

JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP XL NETWORK NEWSLETTER

The XL Network welcomes alumni who are celebrating 40 years or more since matriculation



There have been significant changes in the Development Office and as a result there has been a re-organisation of the timing of the College's communication with alumni. Thus, this newsletter in future will go out with the *College Record* in early February and with *Jesus News* at the end of August or very early September.

Members will recall that there was some spare money from the Plaque Appeal (for the marble plaque unveiled in St. Mary's Priory at Abergavenny for the first Principal, David Lewis). This was allocated in support of various Seren initiatives (a network dedicated to encouraging and supporting able pupils in Welsh schools to aspire to leading universities, especially Oxbridge). This year the money has given added support to the College's residential week for 75 pupils (plus 11 teachers) to gain an experience and insight into College life and education. Also, on a 50/50 basis with the College we are supporting the new Jesus College Essay Prize directed at younger pupils well before GCSE. The competition was run by the College in collaboration with the University flagship website and drew 65 entries. The winner is Melys Thomas, a thirteen-year-old pupil at Ysgol Maes

Garmon School, a Welsh language comprehensive in Mold, Flintshire. Her excellent essay will be published in the next *College Record*. Should anyone wish to know more about any of these College/XL group initiatives, do contact Dr Matthew Williams (Access and Career Development Fellow)
E: matthew.williams@jesus.ox.ac.uk.

The main social events of recent months were Old Members' Day and the successful trip to Cowbridge in South Wales and there are three articles related to that occasion. (Photos by David Pick).

The Jesus College Curry Club (strictly Jesus College Recusants – JCRI) continues to thrive with its regular meeting in Fleet Street wine bar followed by a meal in a nearby curry house, and anyone is welcome. The next occasion is Tuesday 25th September and if you wish to join us the contact person is Norman Wright (E: norman.wright233@ntlworld.com). Information is also available on the website: jomg.org.

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We were once again reminded of Jesus College's strong links with Wales when XL members and partners, more than thirty of us, visited Cowbridge and Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan in early June. And we made some interesting discoveries.

Starting in the tranquil and beautiful setting of Cowbridge Physic Garden, we enjoyed the collection of medicinal and culinary plants which would have been typical of a walled garden in the eighteenth century. But the site also served a more prosaic purpose in the earlier part of the twentieth century as the vegetable garden for the adjacent Cowbridge Grammar School. Why the Jesus interest? Cowbridge Grammar School was owned by Jesus College for 250 years, following a bequest by Sir Leoline Jenkins, Principal of Jesus between 1661 and 1673.

The school no longer exists. The buildings are now an upmarket 'des res' development, but the adjacent Holy Cross Church, where many of the boys would have worshipped, was well worth visiting. Clive Jenkins (1966, History), a product of both Cowbridge and Jesus, acted as our guide and went on to tell us at dinner in the Bear Hotel about the history of Cowbridge.

We were then given a fascinating insight into the links between Cowbridge School and Jesus by Dan Clayton-Jones – a former Cowbridge pupil himself. As well as being the President of the Physic Garden he is generally regarded as one of the prime movers and shakers in the world of Welsh heritage and tourism. Despite being a non-alumnus he's a Jesus College donor who takes a close interest in developments at the College.

The school went through a less than harmonious experience in the early stages – thanks to some serious flaws in Sir Leoline's

will. There were contentious shortcomings with regard to free place allocation, the maintenance of the buildings and the question of school surpluses. The Chancery Court, presided over by the infamous Judge Jefferies, ruled in 1687 that all surpluses should be returned to Jesus, a decision which enraged the people of Cowbridge at the time. Nevertheless Jenkins had successfully established it as a feeder school for Jesus between 1685 and the 1920s. The College appointed every Cowbridge headmaster over that period, the school sent an average of six boys a year there, and 50 Jesus Fellows began their academic life in Cowbridge. The original buildings were rebuilt in 1852, at a cost to Jesus of £5,000. So all in all it was a generous and important legacy.

Day Two saw us travelling by coach through the leafy lanes of the Vale to St Donat's Castle. It's now the home of Atlantic College, the international sixth form school, and is positioned stunningly above the Bristol Channel. For centuries it was the home of the knightly Stradlings, a medieval family of Swiss origin who helped the Norman aristocracy maintain control over Glamorgan. It was the fifth Sir Edward Stradling who conceived the idea of Cowbridge Grammar School, but it was his cousin Sir John Stradling who carried out Sir

Edward's intention, thereby paving the way for the revamping of the school by Sir Leoline Jenkins. Sir John's son, the sixth Sir Edward, was responsible for the decline of the family fortune thanks to a series of disastrous investments. He was captured and then released after taking part as a Royalist in the Battle of Edgehill in 1642. He died in 1644. Although he was a Magdalen man he was buried in Jesus College Chapel – another surprise.

More recently the castle was a playground for William Randolph Hearst, the American newspaper magnate and his



Cowbridge Physic Garden



Atlantic College

guests, in particular for his film star mistress Marion Davies who achieved fame in the silent movie days, but whose marketability declined rapidly once the talkies were established. She had an unfortunate stammer!

We were treated to a fascinating tour by a former Atlantic College staff member, Alan Hall – a Magdalen graduate. He described the tortuous and hugely expensive steps taken by Hearst to restore the castle, to which were added dismantled architectural features (and in some cases whole buildings) from various parts of England and France. Hearst may have been the Rupert Murdoch or even Donald Trump of his day, with his ability to make a fortune out of 'yellow journalism' (now known as fake news) and political chicanery, but we should at least be grateful to him for saving the castle.

And then on to Llantwit Major church, described by some historians as the first seat of learning in Britain. It was where St Illtud founded a sixth century monastic school, an important part of the Celtic rather than Roman tradition. From here missionaries were dispatched in large numbers to Cornwall, Ireland and Brittany. There was a belief at one time

that it survived into the Middle Ages and eventually laid the foundation for Cowbridge Grammar School. Sadly historians have now debunked that theory. So, no Jesus link there. But as Jesus College seeks to revive the Chair of Celtic Studies this site should still be of special interest to us.

Our excellent guide Vivian Kelly debunked another myth – that St David was a student there. But no matter. St Illtud and his followers, such as St Samson, St Paul Aurelian and St Gildas, all left their mark throughout the Celtic world. There are still many churches in the Breton region dedicated to Llantwit saints.

We were particularly impressed by the spectacular Celtic stones and crosses which are now displayed in the recently restored Galilee Chapel, along with some intriguing effigies in the West Church. And we mustn't forget the tea and cakes laid on by the ladies of the Parish, a welcome finale after a warm and untypically sunny spell of Welsh weather.

As a native 'Llantwitian' I was always conscious that Llantwit rivalled places like Nether Wallop and Lower Piddle in the search for Britain's most comic place name. Perhaps English speakers over the centuries found the Welsh version Llanilltud Fawr too much of a tongue twister!

We were always known in the Vale of Glamorgan as 'one a'wanting'. Why? There are two versions. One theory is that a merry brake-load of locals once thought that they were "one a'wanting" as they rolled home after a convivial evening in Cowbridge, only to find on arrival that each man had forgotten to count himself. The version that I grew up with was that, at an annual rugby cup match between Llantwit Major and Cowbridge, the Llantwit captain was asked by the referee if his team was fully present. I needn't say the rest. Needless to say George Reah, when counting us aboard the hired bus, was never found 'one a'wanting'!

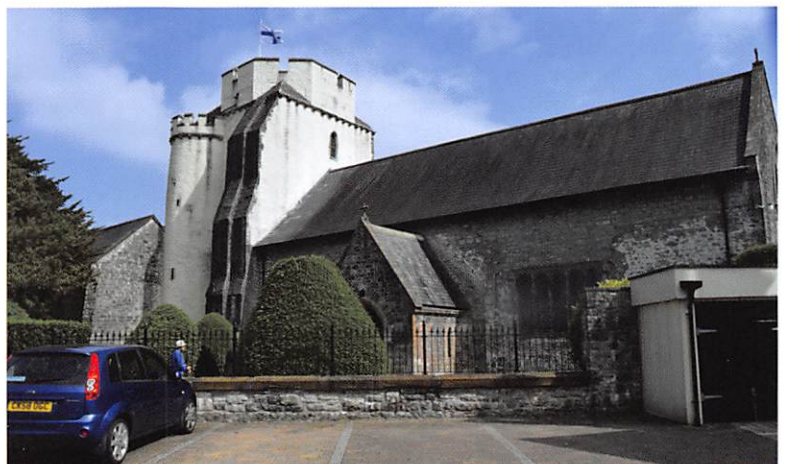
Max Perkins (1964, English)

THE VISIT TO COWBRIDGE A guest's perspective of the first day

The road signs, cattle-grids across main roads, and sheep wandering in suburban-type streets trying to shed themselves of their fleeces by rubbing against posts, made one realise that this must be rural Wales. The Bear Hotel in Cowbridge, just west of Cardiff, was the background to a lovely two-day break for the XL Group.

Cameras were to the fore as most of the thirty-six taking part in the event set off at 3pm from the front of The Bear on the first day to have a good root around the Physic Garden just off the main street. It proved a triumph of voluntary dedication to providing the local community with a well-planned and maintained garden of medicinal plants with history. Bounded on the south side by the medieval town wall, the garden originally formed a traditional garden for the Old Hall, a house fronting the High Street. After the departure of the Edmondes family in the 1920s, the site became a kitchen garden for Cowbridge Grammar School, who later ceded it to a neglectful Local Authority. Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust, a charity, began to clear

the site in 2005 and return it to its more traditional form and it was 'opened' by the Duchess of Cornwall in 2008. The partition hedges surround plants well known by herbalists to ease various illnesses and each bed is labelled with the parts of the body. Confusion could arise as some plants were seen in all



Holy Cross Church, Cowbridge

beds, and one had to conclude that the herbalists of yore knew all about the placebo effect. In all, the garden proved to be a little space of calm and colour, of which the volunteers who maintain it are rightly proud.

The cameras then moved back down the road to view Holy Cross Church. A Mr Jeff Alden of the church penned a little guidebook and it explains one of the anomalies seen from the outside. It looks as if the church has been grafted on to a Norman defensive tower and it is thought that the tower dates from around 1254 AD. I guess at this time everyone must have thought someone might attack them. The South Aisle is reputed to be a gift from Lady Ann Neville who became the wife of the 'car park king', Richard III. A chantry chapel, built a little later, fell victim to Henry VIII and the chapel became a much-needed choir vestry. Clive Jenkins steered us towards the window containing coats of arms of various benefactors of the Grammar School, brought in from the Founders Room and Seys Room in the school, with the help of the County Council and the Old Boys Association, when the Grammar School closed to be replaced by the 'Comp up the road'. The window displays the coats of arms of Sir Edward Stradling 1608, Sir Leoline Jenkins 1685, and Jesus College, Oxford.



Window, Holy Cross Church

We were all ready for a really good dinner at The Bear where in the spirit of our forefathers (oops – mustn't forget the women – it is a hundred years since we got the vote, after all) much wine was drunk, and gossip exchanged. The volume of noise subsided as Dan Clayton-Jones explained the unique historic link between the Boys' Grammar School at Cowbridge and Jesus College. I don't think many of us knew that Jesus College owned the Grammar School up to the early part of the 20th century. Money is the devil in the story and the casual discarding of heritage and history. After dinner we continued at no less a volume as we took over the bar downstairs.

Sue Seward

OLD MEMBERS' DAY, 23 June 2018

I don't think I'd ever noticed that W.Y. Evans-Wentz, best known as editor (in 1927) of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, was a Jesus man, even though he was still blurbed as such on my 1970s paperback reprint. (In truth it was more a cultural talisman than a book one actually read...)

Dr Mark Williams, in an excellent lecture, discussed Evans-Wentz's much earlier work on Celtic myth, especially fairy folklore, under the supervision of Sir John Rhys, Oxford's first Professor of Celtic. Evans-Wentz, who had strong 'alternative' religious leanings, was inclined to go native with his subjects, to the extent of apparently believing in the fairies. Rhys's own folklore research fed into a comparative approach to pagan religions which, though now somewhat superseded, remains respectable. (He had earned his Chair with studies of Welsh philology.)

Celticists in the academy are (naturally) wary of association with loony fringes and ahistorical media exploitations, but this has resulted in a somewhat dry and insular field. Mark sees the public's perennial enthusiasm for all things Celtic (however hokey) as the discipline's best hope for regeneration, including the reinstatement of an Oxford Chair - the aim of the current appeal that looks imminently successful.

Mandy Franz, of MICA, lead architect on the Northgate redevelopment introduced the project, enabled by the major gift of Dr Henry Cheng, which will create a fourth quad

including living, study and teaching accommodation, a cafe and a 'Digital Hub', and new buildings on Cornmarket for income generation through retail. It was great to see the plans and visualisations, and to hear more about the project's intended benefits, both for the College itself, and for Oxford. It is intended to 'open up' the College to some extent - at least to views in - and to improve the Market Street environment. It will also create a view out to die for, for the privileged users of the tall glass lantern room atop the new gatehouse – the most controversial element of the design, and several members present expressed strong disapproval of it. Detailed planning consent for the whole scheme is expected to be considered very soon by Oxford City Council.

After a lovely lunch in Hall, the outing to Abingdon and back on a Salter's boat from Folly Bridge was extraordinarily pleasant and relaxing. There were 3 locks negotiated, their cottage gardens bursting with blooms; some good birds seen (a tern! a kingfisher!! a great flock of swifts and swallows hawking for insects, plentiful near a nature reserve); and home-made ice cream at Abingdon Bridge. For me, the day had the special aspect of a rare family gathering, with cousins Richard Smith (Maths, 1972) over from the 'States with Amy and the boys, and Jenny, along with husband Max Perkins (1964, English.). And it was my partner's first Jesus experience. In all, a brilliant day, thanks so much to the organisers.

Elizabeth James (1975, English)