

## THE 162<sup>ND</sup> SUMMER MEETING

### LAMPETER, 2015

The 162<sup>nd</sup> Summer Meeting was based in Lampeter, and we lodged and dined on the Lampeter Campus of what is now the University of Trinity St Davids. We were ably served by the fleet of large and small coaches from the local firm, G & M coaches. The Meeting was organized by Heather James who would particularly like to thank Professor David Austin for much help before and during the meeting, over and above his Presidential duties. She would also like to thank our many speakers: David Austin, Professor Martin O’Kane, Dr John Hammond, Revd Bill Fillery, Jen Jones, Gerald Morgan, Dr Jeff Davies, Professor Barry Burnham, Dr Toby Driver, Peter Hopkins and Sarah Jones, Dr D Huw Owen, Roger Clive-Powell, Thomas Lloyd, Glen Johnson and Richard Suggett.

### MONDAY 6<sup>th</sup> JULY

Members assembled at the base of the still substantial **motte of Lampeter’s medieval castle** now surrounded by college buildings, walls and access ways. Built probably by Stephen, the constable of Cardigan in the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century, it, like others in Ceredigion, marked Norman attempts to control the Welsh lordly centres of power in the *cwmwdau* – in this case Mebwynion. Although encouraged by the then College Principal to excavate the motte in his early days of setting up the new Archaeology Department in the 1970s, David Austin recalled that little medieval was found but that there was plenty of evidence for a college gazebo on the top of the motte and a wine cellar carved out within its side. He pointed out the slight surviving banks of what had been a double bailey also now within the college grounds, further indication of the castle’s early importance.

The party then entered the **Old College** buildings and began the tour in the Old Hall where we had assembled the previous evening to be briefed on the week’s Programme. In conscious emulation of an Oxford College, quadrangular in plan and Tudor Gothic in style, C R Cockerell’s original designs of 1821 had been modified to suit a less-than-expected budget for the new St David’s College. Portraits of former Principals including the founder Bishop Thomas Burgess line the walls of what was originally the dining room of the college but is now used for lectures. The President-elect explained how changes in interior floor levels and flights of steps reflect alterations and additions to the original building. Thus the high Victorian architect, T.G. Jackson created a new a College Chapel by lowering the floor level into the basement and it is now accessed down a flight of steps from the central passage way. Those members who had not previously visited were surprised by the rich decoration of the chapel with its green, red and gold colour scheme, the late Gothic style woodwork of the organ case, canopied stalls and pews and other fittings.



*President-elect David Austin describes features of the college chapel at the old College Buildings, University of Trinity St Davids Lampeter*

Keeping us well to time, David Austin then led the party out of the College, down College Street and into the High Street. Here he pointed out the traces in property boundaries and street alignments of the burgage plots of the small medieval borough founded in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. There was not time to dwell further on the later buildings of High Street and members progressed up the hill through the large churchyard to the prominently sited **St Peter's Church**, noting the poignant group of unmarked paupers' graves on the edge of the churchyard. In the church we were received by the Area Dean, Revd. Canon D. Roberts and refreshed with coffee kindly provided by church members. The large and imposing church with its spire is a new building of 1867-70, replacing an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century one of poor quality; it certainly had a medieval and possibly pre-Norman predecessor. The particular focus of the Association's visit was however on the outstanding west window's 'Charge to Peter' by the stained glass artist, Wilhelmina Geddes, completed finally in 1946. Professor Martin O'Kane, who has made a detailed study of her work, and is the co-editor of the recently published *Biblical Art from Wales*, gave an informative and absorbing talk on the artist and the window. The massive figures of Peter, Christ and Andrew in each of the three lancets of the west window and the scenes in the roundels draw on an eclectic iconography including postures reminiscent of the Assyrian sculptures Geddes studied at the British Museum. We were also privileged to view St Peter's fine set of Georgian communion silver, given to the church by Lady Anne Lloyd in 1737.



*The Area Dean introduces Prof Martin O' Kane to explain the 'Geddes' window at St Peter's Lampeter to members enjoying coffee provided by the church members.*

After dispersing for lunch, members reconvened at **Lampeter's War Memorial** where John Hammond, who has recently completed his PhD on First World War memorialization, spoke about how funds were raised to commission the fine Goscombe John bronze statue of a rifleman at ease set on an engraved granite pedestal. Land was given and further funds raised for the monument to

be placed within a terraced and walled garden enclosure, still beautifully kept. Unusually there is a woman's name amongst those commemorated – Nurse Richards who died in 1918 in Salonika.



*Dr John Hammond describes the commissioning and those commemorated on Lampeter's fine War Memorial below the bronze statue by Goscombe John.*

Two small buses transported us to **Llanwenog Church**, described in the Buildings of Wales volume for Ceredigion as 'one of the best medieval churches in the county'. The church is entered through the tower, of late 15<sup>th</sup> century date leading to a single cell nave and chancel probably of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest feature is the twelfth century font, a powerful, primitive bowl ringed with twelve 'celtic' faces. A former south chapel, entered through arches in the nave wall has now been sensitively and imaginatively converted to meeting and refreshment use, separated from the body of the church by glass screens, the work of conservation architect Roger Clive-Powell who also carried out the restoration. Our speaker Revd Bill Fillery is making a special study of the elaborately carved woodwork of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century date, the work of Herbert and Mary Davies-Evans, owners of the nearby Highmead Mansion, and the accomplished woodcarver Joseph Reubens of Bruges, a Belgian refugee staying at Highmead during the First World War. Revd Fillery drew attention to the astonishing wealth of detail, signs and symbols of the carved bench ends, depicting saints, legends, military memorials, as well as scenes illustrative of local agriculture and parish life. Members were then provided with tea and cakes by the ladies of the church led by Mary Thomas demonstrating the flexible use of the south chapel area.



*Elan Griffith tries out the organ at Llanwenog Church to an appreciative audience of Peter and Sue Jarvis.*

The final visit of the day, back in Lampeter, was to Jen Jones' **Welsh Quilt Centre**. Opened by the Prince of Wales in 2009, the collection and changing exhibitions are hung and displayed in upper rooms the renovated Lampeter Town Hall – a brave and innovative venture by Jen Jones and her husband, the conservation architect Roger Clive Powell. The spacious and lofty former courtroom now houses the main gallery where these previously little regarded utilitarian products, mainly but not exclusively made by women, are hung vertically to better display their intricate patterns, bold

uses of colour and folk motifs. Jen Jones has rescued many quilts from stables and garages and built up a skilled team of conservators. Smaller exhibitions are housed in side rooms and many members were particularly interested in Cefyn Burgess's work 'Welsh Chapels in cloth and stitch', displayed with some of his collection of chapel tea services marked with chapel names.



*Jen Jones explains the origins and ambitions of her Welsh Quilts centre to an appreciative Cambrian audience.*

After dinner we reassembled in The Old Hall to hear a stimulating lecture from Gerald Morgan on 'Clerical farmers or farming clerics': parish clergy in St David's Diocese, 1600-1700. Based on his own researches into a hitherto unstudied subject using probate documents (wills and inventories), accessed in the National Library of Wales, Gerald Morgan gave fascinating detail into the generally inadequate stipends of rural clergy that forced them to augment their income by farming. We heard of William Evans of Llanddewibrefi, d. 1602, a rare instance of books being named in a will – in this case Calvin's Institutes and the works of a major Hebrew scholar; Hugh Price of Mathry making his will in 1606 and carefully detailing his heifer, small fields of barley and wheat, his canvas bag and plough and coulter all to go with his daughter Jonett as her marriage portion. Whilst these necessities possibly distracted them from their priestly duties, he concluded, they did at least bring them closer to the everyday struggles of their parishioners in a changed post-Reformation world where much church wealth had gone.

TUESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> JULY

The second day of the Meeting was devoted to the Romans, an apt choice for the last day of Professor Bill Manning's Presidency. A column of two smaller buses and two following cars headed north eastwards climbing up out of the Teifi valley from Llanfair Clydogau and onto the modern minor road that directly overlies the 'Sarn Helen' the Roman road linking the forts at Pumsaint and

Llanio and beyond into north Wales. Our first stop was at **Careg y Bwci** where we were met by Dr Jeff Davies and Professor Barry and Mrs Helen Burnham. Fortunately easily accessible from the road this is a small circular earthwork on rough moory ground containing a massive rectangular slab of stone. Sited at the western end of the Craig Twrch ridge and commanding extensive views – which, most fortunately, the improving weather allowed us to appreciate. Jeff Davies began by reminding David Austin of their joint visit over thirty years ago when he identified the site as the remains of a Roman watch tower and signal station and published his conclusions in *Arch Camb* in 1986. The President described some excavated examples of similar towers in Cumbria and Scotland. There was considerable discussion on whether the stone had ever stood upright it being somewhat awkward to incorporate into a four or six post watch tower with its encircling bank (somewhat disturbed by Cambrian excavators from the 1870s!) However Dr Davies pointed out that to serve its signaling functions the watch tower had to be positioned at this exact spot whatever the inconveniences of glacial boulders and that it was exactly equidistant between the fort at Pumpsaint and that at Llanio. Neither were directly visible from this point so two more such towers must once have existed.



*Cambrians ascend the heights! Massing on Carreg y Bwci to enjoy the views.*





*Past President Dr Jeff Davies reminds Prof David Austin of the eureka moment on their joint visit many years back when he convinced David that here was a Roman signal station.*

Returning to the buses we drove down very narrow roads and steep declines to reach the small settlement of Ffarmers, once an important stopping point for drovers. Here we stopped at the recently extended Village Hall (Neuadd Bro Fana) for tea, coffee and home-made cakes, organized by Tina Marshall. Time, sadly, only allowed for a short talk by local historian Elfyn Davies on Ffarmers' medieval origins and growing importance as a Drovers' staging post. He then explained the unusual history of the Hall itself opened in 1931 after long years of fund-raising. It possesses an upper 'concert hall' and has recently been refurbished through a Lottery grant and now serves a variety of functions and houses the village post office.

From Ffarmers we descended into the Cothi Valley and the village of **Pumsaint**. Before lunch at the recently reopened Dolaucothi Arms, Professor Barry Burnham described the location of the **Roman Fort** beneath the village and pointed out the areas excavated by the late Barri Jones in the 1970s and his own excavations in 1989. The 1970s excavations were in the gardens to the south of the Dolaucothi Arms and his own work to the north where part of a stone gate tower and a turf and clay rampart on the north side of the fort had been located. There was time both before and after lunch to view the display panels and information facility provided by the National Trust in the Old Coach House across the road which give information on the Roman fort and goldmines but also on the Hill-Johnes family, the former landowners of the area. There is the feel of an estate village in some of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century estate cottages. The well-maintained corrugated iron Village Hall of 1903 was donated by Lady Hills-Johnes. After lunch we reconvened in the car park behind the Old Coachhouse and Barry described the further information provided on the fort by geophysical survey in 1999 over the flat green field lying on a gravel terrace behind us. This had revealed intensive extra-mural activity flanking a road which was an extension of one of the fort's internal streets. He then led the walking group of the party down the road to the bridge over the R. Cothi and pointed out the eroding gravel terrace from which Roman material had been recovered since the 1960s. Proceeding

further towards the **Dolaucothi Gold Mines** we were able to better appreciate the location of the fort at the confluence of the rivers Twrch and Cothi. Barry pointed out where the Roman road from the south approached the fort, which he had excavated in 1997 and the site of the Bath House. The ground floors of two rooms, one with a tessellated floor over hypocaust pillars were shown to the Cambrian Association, visiting in 1855. Nothing now remains visible.

The party divided into groups at Dolaucothi Mines, some taking the short underground tours organised by the National Trust and all having time to view the exhibition display and sample the cakes and ice creams of the café. After a walking tour with some of the party everyone gathered in the mine yard to hear Professor Barry Burnham give an overview of what is – and is not – known about Roman gold mining at Doluacothi, summarizing past research. The walking group had already seen some of the physical evidence by commencing their tour above the Carreg Pumsaint whose indentations are now recognized as the result of repeated ‘stamping’ to crush ore-bearing rocks in a stamp mill. Although initially ascribed a medieval date (by analogy with tin stamps on Dartmoor) the technology of stamp mills is now known to have been used by the Romans. The group then proceeded through the Penlan workings, up to the remains of the 1930s mill site and thence back to the mineyard via the Mitchell adit.



*Leading the group downhill, Mary Dodd considers Prof Barry Burnham’s explanation of the true function of Carreg Pumsaint*

Returning to the College a final visit was made before dinner to the **Roderic Bowen Library** – formerly the Founders Library and now housed in a specially built section of the College Library. We were welcomed by the Librarian, Peter Hopkins, and the Assistant Librarian Sarah Roberts. Peter Hopkins outlined the origins and development of the library which, soon after the opening of St David’s College by Bishop Burgess in 1827 had great expectations of receiving the vast collection of books and manuscripts made by the wealthy East India Company surgeon Sir Thomas Phillips in his retirement. An unfavourable report on conditions in Lampeter made by Phillipps agents led to the

manuscripts going elsewhere; nevertheless some 22,500 volumes covering a wide range of subjects were given by Phillipps to the library arriving in fifty nine consignments. Another significant founding deposit was the entire library of the college's founder, the scholarly Bishop Thomas Burgess. Dr Hopkins explained how, through internet access and catalogues and integration into college courses, the Library strives to open the collection and archives to as many students and visitors as possible. His personal selection of some of the Library's finest books and manuscripts was laid out for our inspection after Dr Hopkins had given a fascinating account of their history and features of special interest. An illuminated Bible of 1279, originally from Fécamp Abbey in northern France was shown, the result of four years work by a single scribe – hints of internal feuds within the monastery were suggested by close examination of some of the illuminated capitals where some clerics were depicted with forked tongues. A rare first edition of *Gulliver's Travels* of 1726 was displayed. The pristine condition of the Folio Bensley edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* with its illustrations by William Blake showed that had not been subject to much attention by readers. From the modern manuscripts a naval Logbook of HMS Elizabeth of 1759 showed how the grinding routine as well as occasional sea battles of naval life of the period had helped secure the Indian Ocean trade routes for British commerce. Members, particularly those who had worked in Archives and Libraries, were keen to question Dr Hopkins further and only the imminence of dinner ended the visit with the thanks of all present to Peter Hopkins and Sarah Roberts.

The Roman tenor of the day continued with the evening lecture delivered jointly by Drs Jeff Davies and Toby Driver, RCAHMW. Both expressed their thanks to the Association as the principal funders of the excavations at Abermagwr Roman Villa, the subject of their lecture. An interim Report on this work was published in vol 160 (2011) of *Arch Camb*.

(Wed 8<sup>th</sup> July)

The day began with a visit to **Yr Hen Gapel, Llwynrhydowen**, just a couple of days ahead of the official opening after a major programme of restoration. Our speaker, Dr D. Huw Owen was for many years Keeper of Pictures and Maps at the National Library in Wales. In retirement he has worked tirelessly for the conservation of Welsh Chapels and is a Trustee of *Addoldai Cymru*: The Welsh Religious Buildings Trust and a leading member of *Capel*. To date, he explained, *Addoldai Cymru* has acquired six redundant chapels across Wales representing a spectrum of denominations and architecture. Llwynrhydowen is an important chapel in the history of the Unitarian cause in south Ceredigion and is being promoted by Ceredigion Council with partners together with other chapels in the area as *Taith y Smotyn Du*, The Unitarian Trail. The area was called 'Y Smotyn Du' – The Black Spot by other denominations, especially the Calvinistic Methodists, because they could make no headway there. Dr Owen traced the origins of the chapel and Unitarian beliefs back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century at Cilgwyn. In the early eighteenth century Cilgwyn's minister Jenkin Jones founded chapels at Llwynrhydowen and Alltyblaca, the first Arminian chapels in Wales. His charismatic successor Dafydd Dafis was a personal friend of many free-thinking Arminians across Wales such as Dr Richard Price, Thomas Glyncothi and Iolo Morgannwg all of whom visited Llwynrhydowen. The most celebrated event in the chapel's history, *Y Troad Allan*, The Lock Out, took place during the radical ministry of William Thomas (Gwilym Marles) who was outspoken in support of the poor and incurred the enmity of the chapel's landlord, the staunch Tory John Davies-Lloyd reputed to have evicted his Liberal voting tenants. Arriving to preach in 1876 Gwilym Marles was confronted by locked gates and instead preached outside. The incident was widely reported in the national press and contributions flowed in enabling a new chapel to be built on land purchased nearby. After Davies-Lloyd's death, his sister Mrs Massey, effected a reconciliation and the chapel was returned to the congregation. It was then used as a Sunday School and under the Minister Aubrey Martin in the 1960s a small Museum of Unitarianism – the chapel fell into disuse and disrepair, with many thousands of books stored in it. The 1733 chapel, extended in 1745, was rebuilt in 1791 but not thereafter altered greatly. It is thus a fine example of the 'long-wall' entry type with two doors at either end of the side wall giving onto

the graveyard. The doors have arched fanlights and between them two tall round-headed windows. Following Dr Owen's talk the conservation architect, Roger Clive-Powell, explained how he had been able to use different sources of funding to reslate the roof, repair the ceiling, windows and doors and improve access so that hopefully it will be possible for the chapel, with local support, to be open to visitors.



*Dr D Huw Owen looks on as conservation architect Roger Clive-Powell (husband of Jen Jones, Welsh Quilts Centre) explains the conservation of the chapel. With great sadness we record that Roger died later in 2015, a tremendous loss to buildings conservation, especially of churches.*

In still rainy conditions the party then departed the sort distance by coach to the top of the north drive down to **Alltyrhodyn Mansion**. The house is sited on a terrace cut back into the steep valley side of the Afon Clettwr and looks out over the valley; it is approached by two drives leading down from the minor road to Capel Dewi and neither of these allowed our coach entry so the party was dropped at the north-west 'back' entrance – a shorter walk down to the house than the restored main south-east entrance. Mr and Mrs Usher, the owners, are continuing their work of clearance and replanting now turning to the southern drive so those walking and being ferried by cars were able to see the newly exposed stone bath-house which is being restored, part of what were extensively landscaped Regency pleasure grounds. Mr and Mrs Usher welcomed us in out of the rain and provided welcome tea and coffee in the dining room, where Mr Thomas Lloyd gave an account of the Lloyd family and their successive owners of Alltyrhodyn. One problem, he explained, in reconstructing the history of the family and the mansion was the almost total absence of family papers and portraits. The present mansion was built for John Lloyd c. 1820 when he came into his inheritance by a local architect-builder. Whilst some influence by Nash is evident, Thomas Lloyd explained that the plan of this three storey house displayed none of Nash's innovations in entrance halls and staircases but was of quite conservative design and with a plain, albeit imposing façade of seven bays with a central flat roofed porch with paired Doric columns. There had been a mansion on the site since the seventeenth century and in fact, Thomas Lloyd pointed out, it is encased in the

present house . On entering the house today a wide entrance hall, a another broad doorway opens through a thick spine wall to the rear stair hall, kitchen and back courtyard. This wall is the front of the earlier house. The party then briefly viewed the rear courtyard and outbuildings.



*Tom Lloyd describes the family history of the Lloyds whilst members gratefully retreat from the rain and enjoy Mr and Mrs Usher's tea and biscuits in the dining room of Alltyrhodyn.*

The group then travelled to the **National Wool Museum at Drefach Velindre** for lunch, a variety of home-cooked dishes which were finally united with their appropriate consumer at the table! This is very much a working museum with a careful blend of modern walkways and linking structures to the factory buildings of the former Cambrian Mills. The original building of 1889 was destroyed by fire and rebuilt between 1902 and 1912. Although, like all the numerous mills in the Drefach Velindre , the Cambrian Mills were originally water-powered (the leat etc), and water-power continued to be used to finish cloth. Most of the machinery however was driven by what was at the time an advanced gas engine whose giant boiler still dominates the staircase end of the Exhibition Hall. This was only replaced by electricity in the 1940s. We were then led on a tour by Non Mitchell who explained the processes and demonstrated the machines. Standing at the hot presses she explained that the main products were blankets, shawls and flannel cloth for working clothing. First fleeces were untangled in the 'willower', a still working machine that came from the Derw Mills, Pentre-Cwrt. The next mighty machine to be cranked up was the carding machine, essentially a series of drums and rollers processing the untangled fleeces by straightening and separating them finally onto giant bobbins, passed up through a trapdoor to be spun into yarn. The whole of the upper floor is taken up by the 'Mighty Mule' where Cambrians watched, mesmerized, as the machine components moved backwards and forwards as the yarn was spun onto banks of spools. Thereafter the processes of weaving on the still working looms and finishing the cloth were explained and hurrying through the textile gallery, some of the party managed to visit Melin Teifi adjoining and others buy Museum produced fabrics and garments in the shop.



*Non Mitchell processes a lot of wool through the carding machine!*



*Non Mitchell primes the 'Mighty Mule' for its spectacular 'dance' across the spinning floor.*

The final visit of the day was to **Newcastle Emlyn Castle**, approached by the indefatigable Cambrians from the Market Carpark and a brisk walk along High Street and Castle Street. By this time the weather had improved and we were invited to sit on the grassy banks of the huge Civil War ravelin in front of the castle to hear the President-elect, Professor David Austin give an introductory talk on what is – and what is not - known of the history of the castle which is spectacularly sited on a long narrow promontory formed by a massive looping meander of the River Teifi. Built as a Welsh castle by Maredudd ap Rhys Grug probably in the 1230s it was contested and passed from Welsh to English hands and back again until finally acquired by Edward, the Black Prince in the late 1340s. Little

survives of the fourteenth century rebuilding but archaeological examination of the site has been limited. Leland, writing in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, records that Sir Rhys ap Thomas ‘repair’d and new-built’ the castle as a residence after the battle of Bosworth. Finally after being held by royalist forces, the castle was re-taken in 1648 by Parliamentary forces and blown up. The party then walked over the site and a lively debate ensued as to whether the Gatehouse could be wholly the work of Sir Rhys, its character being more domestic than defensive. The Castle site is managed by the local authority entered through a modern arch surmounted by a large and lively sculpture of a dragon made from welding rods and iron bars. Modern and more ancient myth-making are explained on panels describing how an English foot soldier fatally wounded a dragon which appeared on the castle walls where Owain Glyndwr was being besieged. Lured to its death in the Teifi, the dragon vowed to return and the imminent discovery of a dragon’s egg somewhere on the castle site is assured. Cambrians were divided on this issue!



*David introduces Newcastle Emlyn Castle, where, by late afternoon, the rain has vanished.*

After dinner the chain of office was handed over by Professor William Manning to Professor David Austin. In his Presidential lecture, David described how he had become involved in Landscape Archaeology from an initial beginning in English Literature, excavating castle and medieval deserted settlements before moving to Wales to start a new department of archaeology at Lampeter. He then described the difficulties and, finally, the rewards of some twenty years’ work in untangling the evolution of the medieval settlement pattern in Cellan parish where the documentary sources he has been helped by in England had simply not survived or never existed.

(Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July).

We travelled by coach along the at times narrow ‘B’ road on the eastern side of the Afon Teifi from Lampeter to Llanddewi Brefi. Passing through **Cellan** the President used the coach’s microphone to point out features in Cellan and Cellan parish that he had discussed in his lecture the previous evening. Arriving at Llanddewi Church which has been visited by the Cambrians on several occasions rather more time was probably spent outside rather than inside the church than on earlier occasions. Pausing after climbing up the steep path from the churchyard gate to the base of the church’s massive tower, Heather James pointed out the two surviving fragments of the ‘Idnert’ stone now built into the fabric of the restored tower. Fortunately recorded when more complete by the

17<sup>th</sup> century antiquary, Edward Lhuyd, the inscription famously records the the *predam* (? plundering) of the church of *sancti David*. Whilst now dated to the ninth century and not therefore the earliest mention of the saint, the cult of Dewi is closely linked to Llanddewi Brefi. Mentioning the description of the Synod of Brefi in both the 12<sup>th</sup> century poem, *Canu Dewi* by Gwynfardd Brycheiniog and in the earlier *Life* by Rhigyfarch, Heather suggested that the story of the ground rising beneath Dewi's feet was a classic instance of localizing a tradition to the physical character of Llanddewibrefi's church on a prominent mound. Continuing to walk around the churchyard the site of buildings relating to the medieval college were pointed out, home of the author-cleric of the celebrated 14<sup>th</sup> century Welsh religious text *Llyfr Ancr*, the 'Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi'. Finally the party viewed the important collection of inscribed stones and cross slabs inside the church.

Continuing by coach towards Tregaron, we crossed the Teifi at **Pont Llanio** for a brief stop to view the remains of the Manchester to Milford railway and the former creamery opened in 1937 and closed in 1970. The halt was a former depot for the transfer of liquid milk to rail tankers for onward transport to London. Peter Jarvis delivered a bravura impromptu address on (briefly) the history of the line and (at slightly greater length) the economic reasons why possible line reopening could not be financially viable. We then proceeded the short distance to **Tregaron** where lunch awaited at the Talbot Inn. The Talbot was once a focal point in the cattle droving trade as droves were assembled before setting off (as also from Llanddewi Brefi and Lampeter) to cross the Cambrian Mountains and thence on into England. There was enough time for members to look at the town and to visit the *Rhiannon Jewellery-Welsh Gold* showroom, workshop, art gallery and exhibition and Rhiannon's personal collection of ancient Celtic metalwork.



*David Austin explains the recently excavated Great Gatehouse which provided entry to the large enclosure of Strata Florida Abbey.*

The final part of the day was spent on an extended visit to **Strata Florida Abbey** where the President explained the genesis and purpose of the Strata Florida project, the still-open excavation area of the



Gatehouse, the Abbey Ruins and finally a special visit to Great Abbey Farm. The stone footings of the Gatehouse (Penny Porth) had been excavated between 2003 and 2015 revealing a rectangular structure with a central entrance and passage flanked by rooms. Here visitors would be received and formally enter the large outer precinct of the Abbey. Members then walked down to the Abbey church and cloister in the pleasant summer sunshine and David Austin resumed his tour outside the iconic and widely depicted west doorway of the Abbey. The six orders of continuous roll-mouldings of the jambs are divided by cross bands with spiral terminals in what has been identified as a 'court style' of the princes of Deheubarth consciously harking back to the glories of insular art. The gateway epitomizes Abbey's central role in medieval Welsh culture and patronage by its princely dynasties, particularly the Lord Rhys. After rehearsing the work of Steven Williams who excavated and began the consolidation of the Abbey ruins in the 1880s, work funded by the Cambrian Archaeological Association, David drew attention to a hitherto misunderstood and disregarded feature in the monk's choir, a possible 'holy well' with stone steps leading down into a small rectangular chamber and traces of a water supply and exit piped below the church. Its alignment differs from the Abbey church and he suggested that it is an early feature incorporated into the church by its monastic builders. This and other indications strongly suggest to the Strata Florida project team that far from seeking out a virgin site, the Cistercian founders were drawn to a site of existing native sanctity. Relays of members, by special permission, then viewed the Abbey Farmhouse incorporating parts of the monastic refectory and converted to a polite mansion by the Stedman family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At present empty and needing repair the house contains 18<sup>th</sup> century paneling and a remarkable Overmantel painting of youth tempted by vice. Tea provided by Gaenor Parry and helpers was very welcome and many members finished the tour with a visit to the great yew in the adjacent St Mary's churchyard supposedly marking the grave of Dafydd ap Gwilym as an inscribed modern slab asserts. Whilst arguably the greatest medieval Welsh poet he was but one of a number to praise the Abbey in their poetry.



*Rory O'Farrell draws the President's attention to some Irish parallels for features at Strata Florida*

The AGM was held in the evening in the former library in The Old College.

(Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July)

The whole party headed by coach for Cardigan to visit the newly restored ruins of **Cardigan Castle** and Castle Green House. A somewhat slow progress through the entrance area allowed members to look at the small interpretative display which concentrates very much on the role of the Lord Rhys – Rhys ap Gruffydd, Prince of Deheubarth, who captured the castle from the Normans in 1165. In celebration he reputedly held what is taken to be the first Eisteddfod. Inside the castle, in commemoration of the event, is a large bardic chair. After coffee in the marquee, our guide Glen Johnson led us out onto the castle green to begin the tour. He explained that his own connection with the castle had begun as a schoolboy when he made the acquaintance of the reclusive and eccentric Miss Barbara Wood who had moved with her mother in 1940 into Castle Green House. By the 1970s she lived alone, in, it has to be said, some squalor and few ventured into the castle. Its exterior was equally unprepossessing as its walls



*Cambrians assemble for Glen Johnson's tour of Cardigan Castle.*

had to propped up by steel props and wooden shores, not finally removed until 2013. In the 1980s Glen and a small group of local teenagers were allowed by Miss Wood to conduct rather limited guided tours and many years of campaigning to purchase and refurbish the castle began. Some members present recalled a visit to the overgrown ruins in 1981 led by the late David Cathcart King where we were met by Miss Wood spectacularly garbed in yellow pvc and receiving Cambrians' florins as entry fees with enthusiasm. Miss Wood finally moved into a care home in 1999. Glen Johnson was a leading campaigner to save the castle which was bought by Ceredigion County Council in 2003. Finally lottery funding and a European Regional Development Fund grant allowed an £11 million restoration programme organized by the Cadwgan Trust concluding with the castle opening in spring 2015.

Glen Johnson explained the complex structural history of the castle and its surviving elements and also the results of archaeological excavations in advance of the new entrance gate where, interestingly a probable medieval gate into the medieval town was discovered. Within the castle walls however it is the Georgian Castle Green House (built onto the North Tower) coach houses and the restored Green, new gardens and rescued specimen trees and shrubs that dominate the visitor experience. A new kitchen garden is worked by volunteers and special needs people. Within the house are exhibitions on its history and it is planned to let the upper floors as luxury holiday

accommodation. Members were able to discuss at some length with Glen Johnson plans for the future of the Castle which needs to generate an income to survive and he was thanked for an interesting and comprehensive tour.



*Bidding farewell to the Cambrians, Glen Johnson stands between a whale bone arch – a feature of the restored Cardigan Castle grounds that recalls the once world-wide scope of Cardigan’s sea captains.*

Dispersing for lunch in Cardigan members reconvened to be split into parties A & B. Party A departed by coach for **Llanerchaeron House**, in the Aeron valley, inland of Aberaeron. Party B squeezed into a minibus to visit a number of hillforts with Dr Toby Driver. At Llanerchaeron, now run by The National Trust, Cambrians were met by Richard Suggett of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, who has published a book on John Nash’s work in Wales. He explained that ‘pocket villa’ though it is in terms of size, Llanerchaeron contains fine examples of several of Nash’s architectural and interior design elements that made him such a sought-after architect of country houses. Nash skillfully incorporated the earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century house into his 1789 building. Nash also had a hand in the accompanying designed landscape of the park and adjacent home farm buildings and gardens. Members then explored the house with Richard Suggett experiencing the beautiful double cantilevered staircase under a conical roof light to the right of the inner hall. Another feature of note at Llanerchaeron is the Service Courtyard to the adjoining the service wing with its unmodernised 18<sup>th</sup> century dairy, scullery, brewhouse, cheese press, salting room and laundry. Members then dispersed to variously visit the walled gardens, the home farm buildings and parts of the park.



*Toby Driver asks members to consider the possible coastal trading function of Craig-y-Gwbert commanding the entrance to the Teifi .*

Party B’s first stop was at **Craig y Gwbert promontory fort** which overlooks Cardigan Island at the entrance to the Teifi estuary, probably more accessible in the Iron Age to coastal trading; its is now made hazardous by Cardigan Bar. Although the interior of the fort has been damaged by

landscaping for the golf course the ramparts survive and Toby Driver put forward a case for the site functioning as an Iron Age coastal trading settlement. Travelling northwards the next site visited was the coastal **Castell Bach fort** recently planned by Toby Driver. Descending at a brisk pace we paused to overlook the site which occupies a saddle of level ground at the base of an enclosing ring of steep cliffs. The inner fort is quite strongly defended and at some distance from it , on the outer rampart, Toby pointed out the recently identified minor gateway close to the cliff edge. Some discussion ensued as to whether there were man-made small platforms on the now isolated coastal stack. **Castell Nadolig** was the final site visited which has massive concentric ramparts utilised by present day field hedges. It is famous as the find spot for the so-called bronze spoons, and Toby Driver described exciting new metallurgical work on these unique objects showing traces of gold inlay. These rare objects are now thought to be specialist divination tools used by a religious elite.

The Meeting drew to an enjoyable close with a pre-dinner drinks reception hosted by the President and Gaenor Parry in the garden of their house adjoining the campus and a special conference dinner in the Refectory.

Heather James.