



Porthaethwy – Mynedfa Ynys Môn
Menai Bridge – Gateway to Anglesey

ATGOFION O'R BORTH

Cymdeithas Ddinesig Bro Porthaethwy

Menai Bridge and District Civic Society

MEMORIES OF MENAI BRIDGE

Memories of Menai Bridge

Volume 8

Mae Cymdeithas Ddinesig Bro Porthaethwy yn diweddarau ei chofnodion, ffotograffau a'i Gwefan er mwyn ei gwneud yn haws i'r aelodau eu gweld. Byddwn yn ceisio ychwanegu at y rhain yn gyson drwy gydol y flwyddyn ac yn cyhoeddi pigion gyda'ch Cylchlythyr. Mae croeso mawr bob amser i gyfraniadau newydd, yn ogystal â help i adnabod pobl yn y lluniau.

Ewch i'n Gwefan yn
www.menaibridgecivicsociety.org.uk

Menai Bridge Civic Society is updating its records, photographs and Website to make them more accessible to members. We will try to add to these regularly throughout the year and publish extracts with your Newsletter. New contributions are always welcome, as is help with identifying people in photographs.

See our Website at
www.menaibridgecivicsociety.org.uk

MENAI BRIDGE (MEN'S) INSTITUTE, 1905 - 1921, MENAI BRIDGE WAR MEMORIAL CLUB

1922 –
Apart from what is known as "Penny Readings and "Cyfurfodydd Llenyddol" held under the auspices of Church and Chapel, little was done for the young men of the village in the way of indoor recreation during the winter evenings. Realising this need in the early "nineties", Miss A. M. Davies of Treborth made a practical effort to meet this want by renting a room in what was then known as "London's Cocoa Rooms" in Bridge Street (now the Menai Cafe). It was open to all young men over 18 on payment of a small membership fee. It was non-sectarian and non-political. Newspapers, daily and weekly, were provided; also the "Illustrated London News" and the "Graphic" then 6d., paid for by Miss Davies. Chess and draughts were very popular, especially the former. There was also a piano for "Sing-Songs". At Christmastime Mrs London provided a sumptuous dinner for the modest sum of 2/1d., ending up with a concert.

This functioned until 1905 when, as a result of the Religious Revival 1904-5, the local religious leaders realising their responsibilities to those young people who had joined the Churches during those months, while fully appreciating Miss Davies' philanthropy and enterprise, felt that this work should be undertaken by a body representing all the Churches of the village. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that the public houses in those days were open from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. continuously up to the First World War. To counteract these conditions larger premises were required with more amenities. In a matter of weeks sufficient money was collected and the Committee took over the private house – No. 6 High Street. Certain alterations were necessary: two rooms on the first floor were made into one to take a full sized billiard table and a back room for Committee meetings. On the ground floor there was a recreation room and reading room. A caretaker was appointed and given living accommodation in the basement and three bedrooms on the second floor. The caretaker was paid 10/- per week with free light and fuel. Out of several applicants Mr. John Grindir was appointed and he, with his wife, carried out the duties to the entire satisfaction of the Committee and Members.

The Institute was formally opened on Saturday, 10th June, 1905, by Mr. J. R. Davies, J.P., D.L., Ceris. In a very short time the membership reached one hundred, the fee having been fixed at 4/- per annum, 1/- per quarter. The Reading Room was well supplied with national and local newspapers and also weeklies such as "The Sphere", "The Illustrated London News", "The Spectator", "Punch", "The Times" and "British Weekly", and the following monthly magazines "The Strand", "Windsor", "Chambers Journal", "Review of Reviews", "Young Men" and "Cymru", also the Welsh "Y Traethodydd" and the quarterly "Y Geninen". The Committee Room was let to any outside body on payment of a small fee, and good use was made of this. The billiard table was most popular and brought in a considerable revenue. Very soon the new Institute became the focal point for most of the local activities and a much needed amenity, and no doubt exceeded the most optimistic expectations of the promoters. Having been successfully launched, it was set on a steady course and fulfilled its mission up to the outbreak of the First World War. Like many more institutions and societies, this became a testing time. Owing to the young men volunteering for service in the Forces and other later being called up, the membership dwindled to a very low figure with the consequent loss of revenue. The premises were getting into a sad state of disrepair, and as all labour was diverted to the national effort to win the war, it was impossible to effect the necessary repairs. At the time of the Armistice the premises presented a sorry plight.

Early in 1919 the Urban District Council formed themselves into a Committee (with power to add to their number) with County (and Urban) Councillor Henry Rees Davies J.P., D.L., as Chairman: to consider the question of a memorial to the soldiers and sailors of Menai Bridge who gave their lives for their country. The initial meeting of this Committee was convened by the Clerk to the council, Mr. Owen Jones, and took place on 27th January, 1919. It was unanimously decided to prepare a scheme for the erection of a memorial cross to the dead at Llandysilio (Church Island), and also a meeting place for the living in the form of a new Institute. The Committee felt it would not be economical to spend more money on the old building, but rather have a new one worthy of the men who had served in the Forces. A number of sites were considered at length and at many meetings, but each presented difficulties and which could not be overcome. Eventually it was reported that a house and shop in Water Street, known as Iorwerth House, was on the market, and after giving the matter very careful consideration, it was decided to purchase this property, together with the freehold, from the Anglesey Estate. It was reckoned the total cost of the scheme would come to £3,500, £600 being earmarked for the Celtic Cross which was to be designed by Mr. Harold Hughes, Bangor. The Treborth family promised £1400 conditionally, the balance would be made up locally.



Photo believed to be of the Misses Davies

The Marquess of Anglesey presented the freehold of the cottage known as "Pencraig" at the rear of Iorwerth House, and this was demolished so as to extend the premises sufficiently to house two billiard tables.

An intensive effort was made to balance. The Parish was divided into six districts and an enthusiastic band of canvassers called on every household. Later, when they reported to the Committee it was found that they were £600 short of the target. Taking everything into consideration the fact that the population was only a little over 1,600 and that the trade recession had set in with increasing unemployment, the Committee were perfectly satisfied with the result. For the ladies of the village this was only a spur for one great final effort, and they immediately set about organising a two-days Bazaar which took place in the Council School in July 1921. Lord Howard de Walden declared the function open the first day and Lord Anglesey the following day. The event was a resounding success and the balance outstanding was cleared.

The Cross was unveiled by Lieut. General Sir Philip Chetwode, Bart., K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.C. (later Lord Chetwode) on 21st April 1921, and dedicated by The Lord Bishop of Bangor. The service was conducted by the Rector, Rev. David Herbert, and the Rev. Thomas Charles Williams, M.A. – Musical Director, Mr. G. W. Senogles. It was a perfect day of Spring and the service at this sacred spot was most impressive and attended by a gathering of several hundreds, including many of the wives and parents of the men whose names are engraved on the Cross. There were on parade about one hundred Ex-service men, many who served under Sir Philip in Palestine and Sinai. Later

they were entertained to tea at the old Council School and were addressed by the General who paid a fine tribute to the 53 (Welsh) Division which was part of the 20th Corps he commanded in Palestine. It should be mentioned that Lady Chetwode was a daughter of

colonel and Mrs. Stapleton Cotton, Carreg-yr-Halen. All was now set on concentrating on the new Institute. Little did the Committee realise at this period that over four years would elapse before the opening would take place (only some rooms were ready in January, 1923). Endless difficulties were cropping up and causing long delays. The legal work took months, and when one problem appeared to be solved another complication would arise. The biggest worry was to find alternative accommodation for the tenant of the cottage who had lived there since he was a young man and reared a family there - now grown up. At long last the Urban District Council came to the rescue by offering a new Council House, which the tenant eventually accepted. The architects, Messrs. Jos. Owen & Sons, were engaged to carry out the work, which was entrusted to Mr. Owen's nephew, Mr. H. E. Lloyd Owen. Certain structural alterations were necessary; these entailed removing the front elevation which included the two plate-glass shop windows, and building up a fine facade which was more in keeping with the idea of an institute.

It should be mentioned that the Ex-service men, now organised into a branch of the British Legion, were most co-operative and organised such events as whist drives, dances and sports, all of which helped to fill the coffers, but the biggest contribution to the funds was a grant of £80 received from the United Services' Fund. This was calculated at 5/- a head on the 300 odd Menai Bridge men who had served in the Forces. The grant was made specifically for the purchase of an additional billiard table. (The Fund was the result of the accumulation of profits from the Army Canteens and was administered by Field-Marshal Lord Byng and popularly known as "Byng Millions").

The internal alterations to the property were the conversion of the shop into a Reading Room, and the next room for Committee, and the kitchen was for the Secretary. Two rooms on the first floor were made into one - this was intended as a Lecture Room with accommodation for 50 people; the other two rooms were for Games. The second floor was made into a flat for the caretakers (an Ex-service man, Mr. Joe Hughes, and his wife were later appointed.). The open fire grates were taken out and in their place anthracite stoves were installed in all rooms used by the Club. The outbuildings were renovated and made into lavatories and bathrooms. Good use was made of the latter as few houses had these amenities at that time.

Further delay was caused by the Contractor - Mr Griffith Roberts - failing to get delivery of certain materials and fixtures owing to war restrictions and controls still in force, all of which was a set-back to the building of the new Billiard Room. These restrictions also caused the delay of the new furniture.

Mr. T.H. Hughes, Fir Grove, succeeded Mr. Owen Jones as Secretary early on but resigned in 1922 owing to pressure of his official duties as Clerk of the Twrcelyn Rural District Council. The Committee were most fortunate in securing the services of Mr. R. D. Parry, a teacher at the local National School who took over the Secretaryship largely on the recommendation of Mr. G. H. Senogles, Headmaster of the School. Mr. Parry was just the man for the job - he had a vigorous personality, brimful of energy, and when faced with difficulties was always an optimist. He had tact, sound judgement and was a fine organiser. He saw the work was completed and continued in office until he was given a Headship.

From start to finish the mainspring of the movement was, of course, the Chairman of the Committee - Mr. H. R. Davies. It was he who conceived the scheme and visualised it meeting a social need long before it was publically launched. Although one of the busiest public men in North Wales, he gave ungrudgingly of his time and business experience. He was not only an ideal leader but an inspiration to all who worked with him.

A Trust Deed was drafted by Mr. Thornton Jones, Solicitor, and dated 14th December, 1922. The property of the Club is vested in the Menai Bridge Urban District Council: the management vested in a Committee of twelve persons (Officers ex-officio) - nine elected by ballot by members of the Club and three by the Urban District Council. Membership was open to all inhabitants of the Parish of Llandysilio without distinction of sex and from the age of eighteen and upwards; every member to pay a fee as the Committee may determine; the Club to be non-sectarian and non-political. Gambling is strictly prohibited and no intoxicating liquors shall be brought into the Club or consumed upon the Club premises.

Some months before the opening ceremony the Club had 180 paying members.

T. O. Jones Sept. 1962