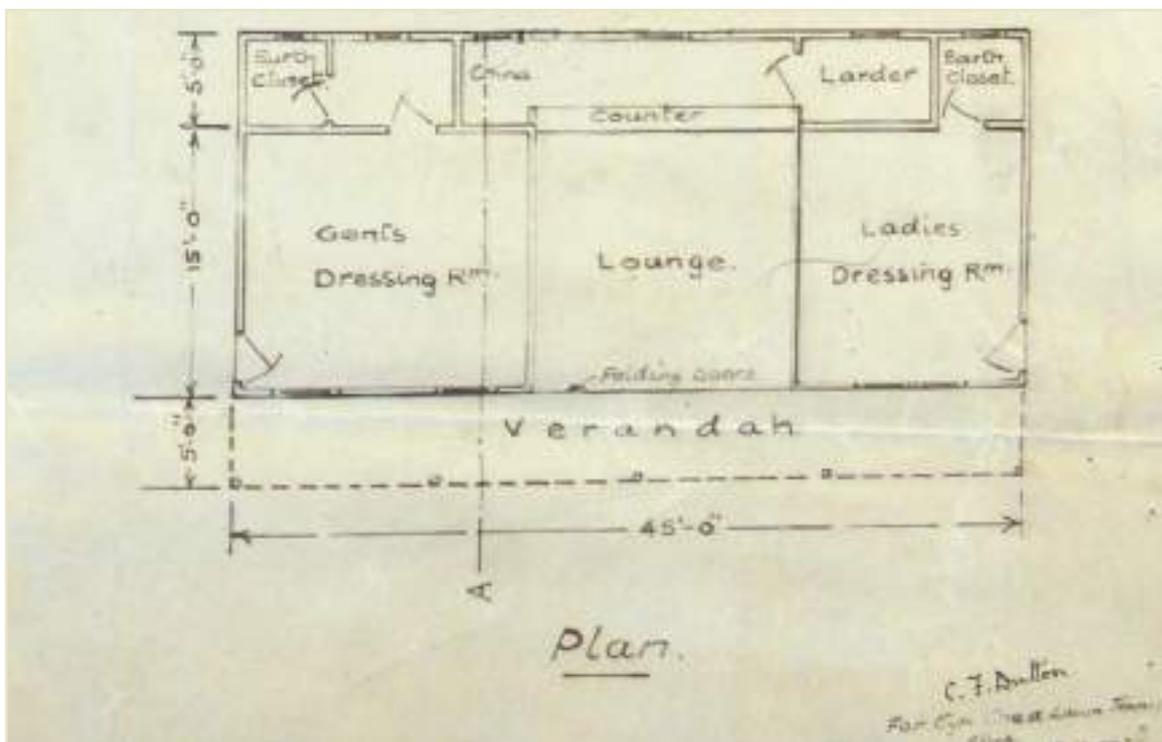
Extract from an Ordnance Survey map from 1941, showing the Tennis Club, just off Cyncoed Road.

Prominent people

Many people were involved in the creation of the Club, and one of the most prominent, was Charles Crofts Llewellyn Williams MC⁴, 1894-1952, the 'Squire of Llanrumney'. He had succeeded a few years earlier to the extensive 'Llanrumney and Roath Court' estate, which included land on the eastern side of Cyncoed Road. In 1921, when the Lawn Tennis Club was being considered, he was able to make a suitable plot of land available for its use⁵. He subsequently served as the club vice-president from 1930, and as its president from 1936.

One other official of note was one of the club's first directors, later president, Daniel (Dan) Radcliffe, 1860-1933, who lived in nearby Tal-y-Werydd, Ty Gwyn Road⁶. High Sheriff of Glamorgan 1917-18, he was a prominent businessman and ship-owner, later JP, who had played a major part in raising funds for Scott's expedition to Antarctica in 1912.

The Club with its pleasant wooded frontage, consisted of three courts, a pavilion, and car parking. The pavilion, located approximately across what is now two of the northern gardens of Brynderwen Close, was a wooden structure with changing rooms, a refreshments area, and verandah.



Internal plan of the pavilion⁷

As the Western Mail of 1925 put it, 'Few local lawn tennis clubs are more favourably placed in the matter of courts than the Cyncoed Club, Penylan, where the season will officially commence on Saturday next.

'The club, which enjoys the advantage of a magnificent site at top of Penylan Hill, is served by an excellent bus service, and with all the courts in splendid condition, a successful season is promised. The club has now been in existence for three years and it has already earned the reputation of being one of the most popular in South Wales.'

A thriving club -

Described as 'the thriving Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club' by Len Syer⁸, it was seldom out of the news, but in the best sort of way.

The Western Mail regularly reported the Club AGM, which was invariably held in Roath Church House, Penylan. By 1928 it was reported that the Men's Singles Open Championship had been won by J O Griffiths for the 4th year in succession. The Kathleen Morris Cup was instituted, open to ladies who had never won the club championship, followed in 1929 by the Dan Ratcliffe Cup for the Women's Championship.

The 1929 season was 'ushered in with an American tournament⁹ in which some brilliant play was witnessed', and in 1934 the club went from strength to strength in hosting a North Wales vs South Wales match, which South Wales won by 'six events to three'.

Many local dignitaries had pride of place in presenting the prizes at the Finals. These included, J E Emlyn-Jones, chairman of the Cardiff & Bristol Channel Shipowners' Association; R G Hill Snook, Lord Mayor; and James A Wilson OBE, Cardiff Chief Constable.

The social side of tennis was important, too, with an Annual Dance in the Royal Hotel, often with over 100 guests. And romance blossomed; at the 1937 AGM, H Kenneth Jones, Honorary Secretary of some years, and a council member of the Welsh Lawn Tennis Association, and his fiancée, Freda Block, also from the club, were presented with a grandmother clock, on account of their forthcoming marriage.

By 1938 a further cup had been added, the S Lewis Cup for Men's Singles, and in 1939 a Boys Championship was also added to the fixture lists.

War time

But sadly storm clouds were on the horizon. Following the outbreak of war, the site was requisitioned by the War Office, where it was used as a staging area for an anti-aircraft unit, part of the 3rd Anti-Aircraft Group.

An air raid shelter was added to the Club Pavilion, and four, later six, emplacements were constructed, placed in an arc with a central command post. This was a standard design, with most likely 3.7" guns, and located in the area which is now the adjacent Springwood common. As the war progressed, the on-site strength increased to over 100 personnel, and supporting accommodation was erected.

Dissolution

At the end of hostilities, aerial photographs show that the pavilion had disappeared, but the remains of the camp were still there. However the site was not to be relinquished by the War Office for a further 8 years, until May 1953. With no prospect of an early return, and with their numbers perhaps depleted by the war, the Club was no longer viable, and the company, the Cyncoed Lawn Tennis Club Ltd, was formally wound up in January 1949. The land was subsequently sold for housing, becoming Brynderwen Close in the 1960s.

And the archaeological evidence ?

Little enough, but :

- One summer in the 1980s, the late Dr Peter Winterburn, who had formerly lived in Brynderwen Close, recounted how he had been digging in his garden to try and improve its drainage, as there was always one area of grass that never drained properly... After going down about a foot, he came across a large stretch of concrete which extended across most of the width of his garden. He surmised that it was a remnant of the Anti-Aircraft site, though it now seems based on the position of his property, that it was the concrete foundations for the Pavilion, and

- Spring 2000, digging a hole for a cherry tree by his rear wall, the author encountered a thin layer of concrete, which he had to break up. Wedged under the concrete was a small bifurcated threaded stay, 5 inches in length, now heavily rusted.

What could it be ? As his rear garden wall aligned exactly with the eastern edge of court No 3, this must have been the original stay, used to tension the net on the court.



Acknowledgements

Thanks - to the staff of Cathays Library for dealing with my numerous enquiries, and supplying the extract from the Pettigrew Parks Guide; to Jonathan Berry from CADW for details of the AA site; and most especially to Anne Bell, retired librarian & local historian, who expertly found numerous newspaper archive references to the Club.

Extracts from Western Mail by kind permission of the British Newspaper Archive

Extract from Pavilion planning submission by kind permission of Glamorgan Archives

Extract from the 1941 OS Map by kind permission Ordnance Survey

¹ A.A. Pettigrew: The Public Parks and Recreation Grounds of Cardiff. An unpublished account of the history of Cardiff's parks in six volumes, available for reference in the Cardiff Library Local Studies Collection.

² A.A. Pettigrew – ibid.

³ A propriety compacted gravel compound manufactured by En Tour Cas

⁴ Captain Charles Crofts Llewellyn Williams, commissioned 25 February 1916, received a Military Cross during the war 'for brilliant and skilful leadership. On 9th November, 1918, east of Solre-le-Chateau, when in command of a half squadron sent forward to pursue the retiring enemy and gain touch with his rear guards, he pushed forward with the utmost gallantry, despite the fact that both his flanks were exposed and a considerable amount of machine-gun fire was still coming from them. He did most successful work.'

- London Gazette, 4 October 1919.

⁵ Likewise in 1919 when the building of a church to serve Cyncoed was being discussed, it was announced that Williams had offered a freehold site on Cyncoed Road, the present All Saints church, whose foundation stone was laid by him in 1922 - 'The History of All Saints' Church in the Rectorial Benefice of Cyncoed', a commemorative booklet produced for the extension to All Saints Church - 1991, L F Syer, lately churchwarden, All Saints Cyncoed.

⁶ Demolished in the late 1960s or early 1970. The remains of the entrance gate piers can still be found, as well as the original boundary walls. - 'Lost Houses of Cardiff', Matthew Williams, 2020

⁷ Glamorgan Archives reference : RDC-S-2-1921-115_Cyncoed Tennis Club

⁸ L F Syer, ibid.

⁹ 'An American tournament is a round robin mixed doubles competition in which participants are initially paired at random. Timed rounds are played on a rotational basis and there are small prizes for the players who win the most games overall as well as the runners up. Anyone can play in an American tournament irrespective of the playing standard.' - www.sydenham-tennis-squash-croquet-club.co.uk/what-is-an-american-tournament/

¹⁰ The London Gazette, 28 January 1949

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Documentary about Wales during World War Two

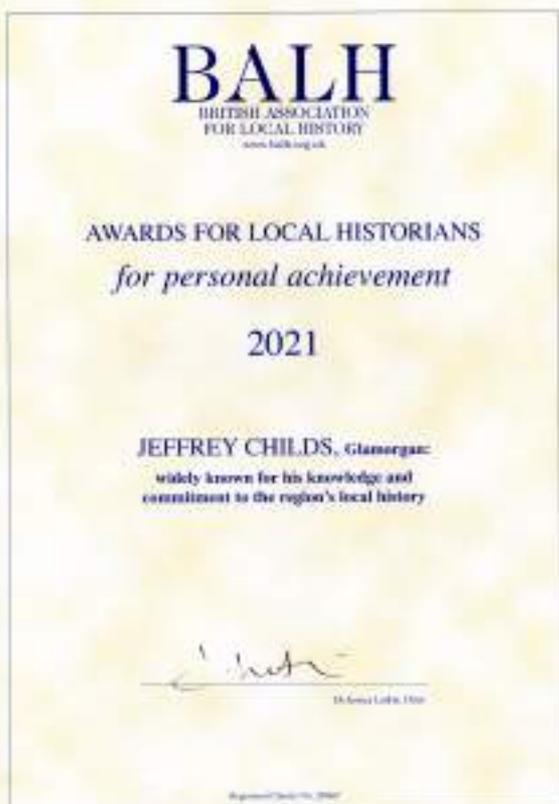
R.L.H.S. has been contacted by **Colin Davies** from **Wildflame**, a production company based in Cardiff. He is interested in finding out about Cardiff and specifically the role of Cardiff Bay in the run up to D-day. He asks "Is there anybody in the Society who can talk about this, with personal knowledge? I know its a long shot to find anybody who is alive who remembers it, but that would be a a great bonus. We are also interested in family memories and finding photographs".

Colind@wildflameproductions.com

Mobile: 07753639229

JEFF CHILDS scores a hat-trick!

- three certificates for historical merit awarded in one year



The second award Jeff has recently been given, namely:

Honorary Branch Fellowship of the Historical Association Swansea Branch

‘in recognition of his significant contribution to the study and appreciation of history in south-west Wales’.

The award was effective from 1 March 2021, the ceremony taking place on 15 July.

Of course, we too are waiting to honour

Jeff Childs and **Martin Sheldon**

with the presentation of

R.L.H.S. Honorary Life Member Certificates.

Hopefully, we will be able to do this live at September’s AGM.

Message from our Chair

It is mid-July and we continue to find ourselves in uncertain times with ever changing rules and guidelines. Having said that I'm sure you are all looking forward to visiting your favourite nightclub in the not too distant future. Our Summer programme of visits is underway and the sun shining. It's great to see our members not only enjoying the history but also each other's company again after such a long break. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in making these trips possible.

We certainly hope to resume our Lecture programme in person in September but need to ensure we can comply with the regulations/guidelines and complete the necessary risk assessments. A full programme of speakers has been organised. This will be distributed to members shortly. The first meeting in September will include an overdue AGM.

Members will be asked to renew their membership in August after a break of a year. We have been fortunate that our funds have enabled us to continue without income in the past calendar year despite continued expenditure in areas such as the website, printing, stationary, insurance etc.

Thank you for your continued loyalty.

Ted Richards

It was lovely seeing so many of you in person this July and I look forward to normal service being resumed a.s.a.p.

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

Elizabeth Morgan.

R.L.H.S. Honorary Secretary.

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