

## Newsletter:

23<sup>rd</sup> Edition Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### WEEKLY UPDATE

Fairly busy in the Museum last Saturday including two visitors from the London area. We now have to destroy the track & trace visitor details from our earliest openings which were more than 21 days ago. For the two members officially manning our Museum there are now many extra duties to think about. Visitors welcomed any Saturday between 10am and 12.30pm and any members who could volunteer for Museum duty would be particularly welcome, this can entitle you to a cup of tea & a biscuit.

Our Friday evening walk managed to dodge the showers and, after two weeks with 13 attendees, we struck lucky with 14. Malcolm educated us on the history of the area of his youth which included pointing out two of his homes but we'd chosen the very week when both the blue plaques had been temporarily removed for cleaning.

This week's Walk will visit the site of the Blackvein Colliery and of Colliery Row, the earliest coal mining community in the area. No strenuous climbing is involved but there is some uneven ground and the possibility of a little mud.

Next Friday we have our AGM which will take place on Zoom commencing at 7pm. For innocents such as I, you do not need to download Zoom. We don't have Zoom at home but Sue has participated in a group meeting for the last few weeks so I watched the process. The co-ordinator sends an email invitation to attend and this includes a link to click which, given a short time for him to approve you, will link you up. Dave Hale will be acting as co-ordinator and will send out further details next week. Please attend if at all possible

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June 1923

The Annual Show of Risca and Crosskeys Horticultural Society will take place, as usual, at the Meadows Field, Crosskeys on August 7<sup>th</sup>, the same having been kindly lent by Dr. D. T. Richards J.P. (*The Meadows was featured in a previous Newsletter photo quiz*).

August 1923

At the Entrance Examinations for Pontywaun Grammar School, the first place was gained by Miss Mary Alicia McCrie, who secured 206 marks out of a possible 250. She is the daughter of Mr Thomas McCrie, Chemist at the By-Products Plant, Risca Collieries.

*(Locals may remember Mary McCrie, who never married, as a resident of Crosskeys, teacher at Newbridge Grammar School and organist at St. Catherine's Church).*

September 1923

The pipe organ at Cwmfelinfach Workman's Hall is well worth hearing. The organist is Mr. Harry Clare (formerly of Olympia, Newport).

October 1923



Mr Herbert Herrera, who is in junction with Mr G. Arthur Lush, has established a Wireless School in Crosskeys, informs us that their object is to give lessons in the making and use of Wireless Sets of all kinds, from the Crystal to the Mulk-Valve. It will be remembered that Mr Herrera was once the first to receive the American concerts and he has since received congratulations from several distinguished personages in the Wireless world. (*We have a photograph in the Museum of a bus with*

*wiring on the roof for receipt of radio waves labelled as having been installed by Lush & Herrera).*(*apologies for the poor photograph of the photograph, but much better to view it on a Saturday morning!*)

## October 1923

*Our Monthly Cameo.* Mr James Nicholas, Overman, National Colliery. Born in Caldicot in 1861, started work as a door-boy at Abercarn. Survived the 1878 explosion where two brothers died. Started at Risca a few months later as a collier. Transferred to Wattstown (National Colliery) in 1908. In 1883, married Elizabeth Hurn, daughter of the late Henry Hurn who was a survivor of the first explosion at the Old Blackvein Colliery.

Regarding Door-boys (he was a door-boy at Abercarn up to the explosion), he recalls -

Amongst the door-boys a tacit understanding seemed to exist which always bound them, whenever necessary, to concerted action. Many a time, the Pit was stopped by their decision to take revenge upon some offending haulier. The favourite practice was to take the besoms which were used for lubricating the tram wheels and then repair to the rubbish tip. There they would light their besoms and hold something like a war dance. Peculiar revenge you may say! But the hauliers would not go down the Pit without the boys and a day's work would be lost.

## February 1924

Our readers will be glad to hear that Mr William Light, who sustained a rather serious injury at Risca Collieries on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, is making steady progress. Mr Light was knocked down by a locomotive while following his employment as a tipper and was immediately removed to the Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport, where it was found necessary to amputate one of his feet.

## March 1924

Mr Charles Edwards M.P. for Bedwellty is being made the first Freeman of the village. This ceremony took place at Nine Mile Point Workman's Institute, at which he was one of the founders.

## July 1924

Lately presented to Newport Museum and Art Gallery, the Newport Roll of Honour book contains the names of 4 women and 1511 men who were killed or died of wounds during the Great War. We should like to record that the honour of writing these names was extended to Miss Eva Caroline Bates, sometime student of Newport Art School and a daughter of Mr Samuel Bates, who is employed at Nine Mile Point Collieries.

July 1924



Crosskeys Silver Band had a very busy month. The band took part in the opening ceremony at Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys.



July 1924

Hodges Heading Annual Outing. The Hauliers of the Hodges Heading District at Risca Collieries held their annual outing on Saturday June 12<sup>th</sup> when about 36 had a very enjoyable trip around the Wye Valley. The party were due to leave Crosskeys at 2.30pm but, owing to some humourist cancelling the order for the charabancs, a start was not made until after 4 o'clock.

There was a short breakdown, several 'refreshment' stops and then a meal in Monmouth. The party left Monmouth at 8 o'clock and, after losing one of their number on the way (it was afterwards discovered that he was accommodated at the Anchor Hotel, Tintern) reached Crosskeys at 12.45 a.m.

December 1924

Our genial Bailiff, Mr William Jenkins, we notice, is back in harness again, after an accident which resulted in his losing the sight of one eye.

Mr James Phillips, who met with an accident to his eye at the Old Black Vein Colliery, we hear, is home again after an operation at the Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport.

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### Non destructive testing?

I read and reread this snippet a couple of times and just wonder if there was an idea amongst the villagers 200 feet below why so many trains were crossing back and forth?

I wonder how much more printers ink would have been used had the High Level line joined with Crumlin Low Level in 1865?

Perhaps at that time they would have reported more on the loss of coal and iron on the trains and the disruption it causes to cross valley transportation than on any loss of life?

*Courtesy NLW*

**CRUMLIN.**  
CRUMLIN VIADUCT.— We last week briefly noticed that this structure had, in consequence of certain misgivings as to its safety, been tested by a Government officer, and that the results were perfectly satisfactory. A correspondent sends the following additional particulars:—For some past various rumours have been in circulation respecting the stability of the above structure, and it may therefore be some relief to the anxiety of the public to learn that it has just been severely tested under the superintendence of Captain Tyler, R.E., Government Inspector of Railways, with the most satisfactory results. The tests were carried on in the presence of several eminent engineers, and consisted in the first instance of seven locomotive engines with their tenders being driven several times over the viaduct at different speeds. These engines covered a space of 282 feet, or nearly two spans of the viaduct, their aggregate weight being 287 tons, or rather more than one ton per foot run: under this load, the deflection of the girders was about one-fifth of an inch. In the second trial a very heavily laden coal train (a large quantity of iron being added to increase the weight) was run over the viaduct on the second line of rails, the seven engines still running upon the first line, giving a load of nearly 300 tons to be carried by each span, that is to say 150 tons on each line of rails, or a total of nearly 600 tons, which is greatly in excess of the traffic load, and is the same test as applied at the Government inspection previous to its being handed over to the railway company by Messrs. Kennard Brothers, its designers and erectors, now nine years since. The constant traffic over the viaduct during this time has had the effect of slightly wearing some of the bolts, and as the timber roadway is beginning to decay it has been decided to replace it with iron, and during the past few months these repairs have been in hand, and have doubtless suggested the reports as to the stability of the viaduct, which it appears were communicated to the Board of Trade, and resulted in Captain Tyler's rigorous inspection and tests. It is pleasing to find the results are so satisfactory, and that after a number of years wear the deflection under the same test as applied at the opening of the viaduct for traffic has not perceptibly increased.

Of course things change and a 100 years on villagers were moved out; not because a train might drop in or an unexpected delivery of coal but in case a helicopter complete with

actors entered via the attic.

# Famous stars thrill crowds at Crumlin

**THE Count of Monte Cristo, alias actor Alan Badel, a German light machine gun cradled in his arms, leaned out of a helicopter as it zoomed through the centre piers of Crumlin Viaduct on Sunday, and shot-up famous film actors Sophia Loren and Gregory Peck as they cowered on the bridge's catwalk 203 feet above the village.**

This was part of an exciting sequence being shot around the 108 year-old viaduct by a London film unit for a new Stanley Donen production, "Arabesque."

Many thousands of people poured into Crumlin to watch the day's filming. They saw the helicopter make the dangerous flight under the bridge 20 times and tried to catch a glimpse of the film stars.

For 300 Crumlin residents it was a day of complete upheaval because they had to be evacuated from their homes to comply with a Ministry of Civil Aviation permit for the flights.

## RECEPTION CENTRES

Each family affected received a £2 disturbance fee from the film company and were provided with packed lunches at reception centres set up by the Monmouthshire Civil Defence Corps.

The filming provided an excellent opportunity for the Civil Defence members—more than 60 personnel under county civil defence officer Mr John Oliver took part—to have a valuable exercise.

Apart from supervising evacuations the corps provided radio links ambulance teams and refreshment facilities.

The influx of sightseers, who filled the village to bursting point, provided a tough task also for Monmouthshire Police.

The police officers, as well as trying to hold back the thousands of people seeking autographs, had to stop traffic every time the helicopter made a flight from its base on the Kay Field, Crumlin the home of Crumlin Rugby Club.

The hair-raising sorties under the bridge provided the highlights for many of the onlookers, as the helicopter's whirling blades went very close to the underside of the catwalk.

Piloted by former Czechoslovakian Air Force pilot Jan Patcha, now a naturalised Australian, the helicopter also made many low flights to the side of the bridge, skimming the mountainside treetops in its approach.

## DECLINED "STAND-IN"

Alan Badel, the actor who popularised the Count of Monte Cristo on television, declined a stand-in for the hazardous journeys under the bridge in the helicopter and was unperturbed by the risk.

"It is not really frightening. While I am up there I have to concentrate on the part I am playing. It is however, very cold, noisy and draughty," said Mr Badel.

A sergeant in the 6th Airborne Regt. during the last war, Mr Badel was one of the first 40 men dropped into France the night before D Day.

He has close links with Wales, his Welsh-speaking wife Yvonne hailing from Lampeter.

He thought the Crumlin Viaduct "fantastic" and was surprised to learn that it is in process of being demolished under the Beeching axe.

Throughout the day Miss Loren and Mr Peck made short sprints across the viaduct catwalk, ducking behind the struts to avoid the shooting by the villainous Mr Badel.

## HISTORIC RECORD

Producing and directing the film, a comedy thriller, is Stanley Donen who had a previous film hit with the musical "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers."

On Sunday the 90-strong film unit spent 11 hours shooting the sequence and were again at the Viaduct on Monday.

Yet, when the film is shown in the cinema, the Crumlin scene will last only a few minutes.

But at least there will be a film record of the last days of the historic Crumlin Viaduct which is coming down for scrap after 108 years.

"South Wales Gazette 27 August

1965" via Findmypast

## **Malcolm's Merlin Musings**

Malcolm has selected and had printed numerous interesting snippets from the Merlin, to help raise much needed funds. They are available at the Museum at £3.00 each

Here's a couple to whet your appetite; or better still reaching for your cash (*yes we will still take cash* 😊)



A man named Rogers sold his wife at the Colliers Arms for five shillings and a pot of beer. The purchaser was a carpenter residing in Pontypool. After holding his purchase, he found he had no bargain and was glad to get rid of her, even at less than first cost.

### **A true story by Malcolm Johnson**

At the end of an exhausting annual day-trip to Weston-Super-Mare, two members of Risca's Working Men's Club, Bill Davies and his mate Johnny Smith headed toward Birnbeck Pier and the waiting Campbell's paddle steamer.

Nearing the pier Bill looked over and unexpectedly called out, 'Hey Johnny, isn't that Chalky White over there?'

'It is,' said Johnny, 'and it looks as if he's had more than his usual eight pints.'

'We'd better give him a hand', said Bill, 'or he'll miss the boat and his missus will not be pleased'.

Being exceptionally good Samaritans, Bill and Johnny hauled Chalky to the waiting boat and dragged him on board. Arriving back in Risca, and with Chalky still in a pitiable state, it was decided to carry him to his house.

On arrival, still supporting Chalky, Bill and Johnny decided that their next move was to rest Chalky's body against his front door.

The pair, now seriously concerned about waking Chalky's wife, finally decided to knock on the door as well as shout through the letter box.

By this time it was one o'clock in the morning, and the next door neighbour was heard opening his bedroom window. With the window now fully open the neighbour looked down and shouted,

'Oi, you won't get an answer, Chalky and his missus are on a week's holiday in Weston-Super-Mare. Now sod off!'

## The old miser's house by John Venn

Early inhabitants of Ty Sign have vague early memories of a large detached house which the kids called 'the old misers house.

Where the house was there is now a playground, opposite the entrance to Fairview Avenue off Rowan Road, the short road that connects Elm Drive near the main shops with Holly Road near the flats. The huge conifers are the remnants of the trees that once surrounded the old house.

The house was, in fact, Holly House built around 1880 for John Rosser Jacob, a prosperous corn merchant, Justice of the Peace, Wesleyan minister and sometime Mayor of Newport. His initials are clearly seen inscribed on the gable.





In the 1891 census, Holly House, Risca, contains JRJ aged 53, his wife, 4 children and a domestic servant. JRJ is said to have been born in Cardiff, his wife in Castleton and the 3 younger children in Newport but the oldest child in Risca which suggests that he had lived in the area previously.

JRJ died in 1915 and the house appears to have been sold almost immediately as the 1915 register of electors lists John Price at Holly House. The 1922 register shows John Price, Harriet Ann Price & John Charles Price which I assume to be husband, wife (with newly acquired voting rights) and adult son.

In 1960 just John C Price is listed at Holly House but the fields around him were now being replaced by a 2000 home housing estate, accommodation for the workers at the newly built Llanwern steelworks. His rural mansion became a target for the first generation of Ty Sign urchins and the more he shouted at them the more they taunted him until he became 'the old miser' and Holly House became 'the old miser's house'.

When he died the empty house became a target for thieves and vandals until it was acquired by the council and demolished.

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# Last week's Quiz

1 Name the local farm and give its location.



This is Gelli Pistyll farm which was opposite the entrance to Ty Sign school on Elm Drive. It was still lived in well after the building of Ty Sign and was only recently demolished to be replaced by several new properties currently almost completed.

2 *JV asked 'What links the Albert Hotel, Danygraig House & Risca Town School?'*

I've told this story to several members so they should have know the answer only I know they switched off as soon as they felt a boring anecdote on its way. Anyway, in the 1980's, after leading a few OHIHS Friday evening walks, I volunteered to do one, on behalf of OHIHS, for Islwyn Borough Council on Risca local history.

I spent a fair bit of time planning it and getting facts together then, the week before the scheduled walk, I decided to do a run-through. Near the church I was going to mention the historic primary school, on the hillside behind it the historic Danygraig House and, just up the road, the historic Albert Hotel.

Unfortunately, during the previous week, all three had been demolished.

## *This week's Quiz*

- 1 photo question - Same again, where is it and when and why?



- 2 For a change, this week's question has no connection with Risca or Industry. Who killed a quarter of the world's population?