



E-NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2021

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EDITOR'S WELCOME



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With Christmas nearly upon us, and the weather decidedly arctic, it's the time of year to light cheering fires in our drawing rooms, deck the halls, and fend off the darkness of the season with some festive cheer! Greek letters notwithstanding, we hope to look forward to a more normal Christmas this year, with our families, friends and loved ones. However you are spending it, I wish you a very merry Christmas and a hopeful 2022.

In honour of the season, local artist David Griffiths has kindly allowed me to reproduce one of his splendid Penylan snow scenes; many of you will be familiar with David's renowned body of work as a portrait painter, and I am delighted he has allowed me to include the above, which was featured on a series of Christmas cards last year.

Our November lecture was greatly enjoyed by all, and we look forward to our December lecture. Looking beyond to 2022, it is with great delight that we will be serialising Deanne Pickstone's excellent history of Cardiff in our 2022 newsletters. As usual, I am greatly indebted and grateful to our contributors, who make editing this newsletter such a joy, and hope these contributions will keep coming!

Yuletide felicitations to you all,

Geraint Denison-Kurg
Honorary Secretary

PUT ON YOUR THINKING CAPS!

Season's Greeting to one and all!

Having said that, this month I am looking ahead to our summer events and next season's lecture programme. This year, in response to Covid, we concentrated on offering local events that took place largely out of doors and in line with the prevailing covid guidelines. They all proved very popular and the desire to actually (not virtually) socialise was palpable.

At this point, there is still uncertainty on what the situation will be like next June. For instance, will we be able to use the community mini-buses to go further afield? Also, how comfortable would people feel using them? I'm sure we could hire a large coach, that would be operated under strict, covid-safe guidelines, with steam cleaning etc. However, there would be significant costs involved, that would require enough Members signing up to make it viable. In theory, how many of you, (at a cost of say, no more than £20), would be interested in this option?

We currently have 137 paid-up Members on our Society Database, (with a further 28 yet to renew). I am inviting each one of you to let me know your personal standpoint and ideas for both our Summer 2022 Events Programme and the 2022 - 2023 Lecture Programme.

In order to build a varied programme, with something for everyone, I need to have your ideas on both the Events and places you'd like to visit; plus the Speakers and Subjects that interest you. The more ideas the merrier, as over my next three years in office, I will need to find 27 good Speakers and 18 interesting Events for us all to enjoy!

So put on your thinking caps over the Christmas holidays and let me have your brainwaves by 'phone, text, e-mail or letter!

Warmest wishes for a peaceful and happy yuletide, regards,

Elizabeth Morgan

R.L.H.S. Programme, Events & Membership Secretary

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

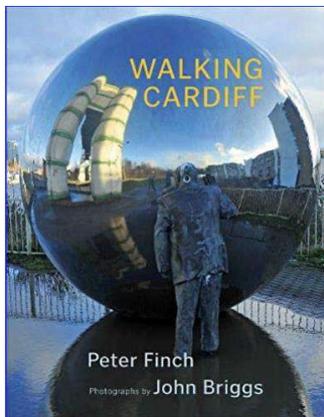
WEDNESDAY, 8th DECEMBER 2021
7:30PM (doors open at 7PM)
ST EDWARD'S MUSIC & ARTS CENTRE

CARDIFF RUGBY FANS 1999-2019
Capturing the street carnival of Match Days
with **John Briggs**, freelance photographer



All welcome! Guests £2, Annual Membership £10

We appreciate some members may prefer to join us via Zoom. If so, please let Geraint know on denison-kurg@outlook.com by Monday, 6th December and he can provide you with the link to do so.



John will be bringing along a few copies of his latest book *Walking Cardiff*, a collaboration with Peter Finch. Should you be interested, the cost is £14.99; please bring either the correct money, or a cheque made out to John Briggs.

SATURDAY, 4th DECEMBER 2021

7:30PM

LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL



CELEBRATION



Côr Bach Caerdydd

Cardiff Bach choir

Conductor/Arweinydd - Stephen Moore

Vivaldi - Gloria

John Rutter - Magnificat

with / gyda

British Sinfonietta

Soloists/Unawdwyr

Soprano - Gail Pearson

Mezzo Soprano - Olivia Gomez

Llandaff Cathedral / Eglwys Gadeiriol Llandaf

Sadwrn 4th December 2021, 7.30pm

Saturday 4ydd Rhagfyr 2021, 7.30pm

tickets / tocynnau: £17

under 16 / dan 16: free / yn rhad

myfyrwyr / students: £10

online from Eventbrite - wrth y drws / on the door

www.cardiffbachchoir.org.uk

Cardiff Bach Choir is a registered charity (no. 1115503)

Covid restrictions apply, and patrons must wear masks (unless exempt) when moving around the Cathedral.
Please do not attend if you have any Covid symptoms or have tested positive in the previous 10 days.

DOES ANYONE REMEMBER...?



Our website manager, **Ted Richards**, recently snapped this revealed shop front on City Road.

Honorary life member **Malcolm Ranson** found out the following:

Percy Newbury had a fruiterers shop here in 1927. He was preceded by the Daffodil Manufacturing Co, wholesale blouse and jumper manufacturers from 1922 to 1924 and succeeded by the Home and Colonial stores from 1929 to 1961.

Source WMCD.

Does anyone remember any of these stores to add some more depth to the story? With so many premises being refurbished at the moment, a great deal of historical information can often be gleaned from what's uncovered. If you spot anything similar, please do send them in!

THE TWO EVILS OF ROATH OF 1875 AND THEIR REMEDIES

Jon Roberts

An editorial appeared in The Cardiff Times in June 1875, drawing readers' attention to the fact that the pretty suburb of Roath, whilst healthy and prospering, was otherwise dull. This dullness could, apparently, be judged by the revelation of the two evils which beset the district.

On reading of these evils, my mind jumped back to my somewhat rusty knowledge of social history, to speculate on what evils might be foremost in the minds of the Victorian reader of The Cardiff Times. Pauperism? Drink? Fallen women? Trade unionism? Anarchism? Even yr iaith Gymraeg?



Fear not, none of these things apparently stood out as besmirching the good character of the district. No, the first of the two evils was the delinquent practice of crowds of boys throwing stones, to the discomfort of the targets of these "young banditti", the luckless householder or carriage passenger. How widespread was this aberrant sport we are not told, but the remedy was clear - it must be put down by the direct application of

the birch. Perhaps meting out this corporal punishment achieved the required result, as I can find no further reference to this menace of the Roath citizenry.

The second of the two evils was the propensity of the inhabitants of Roath to keep animals, specifically dogs, cats, birds and poultry. The objection was not so much the keeping of these creatures as such, but doing so in unsanitary conditions, it being claimed that the rear yards of the dwellings were of an insufficient size to ensure that hygiene could be maintained. The newspaper called on Local Boards to forbid landowners to build new houses where "dwellings are huddled together in a manner which prevents ventilation and every privacy". The editorial finished with an exhortation, which is as relevant 146 years later as it was then: "The ground at the backs of houses is being gradually curtailed, and we ought to check the practice and see that the health of the working classes is not sacrificed to the desire of the landowner to pack as many human beings as possible on every square mile of earth."

I'll leave it to you to judge whether Roath has entirely rid itself of this particular scourge. However, it's perhaps reassuring that if these evils were the worst they could find, Roath was clearly as good a place to live then as it is now.

**THOMAS JOHN, WHOSE GRAVESTONE LIES IN ST. MARGARETS
CHURCHYARD
Mr and Mrs Groves**

The information on the gravestone of Thomas John and his wife, Mary, tells us the date of their deaths (although there was some uncertainty about this, if you remember) and from this we can work out that they were born Thomas in 1781 in Dinas Powys, Mary in Woodend Northampton.

We haven't yet found any information about their lives, except that Thomas John enlisted in the 43rd Regiment of Foot, a Monmouthshire regiment. A private in 1800 aged 19 he and his wife found themselves present in the Peninsular War:1808-1812 in the Battle of Corunna where General Moore was killed on 16th January 1809 and Artur Wellesley took command. The British Army of 10,000 were in retreat, overwhelmed by Napoleons 60,000 men.

At his request, General Moore was buried in an unmarked grave, trampled over by horses, to leave no mark, so that his body would not be disinterred and humiliated.

The battle of the Peninsular war continues as the English pushed Napoleon, northwards through Portugal and Spain and over the Pyrenees to Toulouse. Thomas John was wounded twice at Barajas. Mary, his wife, was with him throughout, providing food, nursing the wounded and teaching the young drummer boys and buglers how to read and write and for this she was given half pay!

Within a year at the end of this conflict they both appear at Waterloo-Thomas having risen from a Private in 1800, a Corporal in 1814, a Sergeant in August 1815, aged 34 and 32 respectively they were both present at that most brutal of battles with huge numbers killed and wounded on both sides. Thomas John was discharged three years later in 1818 at the age of 39. One can only be amazed at their survival and bravery for all those years.

There is a long gap before we have any more information. In the 1861 census Thomas John and his wife were listed as pensioners living in the Red Houses in Roath (see map), it was considered poor housing and later classed as a workhouse and then demolished in 1899

FURTHER RESEARCH by Carole Underwood

On looking into some records of Roath the surname of John is recorded for various reasons and over several years. Below are Johns recorded in the following records.

ROATH PARISH REGISTERS

In the possession of the Vicar, Rev. F.J. Beck, M.A

1. "The names of all those who gave Moneys towards the Repairing of Llandaff Church in the Year 1732."

William John 6d.

2. July 11: 1732. Rees Howell & Joan John were married.

3. January 26: 1838 Burial of Thomas John, of Penylan, Roath, 50.

Source: Parochial Records: Registers of Roath, 1731-1845, in Cardiff Records: Volume 3, ed. John Hobson Matthews (Cardiff, 1901), pp.499-506. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk.cardiff-records/vol3/pp499-506>

Below are inscriptions which have been removed.

INSCRIPTION THAT WAS IN PLACE IN ROATH CHURCHYARD

1. Thomas John; died 1859, aged 77. And family: -"Am hynny byddwch chwithau yn barod."

I believe the English translation reads "Therefore be ye also ready."

2. Thomas John, of Ty-y-Cyw in this parish; died 1847, aged 94. Also, Daniel John, of Pentwyn in the parish of Llanedern, son of the above; died 1855, aged 62. And others of the family.

3. Sergeant Thomas John, late of the 43rd Regt. "He fought under Generals Moore, and Wellington, through all the late War in the Spanish Peninsular. He was also engaged at Waterloo." Died 1864, aged 83. Also, Mary, his wife, died 1882, aged 99. She accompanied her husband through the Peninsular war as above.

NOTE:

The Burial of Charles Hill, of the 58th Regiment of Foot; died 1862, aged 85.

The Burial of Harriet, widow of Lieut.-Col Jonas Watson, late 13th Regt, died at Cardiff 1832, also their sons William Jonas Watson and Richard Watson, and daughter Harriet and Martha, widow of the said Richard Watson.

Source: www.british-history.ac.uk

A COLLECTION OF WRITTEN MEMORIALS

Below is reference of Thomas John noted in Wellington's Men Remembered, a book of soldiers who fought in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo between 1808 and 1815. These regimental memorials covered 28 countries and 150 battlefields. I have also included memorials other soldiers that may be of interest as they appeared to be linked by battles.

JOHN, THOMAS

Sergeant. 43rd (Monmouthshire) light Infantry Regiment of Foot.
Headstone: St. Margaret's Churchyard, Roath, Cardiff, Glamorgan, Wales.

TO THE MEMORY OF/ THOMAS JOHN/SERGEANT 43RD REGIMENT OF FOOT. / HE FOUGHT UNDER GENERAL MOORE/ AND WELLINGTON THROUGH ALL THE/ LATE WAR IN THE SPANISH PENINSULA. / HE WAS ALSO ENGAGED AT WATERLOO. / DIED 1864 AGED 82. / ALSO, HIS WIFE/ DIED 1864 AGED 99. / SHE ACCOMPANIED HER HUSBAND /THROUGH THE PENINSULAR WAR AS ABOVE.

Pte 17 Dec 1800. Cpl 1808. Sgt 1812.

Served in the Peninsula Oct 1808 - Jan 1809 and Jul 1809 – April 1814. Present at the retreat to Corunna, Busaco, Fuentes d'Onoro, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz (twice wounded), Vittoria, Pyrenees, and Toulouse.

Discharged 27 Dec 1818. MGS medal for Busaco, Fuentes d'onoro, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Vittoria, Pyrenees, and Toulouse. His wife Mary was with him throughout the Peninsular campaign.

Source: JANET & DAVID BROMLEY -ISBN 978 1 84884 675 3

The fact that his wife went along with him was not unusual. Officers and lower ranked officers' wives names went into a draw and if their name was drawn out, they would travel with their husband.

OTHER SOLDIERS OF INTEREST

DONOVAN, HENRY DOUGLAS, Ensign

(Northamptonshire) Regiment of Foot.

Ledger stone: St. Nicholas Churchyard, Cardiff, Glamorgan, Wales.

IN MEMORY OF / LIEUTENANT HENRY DOUGLAS DONOVAN / LATE OF HER MAJESTY'S 9TH REG'T OF FOOT / BURIED IN THIS CHURCHYARD ON THE 28TH DAY OF MAY 1863 / AGED 68 YEARS.

Ensign Tower Hamlets Militia 1811. Ensign 48th Foot 25 Aug 1813. Lt 9th Foot Feb 1817.

Volunteered for service in Spain in 1811 to drill the troops. Served in the Peninsula Jul 1813 – Mar 1814. Present at Pyrenees, San Sebastian, Nivelle and Orthes. Retired on half pay 13 Feb 1817. MGS Medal for Pyrenees, San Sebastian, Nivelle and Orthes. After he retired became agent for the first steamer between Cardiff and Bristol which became very successful. One of his sons became a Lt Colonel in the Confederate Army in the American Civil War. SOURCE: WELLINGTON'S MEN REMEMBERED -VOLUME: A TO L – PAGES 263, 495

PACKENHAM - Lieutenant General Sir HERCULES ROWLEY

43rd foot – died 8th March 1850.

Born 29th September 1781. KCB 1838.

Gartree Church Memorial – Lt. Gen. Sir Hercules Rowley Pakenham KCB, Col of 43 Light Infantry, Deputy Lt of Co Antrim, and 8 years Lt Gov of Portsmouth, commanding the SW district of England. He was 3rd son of 2nd Lord Longford and grandson of the Countess of Longford who survived her son.

Born 1781, he entered the Army 1803, in which he served with highest distinction, having been engaged at the siege and capture of Copenhagen 1807, also in the Peninsular campaigns of 1809,10,11 and 12, including the Battles of Elkadeir, Roleia, Viniera, Ponchal, Foz d'Aronca, Salincal, Busaco and Fuentes d'Onor and siege and storm of Ciudad Rodrico, 2 sieges and storm Badajoz, at the assault of which he was severely wounded. He received the Gold Medal for Busaco, Foz d'Aronca, Ciudad Rodrico and Badajoz and Silver Medal for Vimiera and 2 clasps.

He married Hon Emily Stapleton, daughter of Lord Le Despencer, by whom he left 6 sons and 3 daughters. He died suddenly at Langford Lodge on 8th March 1850.

CHRISTIAN, Lieutenant EDWARD – 43rd Foot

From Manx Worthies, 1900 – Edward Christian (b.circa 1780), probably a son of Edward Christian, of Lewaigue, and Catherine Allen, of Ballayarry, and certainly a nephew of Vicar – General Christian, was a Christian, was a Lieutenant in the 43rd Regiment, which formed part of the army intended to oppose Napoleon's threatened invasion. He fought at Copenhagen in 1807, and at Corunna, but it is not known whether he went through the Peninsular War with his regiment or not.

SOURCE: PENINSULA / WATERLOO VETERANS – Waterloo Men: <https://www.members.tripod.com/glostesters/allwat.htm>

NOTE: The French landing in Pembrokeshire in 1797 showed how unprotected the Welsh coast was, and the county was thrown on to its own resources. The French force was composed of the scorings of prisoners commanded by a renegade American general named Tate.

SOURCE: A history of Wales 1660 – 1815, page 226, E.D. Evans, University of Wales Press
ISBN 0 7083 – 0624 – 1

CONCLUSION

I give many thanks to Mr and Mrs Groves for such an interesting account of Thomas John. It seems that the more one searches, many more questions are raised. Was Thomas John related to the other Johns in the Roath area?

Did Thomas John know Edward D'Arcy, a Lieutenant in 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry Regiment of Foot who is Interred at Box tomb: Officers' Graveyard, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin, Ireland?

Edward D'Arcy served in the 43rd but was not as fortunate as Thomas John for Edward D'Arcy had both legs amputated after being severely wounded and returned home and was awarded a pension of £200.00 per annum, he went on to become Captain of Invalids at Kilmainham Hospital Dublin.

At the end of the war Thomas John and Mary settled in Roath.

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THE ELM STREET BIGAMIST
THE SAD TALE OF KATE, WILL AND SUSANNA TOO
Jon Roberts

At the beginning of 1865, 24 year-old William Trim was the model of respectability. He lived at 13 Elm Street with his 23 year-old wife, Catherine Griffiths, whom he met in June 1863. The couple married on 10 September 1864. William was thin and bespectacled and was employed as master of the Wesleyan Day School in Working Street, on a site which is now part of Queen's Arcade. But on 16 January 1865, his world came crashing down.



At the heart of the scandal – 13 Elm Street today

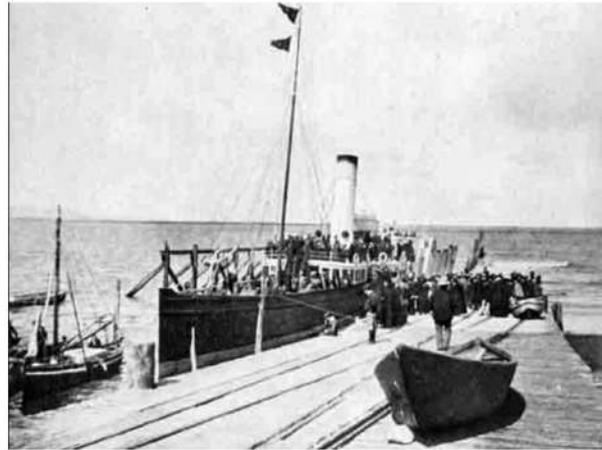
William Trim was a native of Holsworthy in Devon, where he lived prior to taking up his appointment in Cardiff. At some time, he had struck up a relationship with a local girl, Susanna Duffy. How the relationship developed, we don't know, but it is clear that William was seeing Susanna in Devon at the same time that he was courting Catherine in Cardiff. With tragic inevitability, Susanna "found herself with child". One can only guess at the correspondence between the couple, with William in Cardiff and Susanna in Devon. Around this time, whether before he knew of his impending fatherhood we don't know, William had become engaged to Catherine. Bowing to pressure

from Susanna and her family, William travelled back to Devon and married Susanna on 30 July 1864, shortly before her confinement to await the birth of her child. After staying with her for a week, he left her in the hands of her mother, and returned to Cardiff, claiming that he had no suitable home for his new wife.

Catherine came from St George's, just outside Cardiff, and her family, in blissful ignorance of the goings-on in Devon, made preparations for the joyful marriage of Will and Kate. William found himself in an invidious position; if he had left Susanna, he would have been sued for abandonment, and if he left Catherine, he would have been sued for breach of promise. In either event,

he would have lost his position as schoolmaster. Disastrously for all concerned, he chose to go ahead with wedding No. 2 on 10 September 1864, just 6 weeks after his first marriage.

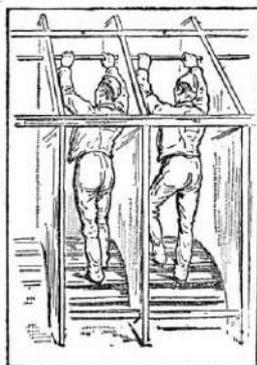
Back in Devon, the first Mrs Trim was, understandably, distressed at her husband's continual prevarication, and so in January 1865, she took her infant child, John Henry Trim, and her sister Lydia, to find out what was going on. William met Susanna and her sister from the Burnham steamer when it docked in Cardiff and took the pair to Elm Street.



The Burnham to Cardiff steamer pictured in 1908

He told Mrs Trim No 2 that his cousin was going to visit, while explaining to Mrs Trim No 1 that he shared his lodgings with a housekeeper. If the subject matter were not so serious, one would imagine the circumstances of the meeting to have elements of a Brian Rix farce (that dates me!). The quartet shared a meal together, but then William had to return to the school for afternoon classes.

Needless to say, during the course of the afternoon the true position of each of the wronged women came to light very quickly. William returned home to face the music. He could not deny the bigamy. Everyone slept at the house that night, in what must have been awkward circumstances. Mrs Trim No 1 returned to Devon next day. The next day, aware that all was undone, he ran away to Derby. On the same day Catherine went to the police to complain about the bigamous marriage. Catherine, under guidance from the police, wrote to William via a friend, declaring her love and forgiveness, and offering him the cost of the train fare to meet at Gloucester train station. William took up her offer and travelled to Gloucester, to be met, not by Catherine, but by PC Vanstone of the Glamorganshire Constabulary. William was arrested and returned to Cardiff. He was tried at the Glamorganshire Lent Assizes in Swansea on 24 March 1865 – just 9 weeks after the offence was uncovered.



William defended himself but offered no evidence to rebut the charge of bigamy. Instead, he tried to say that Catherine knew all about the first marriage and was complicit in the bigamous marriage. She denied the truth of this, but the Judge said that whether true or not, it was irrelevant to his guilt of the offence of bigamy. The jury returned an immediate verdict of guilty, and William was sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment with hard labour. A report of 1870 described hard labour in Cardiff Prison as

consisting of 9 hours a day on a treadmill, broken into periods of 15 minutes work, followed by a 5 minute break, typically grinding flour.

A particularly sad aspect of this tale is that William and Susanna's child died later the same year. Susanna divorced William in 1867 on the grounds of adultery and desertion. The divorce was unopposed and costs were awarded against William. She remarried in 1873 and died in Holsworthy in 1898, aged 53. Seemingly she had no further children. During William's trial, it emerged that Catherine was pregnant at the time of the bigamous marriage being discovered, and that she went on to have William's child. I could find no further information about Kate, William or their child. I hope they found happiness. Anyone with better genealogical research skills than mine is invited to add to this story.

As a footnote, it is perhaps relevant to reflect on how important marriage was in the Victorian era. Divorce was expensive and hard to obtain, but "living in sin" was almost regarded as unconscionable. Marriage records were only kept locally, so it was relatively easy to remarry in another part of the country without being detected. Even so, despite the risks, between 1853 and 1863, some 884 cases of bigamy were tried in English courts, possibly a small fraction of the true figure.

A TALE OF TWO CITY ARENAS

Lyn Eynon

An Opinion, reproduced, with thanks to [Cardiff Civic Society](#)

Recently Cardiff Cabinet adopted its One Planet Vision for a Carbon Neutral City by 2030. Council Leader Huw Thomas likes to claim Cardiff is playing a 'leading role' in the fight against environmental collapse. But that is not true.

Cardiff Council has yet to follow Senedd in declaring a Nature Emergency to reverse critical biodiversity loss. The One Planet Action Plan is weak, placing hope in individual action while Council itself presses on with destructive projects.

One of these is its plan to regenerate Atlantic Wharf around a new Indoor Arena. Bristol, the closest UK Core City to Cardiff, is also building an Arena. Comparing the two shows how far Cardiff is behind.

- The Bristol Arena declares sustainability will be at its heart, but the Cardiff Arena has little interest in this.
 - The Bristol Arena promises to be carbon neutral from day one, but the Cardiff Arena only talks of 'future proofing' towards net zero.
 - The Bristol Arena promises to run without fossil fuels, but the Cardiff Arena energy strategy includes gas boilers for peak loads.
 - Both Arenas will have solar panelling on the roof, but Bristol will have five times as much, with Cardiff preferring to use space for a giant advertisement.
 - Before it opens Bristol's Arena will have a new station nearby on an existing rail line, while Cardiff has only unfunded dreams for its Metro and Crossrail.
 - Bristol will repurpose a Filton hanger, but Cardiff will construct a new Arena, which requires far more embodied carbon.

Cardiff Council wants to regenerate Atlantic Wharf by demolishing all existing buildings, although the Arena can be built without this. The Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Academy of Engineers have called for a rethink of such destructive development methods. But Cardiff Council likes bulldozers.

We should not be surprised that Cardiff Council will be satisfied with an environmentally inferior Arena. Bristol declared a climate emergency ahead of Cardiff and has recognised the ecology crisis. Bristol has been recognised by the UK and the EU as a Green Capital. Bristol's One City Plan is more comprehensive and more mature than One Planet Cardiff. Bristol is not perfect. Cardiff does more recycling. But on most measures Bristol does better on climate and environment.

If Cardiff wants to play a leading role, then it has to deliver in practice not just on paper, and rethink its development plans for the city. Atlantic Wharf needs regeneration. Too much land is devoted to car parking and could be better used, for the benefit of both Cardiff Bay and the city.

But we must get this right. Cardiff Council will be Joint Applicant for the Atlantic Wharf and Arena Planning Application, which has not yet been submitted. There is still time to meet the aspirations of its One Planet Vision. Second best is not good enough. Where is our Capital Ambition?

Cardiff Civic Society exists to campaign for Cardiff's built and natural urban environment. Many of their campaigns centre on the preservation and enhancement of Cardiff's many important heritage buildings, as well as scrutinising planning policy more generally. Those members who are interested in seeing more of Cardiff Civic Society's work can visit their website, [here](#).

ASHES TO ASHES

Jon Roberts

History abounds with stories of the rich and famous, and the middle classes also often find their way into the annals, but this tale touches on a poor Roath family, living in Milton Street, off what is now City Road. The street was occupied by a large number of Irish families, and in 1865 Dr Hill, Medical Officer of the Roath Board of Health claimed that "the houses in Milton Street were overcrowded so that cleanliness and decency were set at defiance, single rooms being occupied by large families, thus making the premises hot-beds of fever". The lack of mains drainage, and the accumulation of filth were the subject of frequent complaint to the Board. A number of the occupiers of Milton Street appeared in reports of the criminal courts. Unlike many of the Victorian houses in Roath, these were demolished in 1969.

In June 1879, the Bridger family occupied 55 Milton Street, a six-room cottage, and were living in what was described in a newspaper at the time as "very reduced circumstances". Henry Bridger came from Godalming in Surrey and worked as a mason's labourer, but times had been hard, and he and his family, wife Kate and children Matthew, Martha, Frederick and Elizabeth had to resort to paupers' relief from the Cardiff Poor Law Union. Despite the general prosperity of Cardiff at this time, there were dozens of people from Roath obtaining parish relief, as a result of destitution (I imagine due to unemployment) or from infirmity.

One of the Bridger children, Martha, aged 13, was sent out to scavenge in the locality for rags, cinders or anything that could be used for fuel. She was engaged in this task at the rear of Halswell Terrace, at 19 Newport Road (now Oddfellows House), sifting through a heap of ashes, when she made the gruesome discovery of a human foot, severed just above the ankle. She took her macabre find home to her shocked parents, who instructed that it be buried in the back garden. Reflecting on the possible consequences should a body part be discovered on their premises, Martha's father exhumed the foot, and Martha was sent to replace it where it was found.

She did so, and then reported her find to the Roath Police Station. The foot was again dug up from the ashes and taken to the police station (accompanied by a crowd of curious women and children). The police concluded that the foot was that of a young woman, and that the scraps of linen attached to the foot were the remnants of a stocking. The foot was brown and shrivelled, leading the police to assume that a murder had been committed some years previously.

Further enquiries quickly allayed suspicions of foul play, for it turned out that the foot was that of an Egyptian mummy, collected by a Cardiff gentleman, who, curiously, could not account for its presence in an ash heap.



An example of a mummified foot
Credit: Mummified Egyptian foot,
probably from Memphis. Wellcome
Collection. Attribution 4.0
International (CC BY 4.0)

And so the mystery ends, but the very fact that there was an Egyptian mummy in Cardiff in private hands might be surprising. Large scale exploitation of Egyptian historical structures and artefacts had started in the early 1800s, and the finds gripped the public imagination, renewed with even greater fervour after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1925. Egyptian motifs found their way into contemporary British architecture, such as the towers of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, but there are few examples in Cardiff (a notable exception being Burges's

Arab Room in Cardiff Castle). A gentleman with means may well have visited Egypt to buy antiquaries, there being few or no controls on their export. But before we leave the subject, although it has no bearing on Roath, or even Cardiff, a newspaper article came to my attention which highlighted the casual manner in which Egyptian historical artefacts were plundered by Europeans.

In 1889, an Egyptian labourer fell into a pit in Beni Hassan, 100 miles south of Cairo, which he found to be part of a cave system in which were 180,000 embalmed bodies of cats. Ancient Egyptians revered cats as a totem of the feline god Bastet, and often embalmed and decorated their bodies as they would do with important people.



A mummified cat

These mummies were quickly offered to the receptive market, and an entrepreneur bought up 19½ tons of them, sent them to Liverpool and put them up for auction in 1890. The plan backfired, as the market was quickly saturated. The best specimens sold for 5/6d, but most were sold as a bulk lot at £3 13s 9d per ton, to be ground up into ash and used as fertiliser. An ignominious and destructive end to almost 3000 years of history.

Returning to Roath, things did not run smoothly for Martha's family. Her mother, father and brother

Frederick received a string of convictions and fines for running an illegal shebeen or drinking club at their home at 55 Milton Street - they were not the

only residents in the street convicted for the same offence. As for Martha, in 1883 she married Nathaniel Unwin, a fairground shooting gallery proprietor, from Rotherham, who lived in a hawker's van in Kings Road, Canton in Cardiff. They went on to live in caravans in Pontypridd, Abercynon and Barry Island. Nathaniel hit the newspapers just 5 years later, when one of his employees, Kate O'Brien, also of Milton St, Roath, was shot dead in a tragic shooting gallery accident – the folly of letting the public get their hands on real guns with real bullets at a funfair. Martha died in 1949, having had 9 children, 7 of whom survived.

GET IN TOUCH



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