



ISSUE 74

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Editorial



Things are still rather quiet. However we have a good selection of articles for you. The Forum met in person last month - the first time in over a year, and plans are being made for Brecknock History Month 2022 so keep an eye on Hanes for events across the county.

Hanes is published every 3 months. The next edition is to be published February 1st 2022. Please email any articles or information about events etc. with the heading "HANES" to alan.j.nicholls@btinternet.com by January 31st 2022.

Introducing The Forum

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CUSOP HISTORY GROUP

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**TALGARTH AND DISTRICT
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NEWS AND EVENTS

Brecknock History Forum

History Month 2022 – a Proposal

At the Forum meeting in October, it was suggested that History Month in September 2022 should focus on Places of Worship. The suggestion is that we produce a booklet featuring a number of churches – perhaps 10 from each of north, south, east and west Brecknockshire. The booklet could have a long-term value but for History Month 2022, one or two outer pages would be added to the book giving details of opening times etc. during the month. The places to feature on the inner pages would be chosen by Forum members in each area.

This is very much a proposal and the idea will only be taken forward if Forum members wish to take part. Please let Elaine know if you are interested.

Brecknock Society and Museum Friends

Volume 52 (2021) of Brycheiniog, the journal of the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends, has been published and is available to purchase:

<https://brecknocksociety.co.uk/resources/brycheiniog/>.

The Society is represented on the BB National Park Historic Environment Partnership by Liz Bickerton and Liz has prepared a series of case studies for the Partnership indicating the range of our activities. We are presenting them here – slightly expanded to reflect recent events and initiatives:

Promoting Heritage During a Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to the face to face activities of local history societies across the country. Members of the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends were determined to carry on with their mission to involve and enthuse people about the sites, stories, and history of the historic county of Breconshire.

To this end, in April 2020 the Society started to produce a series of short well-illustrated electronic papers with a Breconshire focus. These, coming out at monthly intervals, were sent round to Society members as e-mail attachments and then posted on our website - [BS&MF Occasional Papers – Brecknock Society and Museum Friends](#)

Many of the papers relate to objects in the new y Gaer Museum and Art Gallery in Brecon. Others to historic sites and artefacts across Breconshire. A good number relate to the history of people and communities within the Breconshire part of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Examples

include papers on the Cwmdru Pillar Stone and Associated Plaque, The 19th century “New Forest” on Fan Frynach and the almost-forgotten site of Blaenllynfi Castle near Bwlch.

The papers complement the Society’s online talks and events and have provided an opportunity to promote Breconshire history far beyond Mid Wales, even as far as California, USA.



Ruins of the Blaen Lleveny Castle. *Watercolour painted by John “Warwick” Smith in June 1790 on one of his frequent visits to Wales.*

Sister Bonaventure Kelleher Theatre Studentship



Sister Bonaventure holding the Brecon town shield

Sister Bonaventure Kelleher, who died in October 2019, aged 96, was a well-loved and respected historian of Brecon. She had a special interest in the history of the theatre in Brecon, and over many years, carried out ground-breaking research into the subject and amassed an important archive of material.

In recognition and appreciation of Sister Bonaventure’s work, The Brecknock Society and Museum Friends developed the idea of creating a doctoral studentship to take forward her research. It entered into a funding agreement with the University of Bristol; this providing for a three year studentship towards a PhD degree, under the supervision of Professor Catherine Hindson. Part of the finance is provided by the Ursuline Order to which Sister Bonaventure belonged. The PhD’s central subject is an exploration of the history of theatre in Brecon and its connection with the changing town

Members of the Society were delighted that a local candidate, Jayne Gold, was appointed early in 2020. She has already contributed to Society publications and is providing fascinating new insights into theatre in Brecon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A hybrid event (live with a video stream) was held on Oct 2nd at the Muse, Brecon. This featured talks by Jayne and her supervisor and included extracts from the Brecon Little Theatre’s outdoor promenade production, put on this summer on Brecon’s streets, and

entitled *A Time Traveller's Guide to Theatrical Brecon*.

A web-page on the Project with a link to the Oct 2nd event is in preparation.

Places of Worship

The Brecknock Society and Museum Friends has, in recent years, felt it has had a role to play as an independent Breconshire body prepared to speak up for the importance of historic places of worship.

The Society has the following objectives for this strand of its work:

To advance appreciation of the history and cultural significance of places of worship in Breconshire, past and present.

To support, in so far as it can, local groups seeking to enhance the recording, conservation and use of individual places of worship in Breconshire by signposting available information and advice.

The Society promotes appreciation through its talks, events and online papers. In 2019 it visited two parish churches (Llywel and Llanspyddid) and a Calvinistic Methodist Chapel (Beili Du) in the Usk valley west of Brecon. In September 2021, with Covid restrictions becoming more relaxed, a visit was made to St Michael's, Cwm Du, where Society members were given a talk about the early Christian memorial pillar stone and the associated plaque prepared by the



The pillar stone inserted into the buttress of Cwm Du church by Rev Thomas Price

Rev Thomas Price (often known by his bardic name of as Carnhuanawc). The Society has published an online paper on the Cwm Du story and another on St Peter & St Illtyd, Llanhamlach, also within the National Park.

The link between this activity and a wider initiative being proposed by the Brecknock History Forum for the Brecknock History Month in September 2022 is described elsewhere in this issue of Hanes

**Wednesday December 1st 2021
6.00 pm by Zoom**

A talk by Dr Gill Wakley, Chair of the Abergavenny Local History Society



Built probably in the early 1600s by Thomas Gunter, the mansion provided a refuge for local Catholics and supported the Catholic priests. It is an important period building and the presence of a chapel in the attic, lost to view for hundreds of years, makes it even more valuable.

The Plas Gunter Mansion Trust has been formed to investigate and conserve the house. The talk will cover both its unique nature and some of those who lived there.

If you would like the link to this event, please contact Elaine Starling (elainestarling10@icloud.com).

Builth Wells & District Heritage Society

19th November we have our own Rob Warlow speaking on a military theme to focus our thoughts upon the armistice day events of the previous week.

Crickhowell & District History Society

Wednesday 24 Nov. 7.30 pm.

The Friends of St Edmund's Church and the Crickhowell and District History Society are hosting an illustrated talk by Eric Gower in the Church. The talk is on the history of the Sweetland Organ in St Edmund's Church with contributions by Vaughan Bennett on the organ.

All are welcome. Admission is free. Covid restrictions will apply.

Hay History Group



Hay History Group's secretary Peter Ford talks to Jules Hudson about his book: MATILDA, LADY OF HAY
Saturday 27 November 2021, 4pm – 5pm Baillie Gifford Stage



From the time local historian Peter Ford became a guide to Hay Castle, he has been intrigued by its most famous – and infamous – occupant, Matilda de Braose. Moll Walbee, as she was known to the local Welsh, established herself so strongly in the town that when King John sent a letter he addressed her as ‘the Lady of Hay’. This at a time when women were virtually invisible in society. The author discusses Matilda’s achievements, her fame and downfall, and the legends surrounding her. He talks to the archaeologist and TV presenter Jules Hudson (Escape to the Country, Countryfile).

The Winter Weekend 2021 from 24 – 28 November in Hay. A magical five days of conversations, storytelling, comedy, music, and family workshops. If you aren’t able to join us in Hay, you can watch from the comfort of your own home, as most events will also be streamed online. All tickets for in-person and online

events can be purchased from the programme pages.

To whet your appetite, there will also be five Winter Warmer events to watch and enjoy online. These events will be free for everyone to watch and be available online on our website from 15 November.

National Library of Wales

Mon 15th November 2021 5:30PM

Gruffydd Aled Williams

The Salmau Cân Edmwnd Prys a'u Gwaddol Symposium - Online Event

A virtual symposium to mark the 400th anniversary of the publication of Salmau Cân - the Welsh Metrical translation of the Psalms by Edmwnd Prys held in three weekly

****Welsh language event****

See National Library of Wales website for more details.

News from Hereford

Monday 22 November at 7.30pm

(‘doors open’ at 7.15).The Colwall Village Society will be hosting a Zoom talk: **Unlocking the History of your House**, by Rhys Griffith. Please register for a link at:

www.colwallvillagesociety.org.uk.

British Association for Local History
has a 10 minute talk on Youtube -
[Kilpeck's view of its Medieval
World](#) with John Chandler.

Friday 19 November - 10.30am
Hereford Archives (HARC) are
celebrating Black History Month.
Doing Business Overseas: Slavery,
sugar and the Cornwalls of Moccas
1765-1868 with Jane Adams at via
Zoom (free), email
archives@herefordshire.gov.uk) for
Zoom link.

12 October to end of December
Exhibition at HARC tracing
connections between Herefordshire
and colonial slavery, currently
Tuesday – Thursday, 10 am – 3.30pm

Nov 25, 2021 07:30 PM
Book launch of 'Patronage and Power
in the Medieval Welsh March: One
Family's Story'(please join from 7.15
for a prompt start at 7.30)

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85279281794?pwd=b2xVSW1MTVdleTNTZi9EaUdZVm9iZz09>

Meeting ID: 852 7928 1794
Passcode: 816713

The Mortimer History Society and the
University of Wales Press warmly
invite you to the online launch of Dr
David Stephenson's new book
that explores a fascinating aspect of
medieval Wales and the March (to be
published in November).

In addition, the University of Wales
Press is pleased to offer members a
20% discount on the book through
their website with the code
MORTIMER20. To purchase a copy,
visit: [www.uwp.co.uk/book/patronage
e-and-power-in-the-medieval-welsh-
march/](http://www.uwp.co.uk/book/patronage-and-power-in-the-medieval-welsh-march/)

**Saturday 4th December 2pm -
4.45pm** The Mortimer Society
presents an online conference.



Programme:

"Edward III & a Plantagenet Apanage
Policy" - Dr. David Green.

"Edward III & the lords of the Welsh
March" - Dr Matt Raven.

"Edmund Mortimer, Alice Perrers &
the Good Parliament" - Dr. Laura
Tompkins.

Tickets: £3 members £5 non-members

For further details see>
[Mortimer history society.org.uk](http://Mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk)

Priory Mill and its People

Stories from a Brecon Corn Mill

The back-story of a book.

By Guy Bevan

(A version of this article was published by the Brecon Local and Family History Society, of which the author is a member.)



I never thought that I would come across a formal letter from the Marquis Camden to my great-great-great Grandpa Thomas Bevan. Still less that the object of the letter would be to evict my ancestor for non-payment of the rent on his mill, or that great-great-great Grandpa's apparently lax maintenance regime would be a cause of the collapse of the Priory Mill Weir during the dreadful Brecon floods of 1853. But such was the case and this is how it came about.

Like many people, I have been collecting snippets of family history for years. In earlier times this would have consisted of a collection of dog-eared papers in an old shoe box on top of the wardrobe. But of course, we are now almost a quarter of the way through the 21st Century, so the

information is now held in digital form on my computer. Or possibly in The Cloud. There is also, you will understand, a back-up set in my trusty old Clarks shoe box (because you never know with computers. Or Clouds).

When the first lock-down started in the Spring of 2020, rather than spend my days staring at the TV, I decided, as I am sure others did, to sort out those years of unstructured family research.

The problem was that they were mainly unconnected snippets, not proper threads. Just dollops of stuff with no connective tissue, no proper narrative.

My family name is Bevan and an old family bible gave me birth dates for my great-great-great Grandparents, Thomas Bevan born in 1786 and his wife Elizabeth, born in 1782. I'll call him Thomas Bevan senior. They had four children, three of whom survived: Hugh, born in 1821, Thomas Bevan junior born in 1824 (my great-great Grandpa) and Marie (sometimes Maria) born in 1828.

And from census returns I could trace great-great Grandpa Thomas Bevan junior from 1871 to 1901 by which time he and his own family lived in Bristol.

I have a photo of him (below) in prosperous middle-age from around 1887, surrounded by his family, who are helpfully named on the back of the picture. From this I could identify one rakishly handsome young son, seated in the front row right of the family group, as my great grandpa

John Wesley Bevan. These were clear family connections and the Bristol census details also told me that Thomas Bevan junior had been born in Merthyr Tydfil and that his sister Marie (who kept house for him in Bristol after my great-great Grandma died in early 1891) was also born in Merthyr.



That all connects. So far so good. But I knew nothing of their brother Hugh or their parents.

Working backwards and trying to fill in the gaps, "Thomas Bevan" is about as common a name as you can get in the Welsh Census, and so whilst I found a lot of references to "Thomas Bevan" in the records on Ancestry and similar sites, these including too many "false-positives", sundry other dead-ends, and various entries which might or might not be the "right" people. But amongst them was an 1828 christening record from Pontmorlais Wesleyan Chapel in Merthyr Tydfil for Marie which gave a birth date of 26th August (in addition to the christening date) exactly matching the Family Bible and showing her parents as

Thomas Bevan (a "Farmer and Shopkeeper") and Elizabeth.

There was also the 1841 census which gave me a "Thomas Bevan" (with a wife called Elizabeth) working as a grocer in Castle Street, Brecon, with three children in the correct age sequence: Hugh (a draper), Thomas (a grocer), and Marie. That seemed promising.

And the 1851 Census gave me a "Thomas Bevan" working as the miller at Priory Mill, Brecon, with a wife called Elizabeth and a daughter called Marie born about 1828 in Merthyr Tydfil.

Also listed in the 1851 census was another "Thomas Bevan" born in the 1820's in Merthyr Tydfil and now trading as a grocer in High Street, Brecon, living with a wife called Anne who seemed to fit Thomas junior. So, was this the father Thomas Bevan (senior) milling at Priory Mill and his younger son Thomas Bevan (junior) trading as a grocer in Brecon High Street?

It felt as if I had lots of little pearls, but no string to connect them all together and convince me that the Merthyr "farmer and shopkeeper" from 1828 was also the Brecon grocer in 1841 and the Brecon Miller in 1851.

I spent a lot of time looking through Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archives seeking information on "Thomas Bevan" in Brecon, and found various adverts, trade directory entries and short stray stories relating to both the miller and the grocer. There were also marriage records for Thomas junior and birth certificates

for the first of his many children. It sort of fitted together, but nothing quite gave me a clear link to convince me that these were definitively the right people.

Eventually I took a step sideways and started to look up Thomas Bevan senior's eldest son Hugh Bevan in the British Newspaper Archive. Somewhat to my surprise "Hugh Bevan" proved to be a much less common name than "Thomas Bevan" and I soon began to uncover stories from the 1870's and 1880's of a travelling salesman based in Gloucester, who later became a prosperous provisions merchant in Bridgend, a lay-preacher and pillar of the Wesleyan church and eventually Chairman of the Bridgend Local Health Board. I could also track these jobs and locations through successive census returns which suggested these were all the same man, born in Merthyr Tydfil around 1821 with a Gloucestershire-born wife called Louisa.

And then I hit pure gold in the online British Newspaper Archive.

In the late 1880's the Brecon County Times ran a series of biographical articles on local boys made good, called "*Brecon Boys at Home and Abroad*". In its edition dated 11th October 1889 the subject of the article was Hugh Bevan. It even included his photograph, perhaps the only image of him to have survived (he died childless in 1898).

The article on page 8 was about 2,300 words, filling a good third of a broad-sheet page. It confirmed that Hugh had been born in Merthyr Tydfil and

that his father had been Thomas Bevan. It said that in 1831, when Hugh was aged ten, Thomas Bevan senior had moved his family to Brecon and took over the lease of Fennifach Farm, just west of the town. It recorded that a few years later Hugh had become apprenticed to a draper near London, but had had to return to Brecon through ill health. It said that in his twenties Hugh met his future wife, Miss Louisa Surman (who came from Maisemore near Gloucester) at a house-party at Defynnock, just north of Brecon.

The article said that after they married at Maisemore Hugh changed trade and location to become a cheese salesman, working for a Gloucester firm for 20 years, before launching his own wholesale provisions business at Bridgend in the 1870's with a partner. At the time of the article Hugh Bevan was a well-known and wealthy tradesman in Bridgend, living on a 30 acre farm called Ty Risha (or Tir Isha) described as being near the railway line about two miles north of Bridgend. Today the farm is the Ty Risha Inn, just south of Sarn and the M4 at junction 36, although ironically Hugh was an ardent abstainer.

When I checked the marriage of Hugh Bevan and Louisa Surman, which took place on 26th November 1844, the records showed Hugh's trade was "Miller" and stated that his home was in Brecon, although his time as a miller is not mentioned in the Brecon County Times article (there are other omissions too).

That article set me scampering back to my metaphorical shoe box: There was indeed an entry in the Tithe Records showing that a “Thomas Bevan” had been the tenant of Fennifach Farm when the records were collated in 1839/1840. I had disregarded it earlier because I couldn’t link it to my family. That Thomas Bevan, whilst living at Fennifach (or Venny Vach and several other spelling variants) had also been involved in 1835 in placing newspaper adverts for the sale of several shops with living accommodation in Merthyr Tydfil “*For further Particulars, apply to Mr Thomas Bevan, Venny Vach, near Brecon*”, reinforcing his Merthyr connection.

But by August 1840 the landlord and owner of Fennifach Farm, the well-known Colonel John Lloyd Vaughan Watkins of Penoyre House, was advertising for a new tenant, so it seems that Thomas Bevan senior had then moved down-market to run the grocery shop in Castle Street Brecon where he lived with his wife, son Hugh (then a draper), younger son Thomas junior and daughter Marie at the time of the 1841 census.

And the combination of Hugh the ex-drafter working as a miller in Brecon in his 1844 wedding records, plus Thomas Bevan senior as miller with his wife Elizabeth and daughter Marie living at Priory Mill in Brecon in the 1851 census seemed to confirm that the connection was good.

And as locals in Brecon will know, Priory Mill not only still exists, but is

undergoing restoration (below) as part of a low-impact holiday and camping business.

<https://www.priorymillfarm.co.uk>



So naturally we went to stay there in a gap between lock-downs and were made most welcome by the owners Susie and Noel Gaskell. I explained my family connection and interest in the history of the mill and from that visit in October 2020 and subsequent conversations Susie and Noel suggested that I might write a history of the mill. So, with lock-down re-emerging, I did just that through the first half of 2021.

I had a framework from my own family research and Susie and Noel gave me some other pointers, most intriguingly the connection to the family estates of the Marquess

Camden, whose family had owned Priory Mill (and much else in the Brecon area) from the 1700's until 1946, and whose estate papers were held by Kent County Archives. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I contacted the Kent Archives where a Dr Helen Wicker pointed me to a variety of archives which mentioned Priory Mill and included extensive correspondence with Thomas Bevan senior, who had indeed been the tenant miller from 1842 to 1852, until he failed to pay his rent once too often and skimmed on maintaining the mill's weir. Although locked down, Dr Wicker and her team were eventually able to provide me with well over 100 digital images of correspondence and papers regarding Priory Mill's various tenants running from the early 1700's to 1945 (including the ill-fated weir's maintenance records). Once my wife and I had laboriously transcribed the copperplate handwritten letters and records and combined them with my research in the British Newspaper Archive, the General Records Office and Census returns, I was able to put together a reasonably detailed history of Priory Mill and its tenants from around 1750 onwards. This included the text of the eviction notice, addressed to Mr Thomas Bevan, The Priory Mill, Brecon, which reads: *"Sir, I hereby give you notice and require you to quit and deliver up on the twenty ninth day of September next the possession of all that dwelling House, the Water Corn Mill with the machinery and the Garden,*

Land and Premises with the appurtenances which you now hold ... called the Priory Mill situate in the parish of St John in the Borough of Brecon in the County of Brecknock. Dated the twenty second of March 1852. [signed] Camden."

In the six months between the above notice and his eviction date further correspondence continues to try to oblige great-great-great Grandpa to complete his obligations to repair various parts of the weir, the mill and mill-house, to little effect.

So that even after he had been expelled from the mill, the new tenant (John Handley, who later successfully ran the mill for many decades) and the Camden estate were still jointly pursuing Thomas Bevan senior for apparently failing to maintain the mill's weir, as he was contracted to do. A letter dated 10th June 1853, nine months after the eviction, reminds Thomas Bevan senior of a contract which he had signed in 1851 to *"keep the weir...in perfect order...at the end of seven years...and that you will be held responsible for the ...costs or damages...of your defalcation and neglect."* Just three weeks later, on Saturday 9th July 1853, the weir at Priory Mill collapsed in the great 1853 flood.

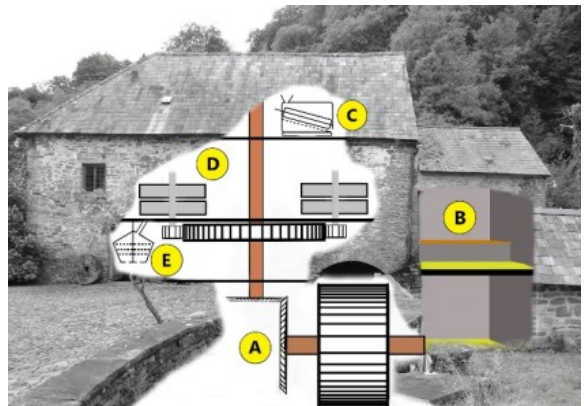
It gave me cold comfort to discover that great-great-great Grandpa was not the only tenant to be turned out of the mill for lack of rent payments. The previous tenants had been the Mathews family, first the father and then the son, from 1800 to 1842. The father had substantially upgraded the

mill and its buildings and was convinced, when he retired and passed the business to his son, that this investment gave him effective equity in the leased mill. The records show that the Estate's agent did spend a lot of time investigating these claims, but ultimately rejected them. So when in 1842 the son was unable to pay the rent and had built up substantial arrears, no allowance was made for the family's past upgrading of the mill. The 1841 Census had listed the son, William Mathews living at the mill and supporting his wife and five children under 13. William Mathews wrote to the Camden Estate's agent on 17th September 1842 begging for alleviation of the rent because of his father's past investment in the mill, ending: "*I trust, Sir, that as a Husband and Father you will pause before you make up your mind to cast a whole family upon the world...*" But it cut no ice.

Contrasting this, the long-standing tenant John Handley, already a successful miller, took over the tenancy from my great-great-grandpa in late 1852. He and his wider family made such a success of the mill that it was still being referred to as "Handley's Mill" seventy years later in the 1920's.

Although I couldn't access the physical libraries at that time because of Covid, in addition to the fascinating Camden Archives, I was able to trace from other online sources the rough outline history of the Priory estates and its mills back into the monastic holdings

of medieval times and through the dissolution of the monasteries and the convulsions of the Civil War into more settled centuries.



I also added something on the outline of the milling process and the mill's equipment as it might have been around 1850, with some simplified diagrams. And with the help of the current owners I also outlined the last twenty years of restoration of the mill and its premises.

The result is a short book called "*Priory Mill and its People – Stories from a Brecon Corn Mill*" which I have self-published. It runs to 111 pages in paperback. And whilst it is unlikely to make the best-seller lists, if anyone is interested in mills in general or Priory Mill and the families who owned and operated it (including the Prices, Jeffreys, Pratts, Wynatons, Mathews, Bevans, Handleys, Williams, and Gaskells) I will be only too pleased if you want to purchase a copy (email: enquiries@melinddu.co.uk).

So, God Bless the Kent Count Archives and the British Newspaper Archive. Perhaps Lockdown did have some benefits after all.