

Friends of Tredegar House Newsletter



The Chairman and Executive Committee of the Friends wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous 2017.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN - Mrs Judith Rice

As we come to the end of another year we can all reflect on what an exciting time it has been. Membership has increased by 18 to date. Two very interesting trips to National Trust properties – Powis Castle in June and Coughton Court in September. Contractors Ellis & Co. have arrived on site and construction of the scaffolding for the roof has commenced and will be completed by mid-December. Work on the roof to replace the slates will commence in January so watch this space.

Our Tredegar Treasures event was a great success with 30 members of the Friends attending. The House were pleased to show some of the Australian collection which as some of you are aware returned to Tredegar House in late 2010. Items on show were 2 Braille Cartier watches which were specially made for Courtney, Lord Tredegar. 1 Movado watch, 1 Crucifix (belonging to Evan Morgan) who was Papal Chamberlain. Mother of Pearl personal domino set and a few other objects. I understand the National Trust have not held an event like this at Tredegar House before and were very pleased with the result.

The restoration work on the Jane Colchester painting is taking a lot longer due to the condition of the picture. It seems the most recent varnish top coat had been mixed with a very high percentage of wax to create a more matte finish to this painting. Unfortunately, this wax had over the years been attracting and trapping a large amount of dirt into the surface of the painting. But, I am pleased to advise the work is coming to the end and should be returned to the House in the not too distant future.

Our speaker at our talk in September was Mr Steven Parry-Hearn the 15 x Great-Grandson of the builder of the Tudor House, Sir John Morgan Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. Steven has been researching his family history in great length for over 5 years and what a history it is. At our talk he presented to the Friends a leather bound copy of this fascinating story which contains 555 pages. In recognition of his gift Dame Rosemary Butler one of the founder members of the Friends presented Steven with a picture of his ancestors home Tredegar House. Steven I am pleased to advise has become a member of our Society.





1725: THE RISE OF SIR WILLIAM MORGAN KB By Paul Busby

For nearly a century, high atop the cupola of Tredegar House, fluttered a flag attached to a copper ball. This finial was familiar to Octavius Morgan who described the cupola as being 'surmounted by a gilt ball and weathercock.' The flag was emblazoned with the year '1725'. A vintage year. It was the year that William Morgan (1700-1731) had been admitted into the Most Honourable Order of the Bath in a lavish ceremony at Westminster Abbey. It was also the year that his son and heir was born.

On 17 June 1725, Sir William Morgan was installed in the Order's chapel, the Henry VII Chapel in Westminster Abbey. Although the knights had a dispensation which enabled them to avoid the old medieval rituals, which involved the knight-to-be taking a bath to purify the spirit, it was nevertheless a grand occasion, heavy with ceremonial. When Sir William, wearing rich robes and carrying in his hand 'a white hat, adorned with a standing plume of feathers' had the collar of the order, which weighed some 30 ounces of gold, and was speculated to be worth £1000, placed over his shoulders, there was little doubt that the extravagant young man was a good fit for his surroundings.

Sir Robert Walpole, often referred to as the first prime minister, had used the newly found Order of the Bath as a handy tool for political patronage. It is likely that he had been keeping a keen eye on the young master of Tredegar, whose marriage into the staunchly Whig family of the Duke of Devonshire had only magnified his own impressively Whiggish credentials. Old John Morgan had been known, in South Wales, as the 'Great Whig'. His son was following in his footsteps. Walpole planned on visiting Tredegar House himself, after a stop at Chatsworth. He would have been certain of lavish hospitality.

Sir William, since coming to his estate at the age of 19, had spent conspicuously and flamboyantly. The surviving papers of his Steward, James Pratt, illustrate this very vividly. William's love of the sporting life is apparent, as he paid for a 'horse race course' in Cardiff (where his expenses for one day's racing in 1722 came to £50) and a cockpit in Newport. He obtained stables at Newmarket, under the influence perhaps of his father-in-law, the Duke of Devonshire. The services of Mr Seels, the Coachmaker, and Mr Archer, the French Puke Maker, were employed. £61.02.11 was spent on a 'Great Punch Bowl', £122 to 'Mr Garthorn' for 'silver items'; £78.15.00 to Mr. John Wootton, the artist, for at least six paintings of horses (one of which, 'Lamprey' still hangs in the Brown Room) and an eye-watering £859.16.00 went on upholstery for the increasingly fashionable interiors of Tredegar House.

Sir William was a rising figure in society. He became known as one of 'Bob's Boys,' those aspiring young politicians that drifted around the powerful centre of gravity that was Walpole. He was also appointed an Aide de Camp to the king, and there was even talk that Sir William would raise his own military regiment. The expense of which would have been vast. Rumours of a peerage swirled around Tredegar, as they had when William's father, John Morgan had been alive. Would he have been created a 'Lord Tredegar', or were the whispers at the time correct, and 'Earl of Brecknock' was the favoured title? We shall never know because Sir William died in 1731, aged only 30, before any such title could be granted.

The copper ball finial with 1725 flag was removed with the cupola by Sir Charles Morgan in the early 19th century. It is uncertain what happened to it. What is certain is that the glittering but brief reign of Sir William Morgan and his wife, Lady Rachel Cavendish, at Tredegar House, as glamorous as it undoubtedly was, came with a hefty price tag. In papers relating to the later legal difficulties that ripped the Morgan family into two warring factions, we find it recorded that Sir William Morgan was 'greatly indebted at his decease more than his personal Estate was sufficient to pay.' Buffered also by the storms of an economic depression, by 1744, the Tredegar Estate was nearly £21,000 in debt.

The glory days of 1725 must have seemed a very long time ago.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

FOTH TRIP TO POWIS CASTLE - By Paddy Landers

Our early summer visit to Powis Castle was a great success. The weather wasn't great and the journey long, but the stunning view of the Castle as we arrived made us realise that the journey had been worthwhile.

The Castle is magnificent. It was built by the Welsh prince Gruffudd ap Gwernwynwyd in 1252 and has survived sieges and wars to become one of the most prominent castles in Wales. The castle was later leased to the Herbert family who lived in it until 1958, when it passed into the control of the National Trust. Probably one of the best known inhabitants of the castle was Robert Clive who married Henrietta Herbert in 1784. He served in India several times, employed by the East India company to promote trade. He was also authorised by the British Government to defeat any local uprisings. The Castle houses a large collection of artefacts from India in the Clive museum.

The Castle also houses one of Britain's greatest collections of art and other historical items. This includes twelve 17th century busts of Caesar and a large Italian table, believed to be over 450 years old. There is a beautiful portrait of Lady Henrietta Herbert, Countess of Powis, painted by Joshua Reynolds. In the portrait, Lady Henrietta is wearing a large hat, but in the earlier black and white sketch by Reynolds, she is bare headed. It is believed that a different artist added the hat later when fashions changed! There is also a portrait of an earlier Countess of Powis. It transpires that when his first wife had died, the husband had had the face of his second wife painted on to the first wife's portrait!

Powis castle is also famous for its beautiful gardens, and although the weather was not good, we could see enough to realise that we needed to go back on a sunny day to fully appreciate them. It is a Baroque formal garden with terraces hewn from the rock in the 1670s and beautiful herbaceous borders. In the early 20th century, George Herbert, spent eighteen years creating the gardens which are believed to be amongst the most beautiful in England and Wales.

There was one more unexpected exhibition to be visited. The cellars were transformed into a recreation of the Somme trenches to mark the centenary of that battle and to remember Percy Clive who had been seriously hurt at the Somme and later died in hospital.

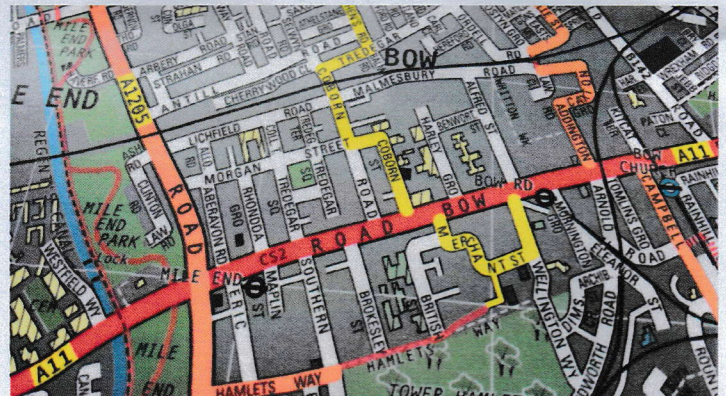
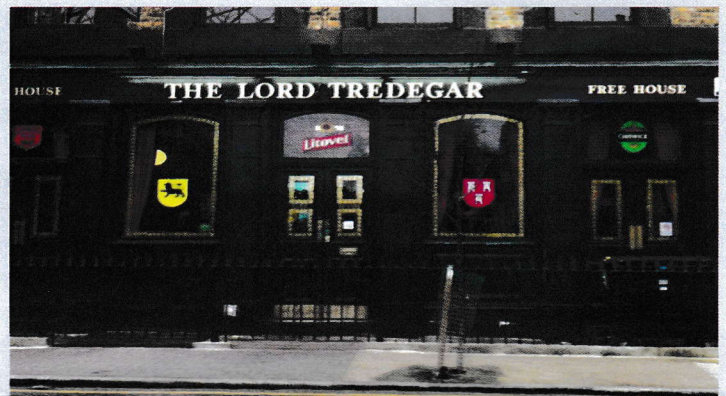
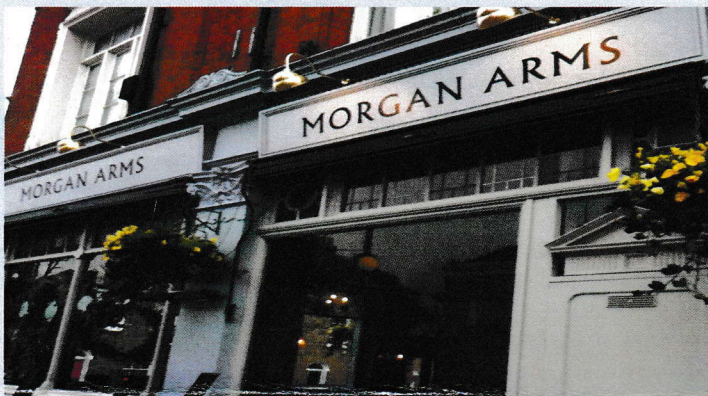


LONDON AND THE MORGAN CONNECTION - By Rosemary Jackson

During my visits to London to child mind, I have started to visit places where there is a connection with the Morgans and I hope to do some occasional articles on the family. My first visit started at Mile End Tube Station opposite Aberavon Road in the East End.

Following an Act of Parliament in 1824, Sir Charles Morgan was permitted to erect dwellings on his fields and became a ground landlord leasing plots to developers and builders who erected houses that they could then sub lease for their own profit. By the 1830s, houses had been built in Rhondda Grove, Morgan Street, Aberavon Road and much of Tredegar Square and Tredegar Terraces. The new development on Morgan ground had its own church, Holy Trinity and a grammar school by 1847.

Areas near Tredegar Square were damaged by bombing during the Second World War and a post-war scheme for widespread redevelopment of the area was under consideration. Of the ones that remained undamaged, many still retain original external and internal features, and in 1971 Tredegar Square was designated a conservation area of special architectural and historic interest.



CHILDREN'S PARTY - 12TH DECEMBER (SERVANTS HALL)

We like to send the children home with a little bag containing fruit, and some sweets, as a gift from the "Friends" given by Sandra of course. Your help is needed could you please donate a small packet of sweets and maybe a chocolate bar. Please bring your sweets along to our talk on 17th November, your donation will be much appreciated.